



Rick's Grape Skinny

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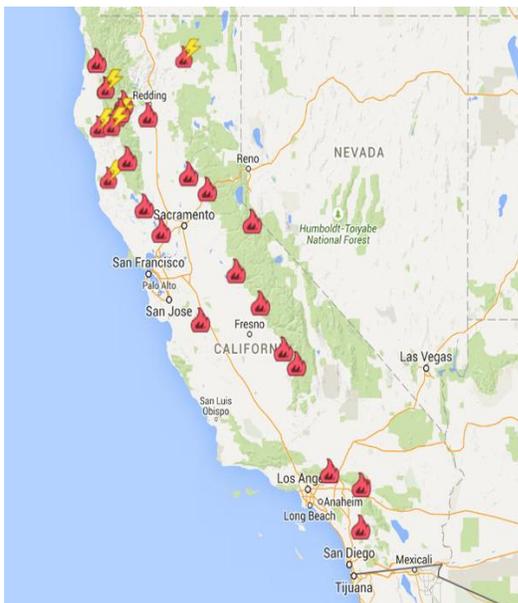


**“If I’m not sipping wine
I’m mourning not sipping wine!”**
(Wine Lover’s Paradox)

California Wildfires

Where There’s Fire, There’s Smoke!

By now I cannot imagine that there’s anyone who isn’t aware of the horrific wildfires that are burning in California...23 of them at last count. A number of the blazes are yet to be contained and controlled...and the damage toll is immense! Here’s a snapshot of the fires and their locations.



The so-called Rocky and Valley Fires in Lake County, have been threatening precious vineyards just north of Napa and Sonoma since late July. As of this writing, the Lake County Fires are 97% contained...and while the damage to homes, business structures and vineyards per se is considerably less than feared, that’s of little comfort to the likes of Adwan and Mike Wood, of Shed Horn Cellars and Winery – who lost everything but their lives. Watch!

<http://www.cnbc.com/2015/09/22/grapes-of-wrath-fires-in-wine-country.html>

Beyond Fire...Smoke is Also a Culprit!

To be sure, losing one’s vines, winery and home is the greatest fear...but a serious and often overlooked concern that can affect many more in the industry is the damage that can be caused by smoke! It’s been a while since California grape crops suffered large scale smoke damage, but in 2008, there were over 3,000 fires in the state...in the first month of Summer! Only a comparative few became major wildfires of course, but nonetheless, damage to grapes in the Napa/Sonoma corridor...whose skins absorbed the smoke...was widespread and significant.

Smoke-damaged grapes imparted a faint but detectable *dirty ashtray* kind of taste in the finished wines. Vintners and scientists alike tried everything and anything to purge the “*smoke taint*” from the juice...and while there was a modicum of success with white wines -- whose skins are less important to the winemaking process -- red wines didn’t fare so well...because the skins are responsible for all that color!

As fate would have it – so far – smoke damage from the 2015 Wildfires has been far less than once feared...since most of the smoke generated by the fires has been blown eastward and away from the most heavily planted areas. That said however, more than a thousand homes have been lost...homes that housed many thousands who not only worked in Lake County...but in Napa and Sonoma wineries as well! And lest we forget, there are a number of very well known wineries and vintners whose vineyards and properties remain at risk...among them – Guenoc Wines, Langtry Estates, Foley Family Estates, Beckstoffer Wines, Vigilance Vineyards, Shannon Ridge Vineyards, Obsidian Ridge Vineyard, and Six Sigma Wines. Hey, as Yogi Berra (may he rest in peace) once said, “It ain’t over til it’s over.” And dear souls...it ain’t over!

How to Help California Wildfire Victims!

As with all disasters, the American Red Cross is always there lending a hand...and donating to the Red Cross is always a safe and great way to help! You can donate to Red Cross Disaster Relief by visiting www.redcross.org – texting the words *Red Cross* to 90999 to contribute \$10 -- or you can call 800-RED-CROSS (800-733-2767).

Each \$ matter\$ and every little bit help\$!





Toast of the Month



*“Here’s to those who wish us well
And all the rest can go to...well,
How about Hoboken!?”*

(Anonymous)



The Monthly Bunch!

Red

Valdigué

J. Lohr Estates Wildflower 2014

A Fruit-forward, Soft & Supple Gem!

(Monterey AVA -- Paso Robles, CA)/\$10-\$12

WOW is the best word that comes to mind when describing this little jewel of a wine. Reminiscent of the famed Cru Beaujolais wines, which are made from the delicious *Gamay* grape, this wine used to be called “*Napa Gamay*” until 2007 -- when it was discovered to be the *Valdigué* – a grape indigenous to Southwest France. Distinguishing the 2014 Vintage of 100% *Valdigué* is that nearly a third of the wine was subjected to *Carbonic Maceration*, a technique that ferments whole grape clusters without added yeast. It’s a winemaking approach that not only helps feature the fruit and achieve lower alcohol and tannin levels...but one that produces a soft, supple and luscious wine. It truly is one of the most versatile food wines ever! Make sure you stock up for the upcoming Holiday Meals!
<http://www.jlohr.com/>

Blend

Bogle Vineyards Phantom 2011

Deep, Dark, Devilishly Distinctive, & Delicious!

(Clarksburg, CA)/\$15-\$18 – A unique and limited-release blend of 46% *Petite Sirah*, 40% *Old Vine Zinfandel*, 11% *Cabernet Sauvignon* and 3% *Old Vine Mourvèdre*, this inky dark elixir is known as “*Black Magic*” and trust me...this baby will cast a spell!! The word “*bogle*” is ostensibly of Scottish origin and means goblin, ghost, phantom, or bugbear...but don’t let the name run you off! This awesome vintage has been aged for 20 blissful months in tannin-taming American oak – and the

pay-off is a rich, complex and beautifully balanced wine that is characterized by a seemingly unending evolution of aromatics and flavors. Winemakers Eric Aafedt and Dana Stemmler have created yet another extraordinary wine...and one that you better hunt down and buy before it “*disappears!*”

<http://www.boglewinery.com/>

Cabernet Sauvignon

Elizabeth Spencer Mendocino 2010

Vibrant, Brilliant Balance and Succulent!

(Mendocino AVA – Rutherford, CA)/\$40-\$45

While it would be logical to think that Elizabeth Spencer is either the owner and/or winemaker...it would be wrong since there is no such person! The name is actually contrived...and derived from the first names of Elizabeth Pressler and Spencer Graham who are the wife and husband and also partners in making some of absolute best Cabernet Sauvignons to come out of California...or anywhere else for that matter. The 2010 vintage is 100% *Cabernet Sauvignon* and enjoyed 24 months of TLC in 60 gallon new French oak barrels before bottling. Production is limited...so this is one of those very special wines that one reads a lot about but has difficulty in finding it. So, while you might not see this vintage on the shelves, just put your favorite wine retailer to work for you and get a bottle!

<http://www.elizabethspencerwines.com/>

White

Chardonnay

Sonoma-Cutrer Sonoma Coast 2013

Rich, Elegant, Classic, and Compelling!

(Carneros-Napa Valley, Rutherford, CA)/\$18-\$22

When it comes to standard bearers in making *Chardonnay*, look no further! Sonoma-Cutrer has been the best selling *Chardonnay* in restaurants nationwide for a good many years...and for good reason! Winemakers Cara Morrison and Zidanelia Arcidiacono wrote the book on how to make great *Chardonnay* wines. With hand-picked fruit from five Estate Vineyards, the grapes were whole-cluster-pressed followed by 100% Malolactic Fermentation. The wine was then aged for 8 months *sur lie* in a combination of 85% new French oak and 15% stainless steel. The result is an award-winning, classic style California *Chardonnay* that is among the best in America! And it’s an American favorite! <http://www.sonomacutrer.com/>