



PLATINUM SERIES



Select, Ultra Premium, Collectable Wines from California's Best Winemakers

When Ray Coursen met his future wife Nancy, both were working for restaurants in the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts. Both loved the business and in particular, the wine aspect that is so important to many successful restaurants.

Ray had already prepped at a couple of landmark Boston wine venues including a top restaurant and an established wine shop. His degree from the University of Massachusetts was in stone fruit (apples, peaches, pears) and he had always nurtured a strong feeling for wines. When he and Nancy married in 1983, one of the first questions Ray asked was when she would be willing to move to California. Nancy never hesitated in answering "tomorrow," so the couple immediately moved to the Saratoga growing area of Northern California.

Ray was able to work his first harvest with Mt. Eden Vineyards but was soon convinced that the Napa Valley region offered greater opportunities for a fledgling winemaker wannabe. They found a B & B in Rutherford that needed help and while Nancy ran the place, Ray planted a vineyard and tended the gardens. He also managed to secure a job with Tonella Vineyard Management, one of the top management companies in Napa.

"It was from the Tonellas (father and son) that I learned the 'why' of the vineyard business. It was from their excellent staff of Mexican workers that I learned the 'how'," Coursen confided. "They were really good at what they did and I really learned a great deal."

Coursen's next stop was at the well respected Whitehall Lane Winery with its winemaker Art Finkelstein, who moved Ray into the cellar from the tasting room. Finkelstein saw great promise in the New Englander and promoted him to assistant winemaker in 1986. A year later, Coursen's mentor advised him that he should begin thinking about making his own wine in case of any potential ownership changes at Whitehall Lane.

Ray Coursen saw the handwriting on the wall and immediately began the project that was to become this month's *Platinum Series* selection, Elyse Winery. He and Nancy named the winery after their daughter and, in 1987, released the first 286 cases of their new wine.

To Coursen's surprise, the winery's first offerings

were met with great critical acclaim. "I never really thought we could be so lucky," Coursen revealed. "I guess it was just a matter of getting some really great fruit."

Modesty aside, Coursen believes steadfastly that it takes superior fruit to produce top class wines. "We can do something about the end product with our blending, and apply some winemaking techniques, but the real truth is that if you don't have it from the vineyards, you won't have it in the bottle."

Over the last twenty five years, production has risen at Elyse Winery to 11,000 cases, a level that Ray Coursen is comfortable with and one that he plans to maintain for the foreseeable future.

However, he has scaled back his number of growers, from twenty-two to the present ten that supply him with most of his fruit. He has a tiny 1 acre planting at the winery on Hoffinan Lane, a vineyard that Ray works himself and brings him a great deal of satisfaction.

"I simply love the vineyard end of the winery business, and there's nothing I'd rather do than be out working among the vines. Nancy is the beauty of the operation and also the brains. She runs the entire business and leaves the vineyard end for me," he stated flatly.

It is Elyse Winery's aim to have mostly single vineyard designated wines in the near future, with three Cabernet Sauvignon and three Zinfandel selections as the trendsetters.

The winery's namesake, Elyse Coursen, 27, lives nearby and is currently working in a bakery café in Marin County. The Coursen's other child, son Jacob, 23, (better known as Jake), also has a winery named after him (Jacob Franklin) that deals with Rhône varietals. Jake is finishing college with a degree in agricultural business and plans to follow his family's footsteps into farming and growing.

This year, Elyse Winery has two causes for celebration: in addition to finishing a stellar looking 2012 vintage in Napa Valley, it is also the 25th anniversary for the family winery. Coursen finalized, "As I told you before, there is absolutely nothing I'd rather do; it's been the best part of our lives."



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94 POINTS - *Connoisseurs' Guide*

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Elyse

Dear *Platinum Series* Members,

We are thrilled to be offering two of our best selling wines to the Gold Medal Wine Club. I hope you enjoy drinking them as much as I've enjoyed making them. Both exemplify the nuances and depth of vineyard designated wines.

It was back in 1987 that I crushed 4.5 tons of Zinfandel from the Morisoli Vineyard in Rutherford to make the first Elyse wine. My wife, Nancy and I lived on the Morisoli property for years and we both consider Gary and Melody to be close friends. This Zinfandel continues to be our flagship wine 25 years later. Fruit from the Rutherford Bench makes for a balanced, powerful wine with great longevity. The 2008 Morisoli Zinfandel is a rich, fruit-driven wine that pairs well with all cuisines.

Our 2007 Tietjen Cabernet comes from a vineyard less than a mile from Morisoli Vineyard. Huge Tietjen is one of our partners in the winery. The properties may be close together, but there is a uniquely different soil that produces a uniquely different wine. Upon taking the first sip, there is an explosive palate sensation. I especially enjoy this Cab with beef, lamb, or rich cheeses.

When you're in the Napa Valley, please visit our Tasting Room. We'd love to show you our entire portfolio.

À Votre santé,

Ray Coursen
Elyse Winery Owner

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TASTING NOTES

93 POINTS

-*Connoisseurs' Guide*

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-*Robert Parker*

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-*Wine Enthusiast*

Elyse Winery has been making Zinfandel from Napa's Morisoli Vineyard since 1985, and they've been the sole producers to have access to the prized fruit since 1988. The old vines, volcanic soil, Rutherford Bench terrior, and field blend of diverse varieties at Morisoli Vineyard always creates a truly distinctive Zinfandel that has been awarded for countless vintages at Elyse Winery. The 2008 Zinfandel is dark ruby in color with aromas of perfectly ripe berries, sweet oak, and spice, while the lush palate has rich flavors of raspberries and plum, black pepper, smoked bacon, and candied cherries. An incredible taste experience! Elyse's 2008 Morisoli Vineyard Zinfandel shows concentrated layers of gorgeous fruit with a deep, underlying complexity that is so characteristic of this special vineyard. Aged 11 months in oak. 87% Zinfandel, 13% combination of Alicante Bouschet, Carignane, Durif, Grand Noir, Muscat Hamburg, Negrette, Syrah, and Valdiguie. Enjoy now until 2018.



REORDERS

The **Elyse 2008 Morisoli Vineyard Zinfandel** retails winery-direct for \$33.00 per bottle. As a *Platinum Series* member your very special pricing is as follows:

2-Bottle Members..... \$30.00 /bottle*

4-Bottle Members &

Multi-Series Members.....\$28.00 /bottle*

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