

AHLGREN VINEYARD

Founded 1976

WINE CLUB NEWS

Spring 2003

The latest Wine Club tasting selections are:

2000 AHLGREN Nebbiolo

Harvest Moon Vineyards

2000 AHLGREN Merlot

Bates' Ranch

2000 AHLGREN Syrah

Ventana Vineyards

A WORD ABOUT VINTAGE 2000

As we wrote in the last edition of the Wine Club News, the critics have been mumbling about 2000 as having been a less than stellar vintage. What do they know? The fall was cool; the fermentations were cool.

We are pleasantly surprised at the resulting wines. They are bigger and more full-bodied than we anticipated early on, consistently improving during barrel and bottle aging. Your own experience with the wines will tell you all you need to know.

Here at Ahlgren Vineyard, we work with the environment and the conditions it presents. No big, jacketed tanks offering finger tip temperature controls! To warm the red fermentations, we set up our three burner propane stove with the big copper tub dating back to Val's beer making days. Beth visited the local bottled water company and borrowed about 65, five gallon jugs, and we started heating water. With a big tarp spread out to keep the waiting jugs clean, funnels and pitchers in hand, we filled the bottles with hot water and floated them in the fermenting musts. It was quite a scene. For the fermentor in the back, Kenny, our Assistant Winemaker and Chief Cellar Guy, rigged a heat exchanger by running warm water from the hot tub through wine hose curled in the must.

It all worked beautifully, and 2000 at Ahlgren, the coolest vintage we have experienced in twenty four years, produced wines of lovely fruit qualities and richness beyond expectations.

2000 AHLGREN Nebbiolo,

Harvest Moon Vineyards

As long time Wine Club members know, when we flew to Italy in April of 1999, we carried sample bottles of our '96 and '97 Nebbiolos to the Currados at Viette Winery in Castiglione Falletto, Barolo. The Currados are makers of a world-renowned Barolo, which is made from the Nebbiolo grape in traditional ways.

Alfredo and Luciana had visited with us here a couple of years earlier, and we tasted the '96 from barrel with them. The '96 was our first Nebbiolo, and the first Nebbiolo fruit from the Harvest Moon Vineyard. The wine was deemed to have good qualities, but it was too early to seriously evaluate either the vineyard or the wine.

On the last evening of our visit at Viette in 1999, three generations of Currados gathered around for a serious evaluation of how we were progressing with this most famous and perhaps best Italian grape.

It was agreed that the wine is from a very good clone, as indicated by the fine color, and that the wines exhibit real quality, especially considering how young the vines were at that time (first fruit in 1996).

Nebbiolo is a grape presenting many challenges to the grower and the winemaker. It is a vigorous vine that must be kept under control, not being permitted to overproduce. Since it is a very late ripening grape, needing full ripeness to produce quality wine, excess cropping leads to difficulties in achieving necessary ripeness before the rains come. In a cool year, like 1998 even careful control of crop levels can leave the grapes at less than optimum ripeness, which is why we made the Tre Vini Rossi™ that year, blending the Nebbiolo with Cabernet Franc and a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon. In 1999 and 2002, the grapes did not achieve suitable levels of ripeness, and we made no Nebbiolo from those vintages.

For the winemaker, Nebbiolo also presents challenges. Like Pinot noir, the grape has serious tannins that can overpower the fruit, if the fermentation, aging, and cellar work are not handled with care. At Ahlgren Vineyard, taking care means avoiding excessive tannin extraction, and emphasizing the fruity qualities.

Also, like Pinot noir, Nebbiolo from the wrong clone, or from a less than optimum vintage, or subjected to careless winemaking techniques can be very light in color and lacking in fruit. It is never truly dark like a Cabernet

Sauvignon, for example. Those who know this wine best say that if it is very dark, it is not Nebbiolo, but a blend, at best.

Following the Currados' advice, beginning with Vintage 2000, Dexter shifted from American Oak to French oak for the Nebbiolo, and the results are most rewarding.

With this wine especially, it is crucial to remember our frequently repeated advice on reds, making certain that it be at room temperature, about 65° to 70°, and that the wine has been decanted.

It will simply come alive if you have the opportunity to take the time to assure that it is not too cool, and that it really has air. Remember, it has been in the bottle with only one half inch or so of air between the wine and the cork since April of 2000, three years ago. It is very young and alive. It wants to breath!

While the first sip before dinner may taste austere, we find that our Nebbiolo, typically for the variety, fills out in the presence of food and stimulates the palate.

Garnet in color, the bouquet is complex and floral with overtones of smoke, cherry and red fruit. In the mouth it is silky and elegant with firm, tannins classically balanced by the Nebbiolo fruit flavors. Dry, unfined and unfiltered. This wine responds well to bottle age, and should continue to improve for some years. 100% Nebbiolo from Harvest Moon Vineyards. 107 cases produced.

	\$26.00 per bottle
Club Member price per bottle-10%	\$23.40
Club Member 12 bottle price - 15%	\$22.10

**2000 AHLGREN Merlot, Santa Cruz Mountains
Bates' Ranch**

Our relationship with the Bates family and Bates' Ranch began when we started making the Cabernet during our first vintage, 1976. Now, the next generation is moving forward with sons Charlie and John Bates, much to our delight. The continuation of the Bates' tradition is a boon to those of us

who recognized the quality of these grapes from their beginnings in the mid 70's. We have witnessed the maturing of the vines and the consistent increase in the quality of the wines as the vines have matured. The early wines were very tannic, as is typical of many young vineyards. With vine maturity, the wines have developed greater fruit and earlier drinkability without sacrifice of aging potential.

The Merlot was planted some time after the Cabernet Sauvignon, as was the Cabernet Franc. Our history with these grapes dates back to 1991.

The Merlot is a very low production grape at Bates', and we get only about a ton of the grapes, if that. Most of it is reserved for Wine Club Members. This is not some of that mediocre, bland stuff the grape produces in many places. The combined effect of the Santa Cruz Mountains location plus low production levels results in an outstanding Merlot of depth and complexity.

This 2000 Merlot is a blend of 76% Merlot and 24% Cabernet Sauvignon, all Bates' Ranch. The bouquet shows flowery, dusty Merlot fruit. The flavors are bright, elegant, complex, flavor-filled and mouth-filling with a good finish. The wine has fine balance of fruit and tannin. Unfined and unfiltered. 2000 was an exceptional vintage, and this Merlot is big and substantial, deserving to be set aside for some months or years, depending on how patient you are. Only 89 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

**2000 AHLGREN Syrah, Monterey,
Ventana Vineyards**

We have been buying grapes from Doug Meador's Ventana Vineyards since our first vintage, 1976. Doug is a very consistent grower, producing grapes of dependably high quality and fine condition.

For several years, we waited for an opportunity to acquire Syrah grapes from Ventana. At last, the time came when they were available, and the wines are proving themselves worth the wait. Wherever we offer them for tasting or sale, they have drawn great attention.

This wine has a bright, smoky, spicy, black pepper bouquet, aromatic: classic Syrah characteristics. In the mouth, it is filled with rich, black fruit flavors, is supple, velvety, complex with great balance. Mouth-filling with a lingering finish. Unfined and unfiltered. 595 cases produced.

\$24.00 per bottle.

Club Member price per bottle - 10% \$21.80 per bottle.

Club Member 12 bottle price - 15% \$20.20 per bottle

OTHER NEWLY RELEASED WINES:

******* AHLGREN PINOT NOIR! Inaugural *******

After 24 years, we finally did it! A Pinot noir.

As we are writing this, the 2000 Pinot noir label is at the printer and for those of you who ordered with the card accompanying the last shipment and newsletter, we will be shipping the Pinot with this shipment, saving you a bit on shipping costs.

The wine continues to improve beautifully in the bottle, rich and fruity with very nice color and distinct Pinot noir character.

Be advised: *This wine is another one that will reward you well if you make certain the temperature is between 65° and 70°. We recently took a trip and had a bottle with us in the car and the hotel room. Although it never got hot, it was definitely up from cellar temperature. When we were on our way home, we opened it for a picnic dinner in our motel, and were stunned by how lovely it was. Although not decanted, the gentle warming over the course of four or five days had brought out beauties we had not before seen in this wine, to this degree. We do also recommend decanting as well as warming. If you simply pull the cork and taste this wine or another wine such as the Nebbiolo, without heeding our advice on warming and airing, you may have a disappointing experience instead of a wonderful -*

There is precious little left of the 27 cases made.

\$35.00 per bottle.

Club Member price per bottle - 10% \$31.50 per bottle.

NON-VINTAGE AHLGREN ZINFANDEL, Central Coast

This wine is made from Santa Clara County and Paso Robles Zinfandel grapes, a blend of vintages 1999 and 2000. It is not a typical big, rich, Ahlgren Zinfandel. It has relatively low alcohol 13%, with good acids, combining 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.

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

Regular Wine Club discounts apply to the wines below:

2000 AHLGREN Chardonnay, Ventana \$18.50

2000 AHLGREN Pinot noir (limit 3 bottles) \$35.00

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.)

1999 AHLGREN Syrah, Paso Robles, \$20.00

1999 AHLGREN Syrah, Monterey, Ventana, \$24.00

1998 AHLGREN Cab. Sauv, Harvest Moon \$27.50

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

LIBRARY WINE:

1997 AHLGREN Cab. Sauv. Bates' Reserve (limit 6 bottles) \$50.00

ANNOUNCING THE CELLAR SALE, AUGUST 9 & 10, 2003:

The Cellar Sale in July of 2002 was a terrific success. Val went through the library wines in the cellar, and organized them into a little wine shop. We all had a great time. It was truly fun to taste and discover together, and we plan to do it again on August 9th and 10th of 2003.

We will sort through Library Wines stored at the warehouse and see what we come up with for the event. Do not miss it: meeting Wine Club friends, tasting many older wines, having an opportunity to browse through and select gems to add to your cellar. See enclosed announcement for information on making your reservations. As always, space is limited.

ADVENTURES AT AHLGREN VINEYARD: *We continued to hear a lot of coyote song through out the winter, often early in the morning, sounding like it comes from up the ridge, directly behind the house. It sounds like a chorus of young and older family members We hope they are serious about hunting gophers.*

On March 13th, Val noticed the first sign of the buds on the little Pinot noir vines, swelling, getting ready to burst. We have spent the last month hoeing around the vines, cutting off the grafting tape from the budding operation last summer, and pruning. This is not a vigorous site, and many of the vines had to be cut way back to insure strong development of the trunk. Val marvels that this arduous hand work is still being done in this century. With 1200 vines out there, each one visited repeatedly, and tended from the kneeling position, an attitude of prayer, knee bones are getting a workout. Remember the parable about coming to the vineyard late? Here we are!

We saw a baby bunny recently. We are also seeing signs of gopher activity as the ground warms. We are keeping our fingers crossed. With coyotes, remembering the short tailed weasel last year, with the sound of the pair of red-shouldered hawks in the sky, along with the sight of a red-tailed hawk sitting on a grape stake, we know the professionals are out there, and we dearly hope they are hungry for furry fare.

On Christmas Day, flocks of robins descended onto the Toyon bushes for the lovely red berry crop, one of the best in years. The madrone trees, however, had the lightest crop we have ever seen.

On April 2nd, Val saw a bobcat dashing across the driveway and into the brush headed up toward the house. Another professional on the job. And, another great reminder to keep the cats inside! It is such a thrill and a privilege to spot these wild creatures so close to our lives. Our job is to keep out of the way This place belongs to the wild ones. We just work around them, using a relatively small portion of the land, a very small portion, if you include the surrounding 1300 plus acres of wild land watershed that surrounds us.

Today, April 3rd, the cream colored native Douglas or Mountain Iris are beginning to come into bloom. The tiny Long-petaled or Coast Iris that we call Blue Eyed Grass are blooming in their multitudes.

www.ahlgrenvineyard.com

Just to repeat, we have changed from the secure online store due to sharply increased costs, and the feedback is quite positive. Wine purchasing is quicker and easier. As a Wine Club Member, your credit card information is on file here already, so you can simply fax or email us your orders, or give us a call. No need to worry about online security. Just let us know what you want shipped. We can run the charge from the 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 indicate otherwise, we ship promptly at the beginning of each week, so wines arrive before the weekend.

TASTINGS AND SALES: SATURDAYS 12-4 AT THE WINERY

Note: *We, Dexter and Val, will be away from 5/20 to 6/26, visiting the Land of the Midnight Sun. Phone messages will be picked up daily. Tastings, sales and Wine Club wine pickups will continue on Saturdays in our absence, but*

you will not hear from us directly until our return. The house sitters will not be available for pickups during the week.

On June 7th & 8th, friends and family will be holding down the fort at Scopazzi's in downtown Boulder Creek for the Vintner's Festival.

We will miss participating in these events, but are truly looking forward to this trip.

That's all for now.

SALUD! CHEERS! À VOTRE SANTÈ, PAX!

Beth, Dexter & Val Ahlgren

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."