CELEBRATIONS WINE CLUB

CELEBRATIONS WINE CLUB

Celebrating over 20 years of good wine, good food, and good friends!
www.CelebrationsWineClub.com

California
Winery of the Month

The Derbyshire Vineyard, just off Highway 1 between the coastal communities of Cambria and San Simeon, overlooks the Pacific Ocean.

Two Careers & Counting

Derby Wine Estates

Life is long, too long at least for just one career. Ray Derby says he shared similar interests with his father and naturally followed him into the family business, manufacturing automobile fasteners. Ray eventually sold to a competitor and expected to retire, moving from Los Angeles to Paso Robles in 1991 when he purchased 635 acres 1.5 miles from the Pacific Ocean near San Simeon in Paso Robles. While he managed the family business east of Los Angeles, he had developed a small avocado farm, a crop that flourished in the area. He described the activity as "an avocation," an opportunity to be a weekend gentleman farmer. Somewhat at loose ends in his retirement, "too young to sit back in a rocking chair and let the world go by" as he describes it, Ray longed for some hands-on work that would also expand his horizons. This time, he was in grape growing country, and it didn't take him long to embrace the challenge.

The land that Ray had purchased in Paso Robles, what he named Derbyshire Vineyard, was a cool-climate area, fit only for Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Within two years, he acquired Laura's Vineyard on the east side of Paso Robles with a much warmer climate where he could grow the Bordeaux varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot. Yet the Rhone varietals were missing from the equation, an important omission since the area was well known for the reds Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvedre and the whites Marssane, Roussane, and Viognier. In 2006, he purchased the Derby Vineyard for Rhones. Thinking of the future, he has lately planted the Spanish varietals Graciano and Tempranillo along with a few other unusual grapes. He wants to be "a little exciting," he says in a measured voice.

Today, Ray owns 400 planted acres. His wife Pam accuses him of being busier now than when he ran the larger manufacturing company. "She's probably right," he says. "I had a lot of people who were involved with their own areas of responsibility, and I could pretty much let them run their show." With his vineyards and now winery, his or-

See **WINERY** *back page*

CelebrationsWineClub.com

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner
75 Pelican Way G1
San Rafael, CA 94901

1-800-700-6227

Celebrate@
CelebrationsWineClub.com

March 2011

WINERY *from cover*

ganization includes just Steve Vierra, who manages the vineyards, and Tiffinee Vierra, his winemaker. The two are husband and wife, "fine young people who are doing great jobs," Ray emphasizes. They both earned degrees at Cal Poly and met there when they were 18 years-old. "They live, eat, and breath wine, and they complement each other. Tiffinee lets Steve know what she expects from the vineyard, and Steve works very closely with her to make sure that she gets what she needs. They're very passionate about doing a good job."

Winemaking is a new aspect of the business. Ray hired Tiffinee in 2005 , when she made their first vintage. Case production is small and hasn't yet gone beyond 3000 cases, which utilizes only 10 percent of their finest grapes. The rest are sold to wineries as far north as Napa and as far south as Temecula, Ray says, including prestigious Justin Winery in Paso Robles and Gallo Sonoma in the Dry Creek appellation of Sonoma County.

Ray works closely with both Steve and Tiffinee, having learned his trade over a ten year period while he engaged the services of a vineyards management service and worked along with them. "Once I felt that I had developed sufficient knowledge and understanding of the grape growing business, I decided to go ahead and take over the management myself. Ray makes viticultural decisions with Steve, who handles daily operations and directs most of the work force.

One the winemaking side, Ray says that he has conversed extensively with Tiffinee. First, he says, they both have the same philosophy in terms of how they see the finished wine. "The trend has been toward higher alcohol content, but my viewpoint is that high alcohol detracts from the aromas and flavors of the wine. I think we ought to get back to a product that allows the consumer to savor the flavors of the grapes rather than get blown away by the alcohol." In fact, intense aromas and flavors distinguish Derby wines from many others, although most of the wines hover around 14 percent alcohol, which is neither unusually low nor extravagantly high. Clearly, the team has found a remarkable balance. Ray surmises that Tiffinee has a softer palate, "softer than some of these macho winemakers that we have around here," he chuckles. "But in any event, I've been very pleased with the wines that we've been able to offer, not only in terms of the style but also in terms of the varieties," which cover a large range that will become even larger as the Spanish varieties mature.

Ray anticipates a fine future, not just for his own wines but for those of the entire Paso Robles appellation. He sees three emerging trends in the area, the first being increased quality in the vineyards and in winemaking, especially coming from the west side of Paso Robles, which is closer to the ocean and has a cooler climate. "As much as I like to say that I'm not an advocate of either the east side or the west side of Paso Robles, because we have vineyards on both sides, I see the boutique market on the west side and the larger production market on the east side, where crops tend to be directed toward bigger wineries."

Another trend that he sees clearly is increased interest in Rhone varieties, which have suffered somewhat in the recent past, especially Syrah. "The Rhone Rangers seem to be really picking up steam here and becoming more and more significant in their offerings." Particularly Grenache is attracting attention, and the market is exploring new possibilities for Syrah, especially lighter versions.

Finally, Ray observes that blends are gaining traction in Paso Robles. "More and more winemakers are coming up with some very interesting blends that give us tastes and wines that you can't get with single varietals." Derby Wine Estates is participating in the effort with some extraordinary Rhone and Bordeaux blends, both red and white.

But the project that currently engages Ray's enthusiasm is the new winery. Originally built in the 1920s as an almond processing warehouse, he is restoring the building as a winery and tasting room. "The project is consuming all of our time and efforts now. The structure is right off of Hwy 101, a very visible building. I'm very excited over that. We'll be able to increase our offerings as far as these other varietals are concerned and have a great tasting room at the same time."

RECOMMEND US

to family members, friends, business associates, and clients whom you think would appreciate Celebrations Wine Club.

RECEIVE a complementary third bottle of outstanding wine with your regular shipment of two bottles, when they join Celebrations Wine Club.

Send this form to: Celebrations Wine Club
75 Pelican Way G1
San Rafael, CA 94901

Or call: 1-800-700-6227

Anna Maria, please send information and a complementary issue of our newsletter to the following people. Please mention my name.

1. Name_____
   Address _____
   City_____ State_____ Zip_____

2. Name_____
   Address _____
   City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Your name _____