



PESSAGNO
WINERY

Wine Country this Week

September 28, 2008

Tasting Room of the Week:

PESSAGNO WINERY

by Dan Ehrler

“Family” has several definitions, including “good or noble lineage” and “a group of things having a common source or similar features.” Upon tasting Pessagno Winery’s “family of wines,” I thought Webster **MUST** have experienced Stephen Pessagno’s truly exceptional family of wines, as well!

If you have not had the opportunity to experience this fabulous family collection, I emphatically encourage you to pay them a “family” visit!

Let’s meet Dad, first! Stephen Pessagno (he prefers Steve) was a successful mechanical engineer, after receiving his degree from Santa Clara University, before fulfilling a passion that began when he was 16. I know! You’re thinking, a mechanical engineer and winemaking? As Steve told me, “I grew up in the San Jose area and worked summers farming. When something broke, you fixed it!” There’s the mechanical engineer! However, Steve’s grandfather, Anthony Escover, introduced him to winemaking on the family’s Santa Clara Valley ranch in 1974. “. . . I remember crushing over-ripe Zinfandel grapes, stems and all, into 500 gallon redwood tanks . . . the enticing aroma that filled the barn during fermentation” was unforgettable! The passion was born!

Fast-forward from there. Steve made his own wine at home before experiencing winemaking from the ground up. He worked the crush at Kirigin Cellars in 1982 in Gilroy and began working there in 1983. During this time, he earned his degree in Enology from CA State University, Fresno in 1986.

Steve was vice president and winemaker for Jekel Vineyards between 1986 and 1991 and was winemaker for Lockwood Vineyards between 1991 and 2004. With two friends, Steve formed what would become Pessagno Winery in 1999. And Steve has been producing “children” ever since. “I’m able to make small lots of hand-crafted wines that my grandfather introduced to me,” Steve said.



PESSAGNO WINERY

Now, it's time for the "kids!" Steve said it well: "Making wine is like raising kids! What's done at the beginning influences what's at the end (when they are grown)." And, believe me, Stephen Pessagno has done a truly extraordinary job in raising his children and producing fabulous wines! Here are snap shots of Steve's efforts that are waiting for you at the Pessagno Winery Tasting Room:

The 2006 La Estancia Riesling from the Santa Lucia Highlands (\$14) was limited to 85 cases. Apricots, ripe pear, honey, crisp acidity and little residual sweetness await you! This dry German dry-styled Riesling is a perfect accompaniment to spicy Asian food and summer-time entertaining. Be sure to serve well chilled!

The 2006 Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Chardonnay, San Benito County (\$32), is elegant and offers deep, concentrated layers of apricot, ripe pear and pineapple flavors with soft oak flavors and a hint of clove. The creamy, lingering butterscotch finish, coupled with firm natural acidity, will invite you back for continued enjoyment.

The 2005 Intrinity Chardonnay from Santa Lucia Highlands (\$45), a spoonerism of "Infinity" and "Eternity" and defined as "going on and on forever trying to reach a goal and not being able to get there" by Steve's then seven-year-old son, Robert, is selected from the five best Chardonnay barrels and is absolute silk in your mouth! The '05 Intrinity Chardonnay is a complex, deeply concentrated wine with layers of apple, ripe pear and caramel from new French oak aging. Truly elegant!

Pinot Noir is, by all accounts, a challenging child! Steve's efforts have produced truly significant PNs that are distinctly different, one from another, like each of your children!

The 2006 Spring Grove Vineyard Pinot Noir, from San Benito County (\$27), is complex and elegant, producing red cherry, raspberry, vanilla flavors in a spicy style.

The 2006 Lucia Highlands Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$28) is rich and elegant, with red cherry, currant and violets on the palate. Stylistically classic, this wine pairs well with Mediterranean cuisine, especially fresh vegetable, seafood, shellfish and pork.

2005 was especially productive, as demonstrated by the 2005 Idyll ("Tranquility and Peaceful") Times Vineyard Pinot Noir from San Benito County (\$40). It is big and expressive with ripe blackberry and clove dancing in your mouth! Beautifully balanced, it offers good body, rich texture and a long, lingering finish.

The BIG Pinot in the family is the 2005 Four Boys Vineyard, Estate Pinot Noir from the Santa Lucia Highlands (\$55).



PESSAGNO WINERY

The four block vineyard, from which this Pinot Noir comes, is named Four Boys in recognition of his four sons: Anthony, who returned home after college to manage Marketing and Direct Sales, Robert, who is responsible for the name “Intrinity,” Stephen Jr. and John. This jammy and complex Pinot Noir is intense, concentrated and elegant with black cherry flavors and possesses a full, lush mouth feel followed with layered flavors of candied plum and vanilla, reflecting the depth of the fruit and lavish use of oak. It is big, delicious and memorable!

And what about the other kids? The 2006 Idyll Times Vineyard Zinfandel from San Benito County (\$21) is an “in your face” and showy Zin with raspberry, cranberry and licorice flavors. “Jammy” will also come to mind, as this opulent wine can be served with hors d’oeuvres, hearty meat, game dishes and semi-sweet chocolate desserts. The 2005 Idyll Time Vineyard Syrah from San Benito County (\$35) is dense and opulent with plum and licorice aromas. This wine begs a grilled steak, hearty meat, game dishes and strong cheeses.

Wondering about the San Benito County connection? Yes! It’s family! Steve’s Uncle Tony owns this property and, guess what? He was also a mechanical engineer and has property that is producing exquisite grapes that Steve ‘raises’ into fantastic wines!

Dessert anyone? The 2006 Sauvignon Blanc Late Harvest – Griva Vineyard / Arroyo Seco (\$35, 375 ML) will definitely please you and your guests! The combination of high natural sweetness, fruit intensity and acidity make this dessert wine a stand-alone aperitif, with poached pear, apricot and pineapple abounding in its aroma! Steve’s description: “Liquid gold!”

And don’t forget the older children! The 2002 Port – Hames Valley Vineyard / Hames Valley (\$36) is made entirely from traditional Portuguese varietals. With soil that is sparse and summer temperatures are relentless, Hames Valley is just like the Douro region of Portugal.

Yes, “family” has several definitions, including “good or noble lineage” and “a group of things having a common source or similar features.” At Pessagno Winery, its historic good and noble lineage has definitely contributed similar features of extreme quality, exquisite offerings and some of the most outstanding wine offerings anywhere! Period!

Pessagno Winery is at 1645 River Road in Salinas. For more information, call (831) 675-9463 or visit www.pessagnowines.com. The tasting room is open Friday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.