



Tasting Roomers
TastingRoomers.com

EPICUREAN EPISODES

The “J” in J. Rickards Winery



Jim and Eliza Rickards



Lots of hand work complements the sustainable growing style.



The 2009 harvest is shaping up to be a great year.



Entrance road to J. Rickards Winery and Tasting Room.

From his earliest recollections, Jim had always wanted to be a farmer. He was probably the youngest person to ever put in a Homestead Act bid, looking for land to farm at age 12. Born and raised in San Francisco, he got his wish after returning from his Vietnam military service in 1969, bought a cow and moved to Petaluma. It was the start of his ranching years, leasing property throughout Sonoma County and running cattle. He also raised three children and worked full time at Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital as an RN. So with his free time, he decided to finally buy property and revitalize an old vineyard. In 1976, he found the 60-acre Alexander Valley ranch on the east side of what was known as Chianti Mountain, built his house and made sure his tractors had headlights for working at night.

Contrary in nature, Jim found water on the ranch after being told there was none. There are now two wells and two large ponds providing water for all irrigation. He was told that the best land use would be a rock quarry. Instead, he started by reviving the original Zinfandel vineyard, and added new Zinfandel vines. He then selected Cabernet Sauvignon, which is well suited for the rocky soil and weather patterns on his northern exposure hillsides. In 1991, when Eliza joined him, Jim added areas of Petite Sirah on the lower south side, Shiraz on the upper terraces and Malbec around the lower pond. Now, all 45 acres of hillsides are covered with some of the best wine grapes in the county. And there are stunning rock walls throughout.

Jim considers it all to be in tune with his “Celebration of the Out of Round”. This phrase derives from the mechanical engineer’s meaning for eccentric; that is, when a cog is slightly off, or out of round. As Jim’s eccentricity, honed from diverse life experiences, has become evident in his work, he has also developed a taste for it. It is displayed in his farming techniques and winemaking, and the people he surrounds himself with.

“We do all our own grafting here in the J. Rickards vine-

yards, using the ‘chip grafting’ or bud grafting method,” according to Jim. “While it’s labor intensive, it allows us to go to prospective vineyards at harvest and mark those vines with the best grape production and best grape quality. Then when it comes time to prune the selected vines, we know which canes will yield the best buds. A new graft actually looks like a fingernail when it starts to heal. Few vineyards do their own grafting, most use nursery prepared stock that’s been caned grafted with the sole criteria being the correct varietal. Our personalized approach is allowing us to build our vineyard blocks by taste.”

Continuing his comments on his grape farming practices, Jim explains “We want to be stewards of the land in every way. Sustainable viticulture practices are used to nourish the soil and produce balanced vines. Wild grasses and flowers are planted to provide flowering plants from March through July, feeding the insects that are pollen eaters and their predators including spiders, thrips, lady bugs, pirate bugs, aphids and predatory mites. When the under story of grasses and flowers are finally dry and are mowed, the predators move onto the upper story of the

vines and attack and eat the parasites of the vines. A balance of nature occurs so that we do not have to use insecticides in our vineyards and have not for 20 years.”

Jim still works his “day job” in ICU with Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, and considers the winery his next career. Because of their love for pairing J. Rickards wine with home-cooked food for annual events, Jim and Eliza have many recipes to share. A great way to share them was by contributing to a cookbook put together by the nursing staff at SRMH. Proceeds will benefit the children’s mobile dental clinic in Sonoma County. On sale at the tasting room for \$15, “Recipes to Smile About” would make a great holiday gift, along with a bottle of J. Rickards wine!

J. Rickards Vineyards & Winery are owned and operated by Jim and Eliza Rickards in northern Alexander Valley. They grow wine grapes on 45 acres of their property and make a limited number of cases of hand-crafted wines, which are available for purchase at the tasting room, located at the winery, 24505 Chianti Road, Cloverdale, about 2 miles north of Geyserville.

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invites you to...



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