



I first discovered Honig Wines at a wine tasting in Boston. The host for the evening asked me to stick around for a few extra minutes, saying that maybe, if I promised to behave myself, he would come up with a selection that he was featuring from one of his favorite distributors. I agreed to his terms and waited patiently. My reward was a Honig Cabernet Sauvignon, aged about four years, and it carried one of the richest and full-bodied flavors I had ever experienced. My only comment was “Where have you been hiding this?” and, in the same breath, I grabbed my order slip and immediately ordered six bottles. I was, to say the least, excited about this wine.

Honig has been with us since 1964 when Louis Honig purchased a 68 acre tract of land in Rutherford located in the heart of the Napa Valley. (As luck would have it, the parcel of land was owned by the Wagner Family, the producers of Caymus Wines.) The tract of land was turned into a vineyard and planted with Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes which were sold to neighboring wineries. Louis passed away before he could realize his dream of a full production winery. However, in a tribute to Louis, his family produced a small quantity of Sauvignon Blanc, which won a Gold Medal at the Orange County Fair. This award was the deciding factor to their continued production, and the Honig Winery was born.

In 1984 grandson Michael Honig took over management of the Winery and Vineyard operations. He was only 23 years old, but well on his way.

Writing about wineries has given me the opportunity to discover that each winery takes on a personality of its own. The large majority of California Wineries are owned by environmentally responsible people who care a great deal about preservation of the land and the environment. This is called practicing sustainability. Honig is no exception. The winery has always practiced sustainable farming and currently employs several cutting edge bio dynamic farming techniques. Among them are the use of bees and sniffer dogs. A profusion of bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects are employed in the cover crops in the vineyard and along the river. Should the insects remain healthy they will reflect a sign that the eco-system is thriving. (There is a side story to the bees. In German Honig means honey, and so the winery has a few beehives that produce a small amount of honey. Should you order wine from the Honig wine club you may find a bonus container of honey included in your package.)

The sniffer dogs that are employed are Golden Retrievers. They are highly successful in detecting the dreaded Vine Mealybug. The folks at Honig describe the use of the dogs as follows: Imagine a nose that is thousands of times more powerful than a human's nose when it comes to detecting subtle odors. Put that nose on a Golden Retriever, give the dog some hands-on training, and you have the latest weapon in the fight against vine mealybugs. A very important development occurred in 2005 when it was discovered that sniffer dogs could detect the female mealybug pheromone. Early detection of this event gave the grape growers the opportunity to treat or remove just a few vines versus using large amounts of pesticides. There is a victory here in that the Vine Mealybug has been held in check in North America and growers are united in continuing the fight. Indeed, their very livelihood is dependent upon winning this fight.

Honig concentrates on two varietals rather than many. They currently make two stylistically different Sauvignon Blancs, a primary Cabernet Sauvignon and several vineyard designate Cabernet Sauvignons. Sauvignon Blanc is their most produced and widely distributed wine. They produce Sauvignon Blanc from Napa and Rutherford. The Napa Product shows notes of citrus and floral. The Rutherford sees oak during its aging and reveals flavors of baking spices and peach and pear.

The Napa Cabernet Sauvignon is widely distributed. The 2011 Cabernet is blended with small percentages of Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc. The result is referred to as "a wine that is more feminine than some of the masculine big Napa Cabernet." My opinion? I completely disagree on the reference to the feminine, however it is still one terrific wine.

For us folks here in the Lowcountry, it would be very difficult to arrange for a Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard designate tasting. Be assured that I am on the lookout for one. My guess is

that staying in touch with a local retailer or restaurant that features wine dinners is the best way to stay informed on the possibility of having such an event.

Hope that you all had a wonderful Easter.