

AHLGREN VINEYARD

Founded 1976

WINE CLUB NEWS

Fall 2004

The latest Wine Club tasting selections are:

**2003 AHLGREN Chardonnay
Monterey, Ventana Vineyards**

**2001 AHLGREN Nebbiolo
Santa Cruz Mountains, Harvest Moon Vineyards**

**2002 AHLGREN Zinfandel
Livermore Valley**

**2003 AHLGREN Chardonnay
Monterey, Ventana Vineyards**

This is the first Chardonnay we have ever bottled without filtration. Usually, as time approaches for bottling, the procedure is to fine with bentonite and then to filter. The fining with bentonite, a natural clay product, assures that unstable proteins are pulled out so that protein flocculent will not develop should the wine get warm. After fining, filtration assures that the wine is completely stable with no potential for malo-lactic activity in the bottle.

With this 2003, the Chardonnay clarified naturally so well after fining, merely by settling naturally in the barrel, that we began to think we could bottle without filtration. The tests for completion of malo lactic fermentation indicated it was complete, and that the wine was stable enough to bottle. Since the wine had some lovely qualities we thought might be diminished by filtration, we decided to bottle it as it was. So, you will notice that while there is a slight bit of haze or sediment, you will also have the benefit of the special qualities that we especially like in this wine.

The wine shows typical Ventana Chardonnay bouquet with hints of butterscotch and pineapple. The wine is well-balanced and quite complex. It is rich, crisp and dry with a long creamy finish. We are certain that not filtering has allowed the beauties of this wine to come through especially well.

230 Cases produced. \$20 per bottle
Club Member price per bottle - 10% \$18.00 per bottle.
Club Member 12 bottle price - 15% \$17.00 per bottle

2001 AHLGREN Nebbiolo
Santa Cruz Mountains, Harvest Moon Vineyards

In 2000, Dexter made a major shift in the making of Nebbiolo, moving from American to French oak, following the advice of our friends at Viette Winery in Piedmont, renowned producers of Barolo. Barolo is the premier Northern Italian red wine made from the Nebbiolo grape.

The Currados from Viette visited us in 1998, tasting the Ahlgren 1996 and 1997 Ahlgren Nebbiolo. In 1999, we visited them at their winery in Barolo and tasted the Ahlgren Nebbiolos again, this time with four generations of Currados. The unanimous decision was that Dexter should shift from American oak to French oak for this wine. That was accomplished in 2000 with wonderful results. French oak was also used for this 2001, and the results are evident.

The wine is deeply colored and elegant, with significant tannins characteristic of the variety. It is sophisticated, has a complex bouquet and flavors, and is most deserving of additional bottle age. This will be the last in the series of Ahlgren Harvest Moon Nebbiolo.

Only 34 cases produced. Reserved for Wine Club Members. Two bottle limit on reorders.

\$26.00 per bottle
Club Member price per bottle-10% \$23.40
Purchased with a 12 bottle order-15% \$22.10

2002 AHLGREN Zinfandel
Livermore Valley

If you liked the 2001 Ahlgren Livermore Zinfandel, you will likely love this edition. Remember, this vineyard was torn out in the summer of 2004, so that only this 2002 and the yet to be released 2003 are left to carry on the joys and memories of this block of old Livermore Zinfandel vines.

This Zinfandel is perhaps the biggest, most balanced and hugely fruity of any Zinfandel Ahlgren has ever produced. It is rich and intense, luscious, mouth filling and balanced. It could be a meal in itself. Delicious with tomato sauces and other big flavors, and a sensation with nuts, cheese, and/or chocolate. Like our big poodle Art, it demands your attention and takes center stage. Unfined and unfiltered.

213 cases produced.

\$26.00 per bottle.

Club Member price per bottle - 10% \$23.40 per bottle.

Club Member 12 bottle price - 15% \$22.10 per bottle

THE RANT ON DECANT CONTINUES: (Repeated for the benefit of new members.)

We are reminded every time we open a bottle of our red wines, taste, and then decant and taste again, that Ahlgren reds, and especially Pinot Noirs, respond dramatically to decanting.

Be advised: These red wines will reward you well, if you make certain the temperature is between 65° and 70°, roughly room temperature. As we mentioned in a previous edition, we took a trip and had a bottle of the 2000 Santa Cruz Mountains Pinot Noir with us in the car and in the hotel room until we started home some days later. Although the bottle never got hot, it was definitely up from cellar temperature. On our way home, we opened it for a picnic dinner in our motel, and were delighted by how lovely it was. Even though not decanted, the gentle warming over the course of four or five days brought out beauties we had not before experienced in this wine, to this degree. (We definitely recommend decanting as well as warming if you are in a position to have a decanter or other container at hand.)

If you first pull the cork and taste, assuming the wine is not too cold, and next decant swirl and taste, you will experience the opening of bouquet and flavors in air and warmth. It is a notable and wonderful delight to behold. Without heeding our advice on warming and airing, you will likely have a less satisfying experience rather than a much lovelier one, when it comes to these well-structured red wines. Young or old, they have been closed away from air for many months or many years.

NON-VINTAGE AHLGREN ZINFANDEL, Central Coast, and news from beyond...

About a month ago we participated in a couple of tastings at the new Beverages and More in Gilroy. In the first, the Ahlgren non-vintage Zinfandel was the winner.

This wine is made from Santa Clara County and Paso Robles Zinfandel grapes, a blend of vintages 1999 and 2000. It has relatively low alcohol for an Ahlgren Zin, 13%, with good acids that combine to make it a very pleasant food

wine. It has a bright, lively, intense and aromatic bouquet; balanced flavors with a berry finish. Unfined and unfiltered. 516 cases produced.

\$17.00 per bottle.

Club Member price per bottle - 10% \$15.30 per bottle.

Club Member 12 bottle price - 15% \$14.45 per bottle.

Just to show how Ahlgren wines age, as a treat we also poured a bottle of 1985 Ahlgren Cab. Sauv. Bates' Ranch, which was the overall favorite of that evening, but is, unfortunately no longer available, except possibly at the upcoming cellar sale. More on that below.

A couple of weeks later, we participated in the next BevMo tasting, and our 2000 Ventana Syrah was poured among a number of other varieties from other wineries, and was the favorite. As a treat we poured the '99 Ahlgren Cabernet Sauvignon, Bates' Ranch. Beverages and More countered with a 2000 Silver Oak. Ahlgren Bates' won that taste off. How nice it was! We sometimes tire of all the Napa spin, so it was nice to have our moment in the BevMo.

OLD NEWS:

Val was digging around "decluttering" in her own personal Sell this House reality project when she came across a bottle of Ahlgren 1976 Chardonnay, Monterey Ventana, our first Chardonnay from our first commercial vintage. The bottle had a little mailing sticker on it designating the contents, and we thought there was no chance it could be good. The cork had been leaking and was wet; the bottle was sticky; ullage was considerable - the level of the wine was well down into the shoulder of the bottle.

First, we just took a little taste. Color was good, but there was a very slight hint of oxidation, but nothing that would cause you to dump out a very old wine. Considering the age (28 years old), condition of the cork, and the amount of wine that had been lost to leakage, a lot of pretty ugly oxidation in this white wine was expected. Just a little oxidation was surprising. With other things to do, we emptied the glass back into the bottle; recorked by simply stuffing in a used cork, since the original was not very pretty, and putting the bottle in the refrigerator.

Next evening, daughter Beth and son-in-law Matt were here, and we said, "Have a taste of this," offering it as more of an historical curiosity than a serious wine to taste. The wine was very different. Gone was any hint of oxidation. The bouquet was fresh and clean with hints of botrytis, giving a lovely overtone of honey. Color was clean with no hint of brown. Flavors were bright, and balanced, wonderfully complex, inspiring us to keep Val hunting through odds and ends of wine stored in our closets, pantry and any other possible sites of buried treasure.

We keep our eyes open as we sort through the old wines for the upcoming...

AHLGREN VINEYARD WINE LIBRARY AND CELLAR SALE

Double Whammy! – Two Glorious Weekends.

February 26 and 27 plus March 5 and 6, 2005

12 – 4 p.m.

Those of you who attended past Ahlgren Wine Library and Cellar sales know the joys and surprises of tasting and acquiring some very exceptional wines at rational prices.

Wine Club Members \$25 each, Non- Members \$40 each.

(reservations are non-refundable)

Call to reserve your space and receive your wine list. We will spend January rummaging through the Wine Library to choose the wines and assemble the list. This is a popular event, so let us know if you are coming and when, so we can save your space.

831-338-6071 or ahlgren@ahlgrenvineyard.com.



ADDITIONAL WINES CURRENTLY AVAILABLE: Some in very limited quantities. Club Member discounts apply to the following retail prices, (See accompanying order sheet.)

1998 AHLGREN Tre Vini Rossi™, Santa Cruz Mts. \$15.00

The *Tre Vini* continues to show remarkable development with time in the bottle. It is very European in style, the Nebbiolo in the blend shows through nicely. It is a good food wine as well as a good buy.

2000 AHLGREN Syrah, Paso Robles, \$20.00

1999 AHLGREN Cab. Sauv. Bates' Ranch \$29.00

2000 AHLGREN Syrah Ventana \$24.00

2001 AHLGREN Syrah Ventana \$24.00

2001 AHLGREN Semillon \$16.50

2001 AHLGREN Merlot, Santa Clara Valley \$22.00

2000 AHLGREN Cab. Franc, Bates' \$26.00

2000 AHLGREN Merlot \$26.00

A VERY BIG SPECIAL: 2000 Cab. Sauv. Harvest Moon

\$10 per bottle, \$120 per case. (No additional discounts on the this H.M. Cab.)

A VINTAGE YEAR -- 2004

This year seemed to compress itself. Spring was long and early. Summer was moderate then hot, and fall and harvest came earlier than usual. Then suddenly, we had big rain in October, much earlier than usual, but by then all of our grapes were safely harvested. Now, it feels like winter, which at this writing is over six weeks away. If we get some more good rain soon, it bodes well for a fine wild mushrooming year.

Harvest this year came earlier than ever before in the history of Ahlgren Vineyard. The quality of the grapes was excellent, even stunning, and the new wines show great promise. As we reported, the Semillon and Zinfandel old vines in Livermore were torn out last year due to low productivity. A sad loss for us all. This year we purchased Semillon from a different block, and the new wine shows wonderful qualities. We were unable to get the Zinfandel though due to

the rapid ripening of the season. We were completely tied up getting other grapes when the call for the Zinfandel came in, so we had to pass, and cannot give you a report on the quality of those grapes until next year. Pressures of the harvest schedule have never cost us an opportunity to obtain grapes before.

Our little estate Pinot Noir vineyard yielded a mere 250 pounds of grapes for its first harvest. It was such a pleasure to harvest early in the mountain shadow of the early morning, just at dawn, with friends who have helped since the first planting of the vines. It is an incredible experience to put in a vineyard, tend it for years, and then finally pick the grapes! Although there is not enough wine to fill a barrel, what we have is of greater intensity of color and flavor than any Pinot in our experience, so we have great hopes for the future.

The grapes from the Klein Pinot vineyard, the Bates' Cab, Cab Franc and Merlot; the Livermore Semillon; and Ventana Chardonnay and Syrah are also excellent. These are very select vineyards, as you know, but in an exceptional year such as this has been, they are incredibly impressive. So, we have much to anticipate as these 2004 wines mature.

ADVENTURES AT AHLGREN VINEYARD:

The hummingbird adventures continued on until recently with Dexter running a pair of one-liter capacity feeders full time, often filling them more frequently than once a day. The birds consumed over seventy pounds of sugar made into nectar before all of the migrants passed through. We are now left with just the residents, and we are very pleased that they choose to stay and share the landscape with us through the seasons.

Dexter has been spotting passing Black-headed Phoebes the past few days. Surely it is too early for nesting with winter approaching. We will have to wait and watch to see what they have in mind.

We heard a pair of Great Horned Owls the other night. The first in months. The call of the Red Shouldered Hawks can be heard, and the voices of the Ravens, the Quail and others as well. Many quail babies hatched this year. We have two coveys, each with many birds producing lovely, skittering little ones.

Coyotes are serenading us during the night and early morning, and we see sign of their visits around the house, the garden, and along the driveway. Someone, presumably a raccoon, is ravaging Val's compost bin. Raccoons are reputed to be able to get into any container. No matter how cleverly latched, a raccoon will figure it out. They have not yet opened the doors to the house, but will enter through an open window. However, they are very polite and quietly exit after checking to see if an Ahlgren cat or dog has left any tidbits behind in their bowls. There are never any tidbits left by members of the Ahlgren menagerie.

We had the first frost in the vineyard a couple of mornings ago, beautiful white cover on the earth, ground for the fall yellow of the grape leaves which will soon be dropping. This is the signal that we should begin to schedule pruning chores to be done in February and March.

Bountiful crops of Madrone and Toyon berries grow more brilliant with each successively cooler night. The Robins and Cedar Wax Wings will be here in ravenous numbers before too long.

THE TALE OF TWO LABELS:

We often get questions about the two Ahlgren labels: the original with the hand lettering and the "designer" label with the impressionistic view of the mountains. The original label grew out of the search every new winery makes for ideas for a label. Val was then a member of Gallery House, a great little art gallery in Palo Alto and was in touch with a number of very fine graphic artists. She was determined to come up with a great label. (Does not every fledgling winemaker share that aspiration?) After much consultation on the technical processes and costs involved in creating an artist designed label, Bonnie Stone, graphic artist, recommended that Val go visit a friend of hers who had a warehouse filled with old letter press equipment and type. Val and the friend discussed what might be done with old type, because Val thought an "old" look would be interesting if the great graphic goal had to be abandoned. In that process, they consulted a book entitled Printed Ephemera, which contained reproductions of all manner of old time tickets, handbills, and labels for a vast variety of products. As she and Dexter later reviewed the book, Val pointed to an 1860's railroad ticket, and said, "We could do something like that." Dexter said, "Let's do it!"

Typographer Dan Solo has an incredible collection of old type he has taken digital. He was able to provide the typography that gave the look the original label bears even today, including the very band that was on the tear strip of the old ticket in Printed Ephemera. The ticket became the front label, and the stub became the space for the winemaker's comments. So was born the original label with the blanks to be filled in by Dexter with his practiced engineer's Speedball pened lettering. Nowadays, it is sometimes difficult to replace Speedball pen points when they wear out, but the master copy for the labels is made the same way it always has been, with the specific information for the each wine hand lettered and sent off to the printer to be printed in black onto the pre-printed basic label form. (To be continued: Part II -- Controversy and The Coming of the Ahlgren Vineyard Designer Label.)

ORDERING AHLGREN WINES: *As a Wine Club Member, your credit card information is on file here, so you can simply fax or email us your orders, or just give us a call. No need to worry about online security. Just let us know what you want shipped. We can run the charge using your credit card number on file here, and the wine will be on its way.*

Or, to fax an order, you can use the enclosed order form, or download the order form from the web site, fill it in, and fax it on to us.

Tell a friend! They can download the order form and/or the Wine Club Application directly from the web page, or they can give us a call.

To contact us directly:

Long distance: 1-800-338-6071; fax 1-831-338-9111.

Local phone: 831-338-6071; email ahlgren@ahlgrenvineyard.com.

Unless excessively hot or cold weather indicates otherwise, we ship at the beginning of each week so that wines arrive before the weekend.

PICK UP AND DELIVERY: *Some members, for whom it is convenient, choose to pick up their Wine Club packages at the winery on a Saturday afternoon during our tasting hours. This makes for an opportunity to taste, talk, and to enjoy the always gorgeous views. For those of you who pick up at the winery, we now pack your wines in boxes, ready to go when you arrive. Due to very limited storage space here at the winery, if you do not pick up your wine before the next shipment is ready, we will ship the previous box on to you. We will give you a call before doing so, however. We welcome your friends to the Wine Club. We are always delighted at how the word spreads and brings in new members.*

BE A WINE SANTA!

THE BEAUTY OF HOLIDAY SHOPPING WITH AHLGREN:

It may be hard to think of gifts these days when so many have more than they need of everything, but Ahlgren wines never fail to delight. And, Ahlgren has gift certificates available in any amount. Give us a call for the most convenient of holiday shopping: 800-338-6071

TASTINGS AND SALES: SATURDAYS 12-4 AT THE WINERY

It is great time to visit, pick up your Wine Club packages, and taste some current releases.

That's all for now.

Have the happiest of holidays,

SALUD! CHEERS! À VOTRE SANTÈ, PAX!

Dexter and Val

GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS. "