

DAMAS VINEYARDS WINE CLUB NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2025

***DAMAS VINEYARDS ESTATE-GROWN ZINFANDEL SCORES 96 POINTS,
WINS GOLD MEDAL IN 2025 CALIFORNIA STATE FAIR WINE JUDGING***

DAMAS VINEYARDS



2020 Damas Vineyard Zinfandel
Fiddletown, California

We often feel desperate for good news these days, so we were delighted to receive an email from the California State Fair Commercial Wine Competition in mid-April notifying us that our 2020 estate-grown Zinfandel scored 96 points and won a gold medal this year! That put a smile on our faces and a spring in our steps. This was welcome news, especially at a time of great challenges in the wine industry.

Amador County has not escaped the tumult. Due to a multitude of factors--including overplanting of grapes, incentives that reward conglomerates for importing foreign wines instead of buying locally-grown grapes, and changing consumer tastes--many wine grape contracts were cancelled last summer. Several local wineries and vineyards are now for sale or have declared bankruptcy. It's been heartbreaking to see large vineyards with tons of grapes left

hanging last fall or going unpruned this spring for lack of buyers. We have been fortunate to find good homes for our two acres of hand-tended grapes thus far, but market conditions are very uncertain and not looking too bright.

Nature is oblivious to such worries. Spring has been unfolding around us as usual, in all its splendor: puffy clouds, chirping birds, pushing buds, rainbows, and lots of wildflowers. The lupines are particularly impressive this year, and the cover crop in our vineyard also looks especially bodacious.

The past few months have been relatively cool and wet. Now that the temperatures are rising and rains diminishing, we seem to have no end of weeding, mowing, and weed whacking to keep us from wondering what to do next.

We finished pruning in late March. Once the cover crop reached 3-4 feet tall, Deborah began mowing and mulching the vine rows, turning that rich cover crop into organic matter and nutrients for the vines. The vetch, field peas and beans provide green fertilizer to nourish the vines. Mulching the cover crop





into a few inches of dense organic matter provides excellent weed suppression and moisture retention. Note that the mulching mower does a good job between the vine rows but leaves a strip of green growth between vines. As you drive past vineyards, it is easy to detect those being grown using organic methods and those that are not. What you will see in many vineyards is a brown stripe of bare dirt beneath the vines. That is typically the result of applying chemical herbicides to make farming easier. We don't do that. Instead of spraying, we have these remnant green strips weed whacked as needed. It's more work and expense, but we

believe it is better for the earth and for consumers. Our vines are beginning to emerge from dormancy right on schedule. Soon our annual race to repair the water lines, clean out the drippers, and get all of the irrigation systems up and running will begin.

Mara's affection for farm animals continues to blossom. Last summer she fell in love with Clover the Goat. This winter, a piglet named Wilbur stole her heart. He was the runt of a litter of nine, but his eight sisters wouldn't let him share mom's milk. Wilbur had to be bottle-fed for a while, and he needed extra pampering and cuddles, which our friends Stewart and Andrea (who own both Clover and Wilbur) allowed Mara to share in the fun. Do not knock baby goat and piglet hand-feeding and cuddling therapy until you have tried it for yourself!

Another friend's horses and donkeys will return soon to our property to provide several months of mowing services, cutting down the wild vegetation in our fenced back acreage. This is a huge help in reducing fire danger. It's fun to watch them elegantly grazing--or come running for apple or carrot treats.

Meanwhile, the barn cats (mom and her three grown daughters) are doing great. They're not getting ALL the gophers but do make a dent in the pest population. We

now have a fifth cat who visits frequently. We call the visitor "Cinco." Our cats tolerate him or her, so we got a bigger feeding bowl. Time will tell whether this relatively tame stranger without a clipped ear (meaning it has not been spayed or neutered) is male or female...



THE MYSTERY OF WINE AGING

After fermentation, red wines like Zinfandel are typically aged in oak barrels for a year or two. But even after bottling, the wine continues to change in personality and complexity over time. If all goes well, the tannins soften, the fruit and alcohol play nicely together, and the characteristic aromas and flavors intensify. It's interesting to observe how wine can change even after bottling. In past years, we've typically thought our wines needed a good five years of aging before they really came together and were ready to release. So, it was a surprise to us when our 2019 estate-grown Zinfandel was a precocious pup. It seemed ready to drink relatively early. We entered it in competitions, and it excelled, winning Double Gold, Best in Class, and even the coveted title of "Best Amador Zinfandel" in 2022. That vintage sold out quickly. The 2020 vintage, from our same vineyard, made by the same winemaker (Eric Hays) did not seem to hit its stride quite so early. It won a silver medal at the Amador County Commercial Wine Competition last year, but we held it back a year before entering it into the statewide competition. This year, the 2020 vintage seemed to shine, tasting very similar to how the 2019 vintage did at its zenith. We entered it in the State Fair this year rather than the 2021 vintage, which seems to still want more time in the bottle. So, of course, we were thrilled to learn that the judges of the prestigious State Wine Competition agreed!

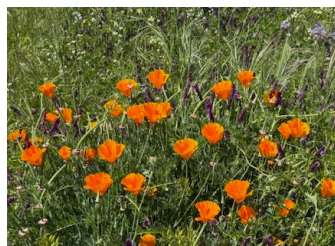


As for the 2021 Zin, we will hold off on releasing it until we feel it is ready to drink. One of our favorite wine customers, the 'Iowa Oenophile,' talked us into letting him take a few bottles of the 2021 Zin home for his cellar last summer, so he could open one every once in a while, to track how it is evolving over time. He recently sent this report: *Hello from Iowa! I thought that since I'm sitting here this evening with a glass of your 2021 Zinfandel I should write and tell you how much I am enjoying it!! It might still be a little young, but you certainly can tell this is going to age quite well. Cheers, Rick.*

ANOTHER PEEK AHEAD

We recently paid a visit to Eric Hays, owner and winemaker at Chateau Davall (one of the places where we have been custom crushing our Zinfandel) to barrel-taste our 2024 vintage. We're watching this vintage like mother hens, because it represents the 25th anniversary harvest from the vineyard we planted in 1998 and first harvested for wine production in 2000. The wine has finished fermentation and is resting now in oak barrels. Typically, a seven-month-old red wine can be pretty gnarly – tannic, disjointed and still tasting of fermentation. But our 2024 vintage is tasting remarkably good for a youngster, showing its peppery Zinfandel character. It's still a little tannic, but that is to be expected. We were all pleased with its development and predict the 2024 vintage will also be excellent--and possibly ready to drink within a couple of years. Stay tuned.

Our current price list and ordering form is attached. Get in touch if you'd like to order anything. Our wonderful shipping service is just a few miles down the road. If you want to have wine or olive oil shipped, it's a good idea to arrange this before the summer heat kicks in to avoid having your goods cook in a delivery truck on their way to you. Our classic Shenandoah Blanc, Rosé of Barbera, Roussanne, and Viognier all make great summer sippers--and when the heat cranks up, you have our permission to put an ice cube in that glass of yummy DAMAS Zinfandel!



'Til next time,

Mara & Deborah