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WHAT TO BUY IN 2003 BORDEAUX

An Opulent
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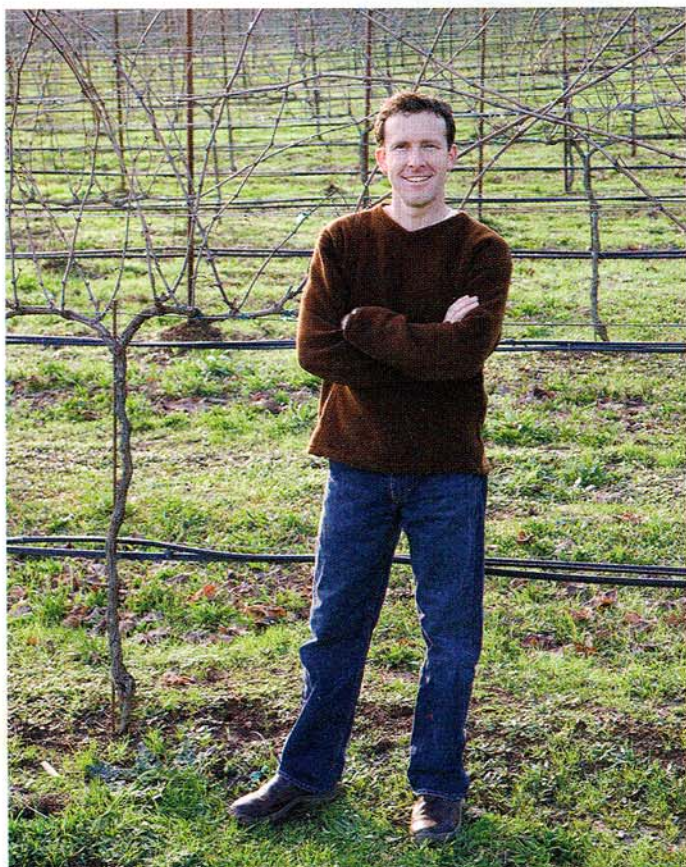


TASTING REPORT | CALIFORNIA RHÔNES

The Rhône Range

EXCITING NEW SYRAHS FROM AN ARRAY OF REGIONS

By MaryAnn Bovio



Winemaker Ted Osborne promotes not only his Olabisi line of wines but also the Suisun Valley, one of California's oldest but least-known AVAs.

SUISUN VALLEY
GRAPE GROWERS
ASSOCIATION™



Suisun Valley One of California's Oldest AVA's

Olabisi

Winemaker Ted Osborn points to his English degree as the reason he's now a winemaker. "I have to give it some credit," he says, "It left me conveniently unemployed." Osborn found work as harvest help all over the world, and he is currently winemaker at Piña Cellars in Napa. He jokes that he created his own label as a form of job security, since winemaker jobs can be scarce. With the 2003 vintage, Osborne has three high quality releases: the Syrah Suisun Valley King Vineyard 2003 (91, \$22, 225 cases), the Petite Sirah Suisun Valley King Vineyard 2003 (88, \$35, 107 cases) and the Syrah Knights Valley Betsy's Vineyard 2003 (85, \$22, 195 cases).

Making wines from lesser-known appellations means Osborne has to make the case for them as well. "I have to sell Suisun Valley now," says Osborne. "The vineyard is 3 miles south of the Napa line. That's how you convince people it's OK to drink." In fact, Suisun is one of the oldest appellations in California, and for years growers there sold grapes to Napa and Sonoma. Osborne says that picking a name for a wine label is as difficult as naming a child. He went to a book of names and picked Olabisi, a Nigerian girl's name that means "joy multiplied."

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wine notes

Plenty of room at the tasting table

Down-home in Suisun Valley

As California's No.1 wine destination, Napa Valley offers the most wine tasting opportunities locally. But wineries in both Solano and Yolo counties are working industriously to claim their place at the dinner table and in the minds of wine lovers.

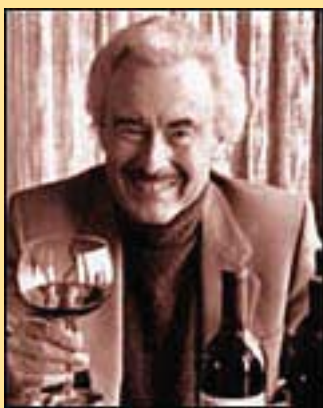
Solano County's Suisun Valley was recognized as an official American viticultural area in 1982, just one year after Napa Valley.

Because the soil and climate are so similar to Napa Valley, vintners there have been buying Suisun Valley grapes to blend into their wines for decades. Even though Suisun Valley wineries are making some award-winning wines, the area has yet to be recognized as a fine-wine growing region.

As a result, wines here tend to be modestly priced and the wine tasting experience more laid-back.







NORTHSIDE | DECEMBER 2005

Wine Report from the Fort

By Fred McMillin

And the winner is ...
Northside's 100 best wines of 2005

Here are some interesting things
to watch for on our top 100 list:



Suisun Valley Grapes Make the List

2000 Sunset Cellars, Suisun Valley, Zinfandel
Ledgewood Vineyards

www.svgga.com

Fred McMillin was voted one of U.S.A.'s 22 best wine writers by the Academy of Wine Communications. If you have questions, please phone him at (415) 563-5712



www.svgga.com

www.napavalleyregister.com

Classy n.v. is welcome addition to downtown Napa dining scene

Tuesday, December 6, 2005 1:06 AM PST, Register Staff Writer, L. PIERCE CARSON

As wine country caterer and culinary director for the prestigious Dean & DeLuca food emporium, chef Peter Halikas has been helping shape our culinary palates for more than a decade.

Now, realizing a long-held ambition, the 33-year-old Napa Valley resident is manning the stoves at his own restaurant -- an inviting, intimate dining room and lounge in the heart of downtown Napa, called n.v. ...

Wine and sweets

[General manager Chris] Drumm and restaurant managers Rick Maupin and Traci Steuteville (who also served as interior designer for n.v.) have put together a very attractive wine list that contains the usual wine country suspects as well as some attractive imports -- such as a Spanish garnacha, a choice of spicy Gigondas, a pair of Austrian gruner veltliners, a Soave from Inama and an Alsatian pinot blanc.

Making one's wine decision a bit of a head scratcher, the choice of **exciting reds** includes a meritage from Conn Valley Vineyards (Right Bank), a Home Ranch merlot from Ed Sbragia's Family Vineyards, a sangiovese from Showket, a Thomas Michael syrah from **Suisun Valley**, plus juicy cabernets from Buoncristiani and Ahnfeldt.

SUISUN VALLEY
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Suisun Valley grapes score big

Wine Spectator

Dec. 15, 2005

www.winespectator.com

91

Olabisi Syrah **Suisun Valley** King Vineyard 2003

Immense dark color, with spice rack of pepper scents - bell, cracked, cayenne - thrown in with a rich, hearty mix of currant, blackberry and beef carpaccio. Tightly wound and sharply focused, it's deeply concentrated, with a rich, vibrant aftertaste. Drink now through 2010.





AS SEEN IN

Wine Spectator

www.winespectator.com

NOVEMBER 15, 2005

Suisun Valley grapes have
superior character and style.

Smart Buys

91

Ledgewood Creek 2004 Sauvignon Blanc

Suisun Valley \$10

What an exciting Sauvignon Blanc. Fragrant, with orange blossom, lemon-lime and grassy flavors that are intense and vibrant, picking up a green apple and tart citrus edge. It keeps pumping out the concentration through the finish.

About the 100-Point Scale

90-94 - Outstanding: a wine of superior character and style



Article Launched: 10/19/2005 06:52:14 AM
www.thereporter.com/news/ci_3130983

For wine, it's time Vines bulging with bumper harvests From staff and wire reports

In agricultural circles, 2005 may be remembered for its woes - such as hurricanes and flood damage - but in California, it's a vintage year.

Grapes from the 2005 harvest are starting their journey to the bottle and this year's crop is larger than expected.

Growers up and down the state, including those in the Suisun Valley and Green Valley areas of Solano County, are reporting huge tonnages that are causing a few headaches, but bringing tentative predictions of a banner year for the multibillion-dollar industry.

"Our crop is up about 20 percent this year," said Rick Wehman, general manager of LedgeWood Creek winery in Suisun Valley.

Cooler spring temperatures and a longer rainy season helped, Wehman said.

"The clusters are heavier than normal," he said.

State officials estimate this year's grape crop will be 3.2 million tons, up 15 percent from last year's 2.78 million tons.

But that huge harvest is a double-edged sword, say growers.

"The good news is we have a lot of grapes. The bad news is - we have a lot of grapes," joked Steve Devitt, winemaker for Darioush in the Napa Valley.

Or as Randy Ullom, wine master for Sonoma County-based Kendall-Jackson put it, "We're going to hand out life preservers pretty soon because of all the grapes and the juice."

The larger-than-expected crop could cause some short-term surpluses. "From the winery's perspective, it's fine. We're taking in fruit to produce wine," explained Wehman. "On the vineyard crop growing side, you hope for a smaller harvest statewide so that you can find that balance. Farmers love a big crop, but if no one wants your crop next year because you had so much this year, that's not good."

Still, industry observers don't expect the kind of glut that forced some growers to rip out vines in the early 2000s.

Nonetheless, some growers have extra grapes on

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their hands because most winemakers contract in advance for fruit and don't have the need or capacity for more.

"I've had to scramble around to try to get homes for some of my fruit that was additional," said Temecula-area grower Ben Drake, chairman of the board of the California Association of Winegrape Growers.

Devitt was surprised by the bounty. "The berry weight is so much more than we anticipated. Some of it doesn't make viticultural sense," he said.

The harvest is expected to be finished by early November, with workers bringing in tubs and bins to wineries all over the state.

At Darioush, a winery known for its signature cabernet sauvignon and for a distinctive design modeled after the Persian city of Persepolis, incoming grapes get a thorough going over. Workers monitor the fruit as it rumbles along conveyor belts, flicking out leaves, debris and any grapes that don't look right.

After that, the berries are pumped into tanks where fruit is gently crushed under its own weight.

In some areas, the growing season started early this year and then turned cool and wet, giving grapes time to develop fuller flavors without reaching the high sugar levels that result in high alcohol levels.

Some were hoping for a vintage on par with or perhaps even better than 1997, a "huge year with great quality," Ullom said.

"Everyone's just jazzed beyond belief," Ullom said. "This is going to set the tone for this decade."

[www..svgga.com](http://www.svgga.com)

The Vine Times

Wine - Food - Travel

March 2005 Picks by Fred McMillin

Reds Maximum \$15.00
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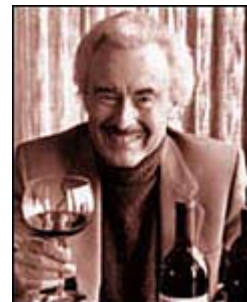
"These wines taste better right now than over 100 rivals..."

#1 Zinfandel

Sunset Cellars 2000 Zinfandel Suisun Valley

Fred McMillin

Fred McMillin, a veteran wine writer, has taught wine history for 30 years on three continents. For information about the wine courses he teaches every month at either San Francisco State University or San Francisco City College (Fort Mason Division)



www.svgga.com

Wooden Valley grows sideways

6/12/2005



By Matthew Bunk

SUISUN VALLEY - Between pouring glasses of wine in the Wooden Valley Winery tasting room, Ron Lanza points out the wine spots on the 100-year-old oak bar.

The bar itself isn't 100 years old, but the wood it's made from is. It used to be part of a huge barrel that cased Wooden Valley wine long before the Lanza family took over the winery.

"There's a lot of history in our tasting room," Lanza said while standing in front of a display case that held pictures of his grandparents Mario and Lena Lanza, next to bottles of wine adorned by state fair ribbons.

The future of Wooden Valley might be as rich as its past.

The winery slowly amped up production in the last couple of years as executives hope to reach more wine consumers through direct sales. A Supreme Court decision last month that lifted limits on interstate wine sales could make that easier, Lanza said.

In the meantime, Wooden Valley is trying to increase its customer base at home through the release of two new wines and by investing in a marketing campaign to promote Suisun Valley wineries.

"We're trying to bring more awareness of our appellation so people immediately recognize our labels," Lanza said, noting there's much more to it than that. "You can promote it all you want, but you have to prove it through the wine."

Branching out on the vine

Wooden Valley last week began shipping its newest products - a 2004 Pinot Grigio and a 2003 Primitivo - to wine club members. It was a move meant to tap into the growing popularity of the two Italian varietals.

“It’s been a while since we released something new, so it’s a big deal for us,” said Lanza, a third-generation owner whose family bought the winery in the 1950s. “These two new ones could potentially be a big deal for us.”

The Primitivo was somewhat of a mystery grape, as far as origin is concerned. Research at the University of California, Davis, has found Primitivo grapes and its genetic twin Zinfandel mutated from an ancient variety native to the Balkan region.

According to legend, the deeply colored Primitivo got its name after it had been transported to Italy, where Benedictine monks described it as precocious.

The white Pinot Grigio puts Wooden Valley at the forefront of the market for wines made from the temperamental Pinot grape. Wine tastes have shifted toward Pinot varietals in recent years, Lanza said, and the trend was fueled by the movie “Sideways,” which denigrated traditional favorite Merlot and praised Pinot Noir.

Despite the silver-screen setback, Merlot remains in high demand at Wooden Valley and beyond. It has been Lanza’s biggest seller, making up about 15 percent of the 12,000 cases sold last year.

Cabernets and Chardonnays are also popular among the 16 wines sold at Wooden Valley.

“For most people, Cabernet, Chardonnay and Merlot is what they know,” Lanza said. “But now more people are starting to pay attention to the other varieties.”

Suisun Valley: The little sister

Along with LedgeWood Creek Winery, Wooden Valley is one of the largest wineries in Solano County. There are a few other private labels made by grape growers in the region, but the Suisun Valley for the most part gets overshadowed by its world-renowned neighbors, the Napa and Sonoma valleys.

Although Suisun Valley farmers argue there’s not much difference between a grape grown in Napa and one grown in Solano, there’s a huge price difference. Napa grapes typically sell for 10 times the per-ton price of those from Suisun Valley.

Nonetheless, most grapes grown in Solano are shipped to wineries outside the county. Selling grapes, not wine, is the biggest money-maker for both Wooden Valley and LedgeWood Creek.

Only 10 percent of the grapes grown on Wooden Valley’s 600 acres go into its wines, Lanza said.

He hopes better marketing, a greater selection and fewer regulations will tip the scales in the coming years.

“More labels brings more attention,” Lanza said, leaning across the century-old bar to scratch a wine spot. “Which brings more success.”

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APRIL-JUNE 2005



The COLORADO WINE NEWS

VOLUME 15, No. 2

Suisun Valley Wines shine in Colorado Wine News

BEST BUYS

**Ledgewood Creek
2003 PicNique Rouge, \$8**

**Wooden Valley
2000 Cabernet Sauvignon,
Estate, \$12**

The 2002 Zinfandel, Hoodoo Creek Vineyard, Lake County, \$21, opens with cranberry, cherry, rhubarb, smoke, and vanilla lead to light, fresh flavors of the same laced with fine tannin and nice acidity. The finish is long and medium-broad. Tasty.

BEST BUYS

Meridian: 03 Pinot Noir, \$11
Falling Star: 04 Merlot Malbec, \$5
Alice White: 04 Merlot, Shiraz, & Cab.-Shiraz, \$7
Olathe: 00 Merlot and nv White Riesling, \$11
Kendall-Jackson: 02 Zinfandel, Vintners Res., \$12
Ledgewood Creek: 03 PicNique Rouge, \$8
R&B Cellars: 03 Swingsville Zinfandel, \$10
Field Stone: 03 Convivio Semillon, \$10
Raymond: 02 Amberhill Cab. Sauv., \$13

Banrock Station: nv Sparkling Chardonnay, \$10
and 04 Chardonnay, \$7
Korbel: nv Brut Rose, \$11
the Little Penguin: 04 Shiraz, Merlot and Cab.
Sauv., \$8
Round Hill: 02 Merlot, \$9
Selby: 03 Rosé of Syrah, \$12
Wooden Valley: 00 Cab. Sauv., Estate, \$12
Wyndham Estate: 03 Shiraz, Bin 555, \$10

Here are the results of a focused tasting of Suisun Valley Wines in the April - June 2005 issue of Colorado Wine News

Ledgewood

The **2002 Syrah**, Suisun Valley, \$12, 311 cases, contains 0.5% carignane. It has aromas of herb, black cherry, currant, earth, and smoky oak introducing the same fruit with a cooked character laced with dry grippy tannin. The finish is medium-broad and somewhat short.

Mankas Hills

The **2002 Contado, Cabernet Sauvignon**, Suisun Valley, \$19.75, spent 12 months in French, American, and European oak and opens with oak over blackberry, blueberry, and cherry before flavors of blackberry, blueberry, cherry, cedar, and celery seed. Everything carries through the long, medium-broad, persistent finish which adds sweet tar at the end. Well balanced, structured, and integrated. Tasty.

Sunset

The **2002 Zinfandel**, Suisun Valley, \$15, contains 0.5% each of petite sirah and carignane. It has aromas of very jammy black cherry plus raspberry leading to light bodied flavors of the same plus some plum, lots of pepper and plenty of tannin. Everything carries through the broad, medium-long finish. Well balanced, structured, and integrated. Good

Wooden Valley

The **2003 Chardonnay**, Estate, Suisun Valley, \$10, 621 cases, spent 8.5 months in new and alder French oak. It shows oak, peach, and apple on the nose. All repeat in the reverse order as flavors joined by some astringency. The **2004 White Gamay**, Suisun Valley, \$5, is made from valdiguie. Aromas of unripe strawberry lead to sweet strawberry flavors. Fairly thin but would serve for an afternoon on the deck.

The **2002 Pinot Noir**, Suisun Valley, \$10, has aromas of smoke and black cherry which repeat in the reverse order as thin, tart flavors which finish short and narrow. Tasty. The **2001 Syrah**, Suisun Valley, \$8, was aged for about 13 months in one and two-year-old American oak. It opens with an inviting nose of coffee, blueberry, and cassis introducing light, fresh, slightly tart flavors of cherry, raspberry, blueberry, and cassis plus fine tannin. All carry through the broad, long finish. This is a well balanced, structured, and integrated Syrah to match with food.

Wooden Valley (continued)

The **2002 Pinot Noir**, Suisun Valley, \$10, has aromas of smoke and black cherry which repeat in the reverse order as thin, tart flavors which finish short and narrow. Tasty. The **2001 Syrah**, Suisun Valley, \$8, was aged for about 13 months in one and two-year-old American oak. It opens with an inviting nose of coffee, blueberry, and cassis introducing light, fresh, slightly tart flavors of cherry, raspberry, blueberry, and cassis plus fine tannin. All carry through the broad, long finish. This is a well balanced, structured, and integrated Syrah to match with food.

The **2000 Cabernet Sauvignon**, Estate, Suisun Valley, \$12, 872 cases, has a bright, forward bouquet of blueberry, blackberry jam, cherry, bittersweet chocolate, and smoke. Fairly light bodied flavors of the same plus lavender and with the oak last are laced with light tannin and nice acidity and finish medium-broad and medium-long. This well balanced, structured, and integrated wine makes a good match with food. Very Tasty. BEST BUY.

Ledgewood Creek

The **2003 Chardonnay, PicNique**, Suisun Valley, \$8, has flavors of candied lemon and apple which finish at the front of the palate. The **2003 PicNique Rouge**, Suisun Valley, \$8, has aromas of black cherry jelly and light oak introduce light-bodied flavors of raspberry and sweet cranberry laced with a moderate amount of dry, smooth tannin. The finish is long and medium-broad. Well balanced, structured, and integrated. BEST BUY.

The **2002 Merlot**, Suisun Valley, \$15, spent 15 months in equal amounts of French and American oak, 70% new. It has a bouquet of currant, blackberry, herb, and smoky oak before flavors of blackberry, currant, and black cherry plus soft tannins. It finishes medium-broad and medium-long.

Olabisi

The **2003 Petite Sirah, King Vineyard**, Suisun Valley, \$35, 23 cases, has aromas of sweet coffee, sweet chocolate, and baked blackberry. All repeat as flavors led by the blackberry and with the addition of raisin at the edges.