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A Close Call for Va. Vineyard



Christine Wells Vrooman

A wildfire that blazed over 11,200 acres in the Mount Pleasant area in Amherst County in November came within yards of Ankida Ridge Vineyards, raging on three sides of the property. For story & more photos, see Page 9.

Making Tough Decisions For the Next Generation

By Jim Law
Linden Vineyards

Hardscrabble Vineyard is now in the fifteenth year of a 10-year plan of replanting vineyards. It has taken a bit longer than planned, mostly because I've been dragging my feet on the final stage, which was implemented just after harvest 2016.

We just pulled out four acres of vines adjacent to the winery. None of these vines were removed because of old age or low yields. They were pulled because the wine quality never lived up to expectations.

I tried every "Band-Aid" viticultural technique known to mankind: Re-trellising, field grafting, changing pruning systems, interplanting, and

multiple pickings. Some of this helped, but the truth eventually became apparent. It was planted wrong. It certainly didn't feel wrong 25-plus years ago, but I've learned a lot since then. I had a C- planting on an A+ site.

The only solution was to start over.

My hope is that others will learn not only from my mistakes, but more importantly muster up the courage to face those mistakes and start over. At this stage of our industry's development we will all make establishment mistakes.

At what point does one make the decision to try again, building on experience?

First, the problems:

1. Not understanding the impact of differing landscape forms (topography) and soils. The

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President's Corner

How VVA Benefits Growers

By Tom Kelly
Kelly Vineyard Services

I am writing this article as a supplemental piece to my previous column, which was supposed to be my last as president of the VVA. However, as you know, the election of new board officers has not yet been held.

It was our hope that the election could have taken place at its normal time in early November but we initially struggled to get anyone from the membership to step up and serve on the board. This has changed following the letter we sent out late last month seeking volunteers.

Since then, we've had a good response from people willing to put their hat in the ring for the various board positions that are coming up

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A new column for Grape Press focuses on organic grape growing.

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Tom Kelly

tom@kellyvineyardservices.com

Vice President

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jwbenefiel@aol.com

Treasurer

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kaythompson@gmail.com

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aimee@lostcreekwinery.com

Advisor

Dr. Tony K. Wolf

vitis@vt.edu

Business Manager

Tracy Kirkman

vavineyardsassoc@gmail.com

Grape Press Editors/Production

Bob Garsson

rgarsson@gmail.com

Chris Garsson

cgarsson@gmail.com

VVA Mailing Address

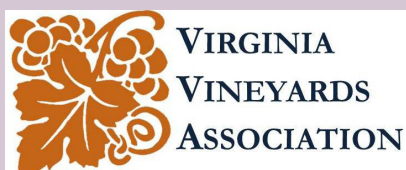
P.O. Box 168

Waterford, Va. 20197

vavineyardsassoc@gmail.com

Special thanks to:

Bill Freitag, Karl Hamsch,
Katie Hellebush, Andrew Hodson,
Paul Krop, Jim Law, Christine Wells
Vrooman, Bruce Zoeklein



PRESIDENT'S CORNER (cont.)

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for election. We had an even greater response from folks willing to take committee level positions.

I want to extend a personal thanks to all those who have contacted me expressing their interest in getting more involved with the association.

We now have a good list of nominees for board officers and you should be seeing ballots in your mailbox before the end of the year.

It is still our hope that the election results can be finalized before the upcoming winter technical meeting in February so that the new officers can be introduced at the business session that Saturday.

As has been said before, this association depends almost entirely upon the work of volunteers who donate their time, expertise and resources to see that the VVA continues to function in a manner to which its members have become accustomed.

If it weren't for the efforts of the current board and those that came before us, all the benefits of membership that we currently enjoy in the VVA would go away – or would never have been there in the first place.

If the association is to continue into the future it will need its members to take an active level of participation in keeping it running.

But, what are the benefits of membership in the association? What does the VVA do?

Obviously, there are the meetings. One of the primary missions of the association is to educate and we do this, by and large, through the biannual technical meetings we host.

We also list numerous educational resources for our members on our website, <http://www.virginiavineyardsassociation.com>.

And we have launched an online sustainability self-assessment tool designed to allow users to evaluate their vineyard sustainability practices against a known set of standards.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this tool is its ability to educate users by letting them learn more about each proposed practice through active links to research articles, publications and other resources. Much of this is facilitated by our Education and Sustainability committees.

The VVA also provides advocacy for its members through its Legislative Committee.

Upcoming Elections

Ballots to elect VVA officers are expected to be sent to members by the beginning of the new year, so check your mail and also look for biographical information on the nominees that will be posted on the VVA website soon.

Representatives of the VVA hold seats on both the Virginia Wine Board and the Virginia Wine Council. These are all ways in which VVA members can have a voice in the legislative and policy issues that shape our industry.

Opening the channels of communication and offering a sense of community to growers is another way the VVA serves its members. This is done through social gatherings, an online forum, a member exchange board and periodic email updates, including weather forecasts from WxRisk. We also sponsor a website, a Facebook page and a quarterly newsletter, Grape Press.

These are only a few of the ways that membership in the VVA benefits you, and there is more on the horizon. There are several new online tools in development that will help growers manage their operations, streamline recordkeeping and identify



TOM KELLY

problems, all of which should help us all be better growers.

But none of this can happen without active involvement from our members and so, at the risk of relying on a bit of melodrama, I would like to reference a quote from one of the most renowned of our nation's presidents, John F. Kennedy, who once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

I'd like to turn this great statement around a bit and suggest that you ask yourself first what you want from the VVA: What can it do for you and what do you want it to be? Then ask yourself what you can do to help that become a reality.

With that, I'll sign off – again – for the last time. I look forward to seeing you all in February!

Best wishes.

▶ **EASTERN VA.:** “It has been anywhere from a lackluster to poor year...”

By Paul Krop
Good Luck Cellars

Here in the eastern part of the Commonwealth, we had our shares of issues and a rather small production. At Good Luck Cellars, our production was way below the expected because of the April 6th frost and the further recognition of split trunks and crown gall.

Major crown gall is now visible in virtually all our Chardonal at the graft site in its first two years of growth. As noted earlier, by one of our professors, this likely came to us through nursery stock.

Minimal good news, as one might expect, is that we've seen no new Pierce's disease since some that had appeared mostly in our Petit Verdot.

From some of our neighbors in the Chesapeake Wine Trail and other eastern vineyards it has been anywhere from a

lackluster to poor year for production.

Of course, this makes us reconsider our need for crop insurance, although friends have warned us about reading the fine print in the coverage.

Coverages are usually linked to average production for the region per variety.

Take a close look at what those averages are calculated to be by the insurance underwriters. They may not represent your usual production at all.

We're also reconsidering the advisability of frost mitigation techniques and equipment which are not as commonly needed here closer to the tempering effects of the bay.

It's about time, with labor at a premium, at our 25 acres to consider mechanical hedgers and leaf pullers. These are being budgeted for 2017.

Wishing you all the best for a great holiday season and a better year for viticulture for 2017.

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Notes on Traveling in France

Laying Claim to Unique ‘Terroir’

“Whether it is the extraordinary, sometimes explosive perfumes often consisting of cassis, raspberry, olives, fried bacon fat and smoke or the cascade of velvety, berry-flavored fruit flavors, Côte Rôtie is an undeniably seductive, voluptuous wine that one needs little experience to appreciate.”

Robert Parker

By Andrew Hodson
Veritas Vineyard & Winery

We all know that you cannot grow Pinot Noir on red clay in a hot climate. Pinot does best on well-drained soils with good water-holding capacity in cool climates. But which came first, the Pinot or the terroir – the chicken or the egg?

Do we believe that in the same region, in the same climate, with the same orientation at the same elevation with the same sun exposure, the same winemaking techniques, and under the same AOC regulations that soil is the distinguishing factor?

Or, as Mr. Parker puts it: “Certainly, the soil composition of each slope is different, and the type of wine produced is profoundly marked by the dissimilar soils.”

Why is it that no other branch of agronomy – apple growers or soybean farmers, for example – uses terroir as a concept in crop production? And why is it that terroir has escaped the rigors of scientific investigation?

To answer some of these questions, my wife and I, in our travels around France, visited the northern Rhône valley; specifically, a tiny region at the very northern tip called Côte Rôtie. The wines of Côte Rôtie are of the highest



Courtesy of Andrew Hodson

The wines of Côte-Rôtie in the northern Rhône valley are of the highest quality.

quality, matching any of the first growths of Bordeaux or the Grand Crus of Burgundy. Surely understanding what makes these wines so great is key to our own industry.

I am going to describe what I learned about the terroir of the Côte Rôtie, then make comparisons to other regions in the world where terroir holds equal importance and finally delve into the historical aspects of why terroir has been used by the French to protect their monopoly of the luxury wine market.

We got off the Train a Grande Vitesse (TGV) in Lyon, taking a regional train to the ancient Roman town of Vienne, which Pliny the Elder mentioned in his writings in AD 71.

Indeed, our beloved Thomas

Jefferson visited the region in the 18th century and liked the wines sufficiently to have them shipped back to Paris, where he was serving as U.S. minister to France.

This very small appellation, just south of the town of Vienne, consists of only about 500 vineyard acres centered around the three villages, or parishes, of Ampuis, Saint-Cyr-sur-le-Rhône and Tupin-et-Semons.

Even within the parishes, only certain plots qualify for the appellation! Here the steep hillsides, as steep as any in the world, rise sharply from the banks of the Rhône to heights of over 1,200 feet.

By the 1970s, following the Phylloxera blight and two world wars, the Côte Rôtie, along with Condrieu, was in danger of

extinction. Two figures brought the region back to life: Marcel Guigal, a local landowner and wine grower, and Robert Parker, the aforementioned world-acclaimed wine critic. Between them, the Côte Rôtie has acquired almost cult status and, as you can imagine, an equivalent price tag.

Grapes grow here in this continental climate for two main reasons: the river that dampens the brutal cold in the winter and the steep southeastern exposure that literally roasts the slopes in summer and fall. Indeed, Côte Rôtie means roasted slope in French. Some claim that light reflected from the river is also instrumental in bolstering sun exposure.

In this region, Syrah is king, being the only red grape permitted in the appellation. The original rules allowed the inclusion of up to 20 percent Viognier, ostensibly to soften the tannins while at the same time preserving color and adding to aromatics. However, few modern-day producers add that much Viognier.

The very finest vineyard sites are named the Côte Blonde and the Côte Brun. Legend has it that they were named after two daughters of a local dignitary, one with blond hair and the other dark.

The Côte Blonde vineyard consists of sandy, slaty soil with a pale limestone element, while in the Côte Brun, increased iron in heavier clay produces a darker brown soil type.

Prior to the rapid rise in popularity of the Côte Rôtie, the negociants would blend grapes from the two vineyards to produce what was generic Côte Rôtie.

Marcel Guigal was the

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first to realize the potential of making the highest quality wines by vinifying the wines separately and at the same time breaking with tradition by using high-quality new French oak barrels.

It was this change that led to a quantum leap in quality, catapulting Côte Rôtie wines to quality levels comparable to the best of the best wines in the whole of France. Theory is that the blonde soil leads to lighter, more fruity and approachable wines, compared to the brun soil with more iron that makes the wine more tannic, with less fruit, necessitating longer aging.

Does this story seem familiar to you?

Think of the Piemonte in northwest Italy, particularly the Barolo region and the Nebbiolo grape which grows there. In the villages of Barolo and La Morra, Tortonian soils have a bluish tint made up of sand clay and limestone; typically the wines from this soil are softer and fruitier and mature earlier. In contrast, the so-called Helvetian soils of

Serralunga, made up with sandstone that is rich in iron, produce stronger tannic wines that take longer to mature.

In my last article, I was able to show an area where a grand cru vineyard differed from premiere cru by a line dividing the white, more chalky soil from the red, higher iron-containing soil

In Coonawara in Australia, the iron-rich red clay – the Terra Rosa – overlying limestone gives rise to what every vine loves: great water-holding capacity with great drainage and an ample supply of minerals that results in wonderfully deep-structured, tannic Cabernet Sauvignon wines.

These regions, from the Rhône valley to Italy to Burgundy – and as far away as Australia – all lay claim to be “terroir” wines, but it is worth just looking back on the word “terroir” itself and how it has been promoted as the key to wine quality.

It will probably surprise you to know that in its original context “terroir” was used by the French as a negative term. “Gout de terroir” meant to the French that the wine

stank!

Then came Phylloxera, the scourge from the American New World. In 1863, the innovative owner of Château de Clary in the Lirac region of the southern Rhône valley decided to try some California cuttings; the cuttings died, but the deadly aphid survived, and by 1869 Phylloxera had reached Bordeaux, and from there spread to decimate the vineyards of the rest of Europe.

The reason why this is relevant is because after the Phylloxera epidemic, the French wine market was flooded by generic wines from everywhere but France. The wine merchants, then as now, were in the cat-bird seat.

In order to prevent fraud, first the Champenoise in 1909, and then Baron Le Roy of Châteauneuf du Pape in 1927, championed the idea of protecting the name of the wine by defining the area from which a specific wine was produced. Eventually, in 1937, the French government put into law the Appellation d’Origin Contrôlée.

Used in the commercial context, “terroir” became a guarantee of authenticity, a protection against fraud.

Terroir from that time on took on a dual significance, one for the wine producer as well as one for the wine retailer. For the producer, it represented the factors both natural and human that bear on the growth of the vine and in so doing, it was considered as expressing the very nature of land from which the vine grew.

For the wine retailer, it was a safeguard to the brand.

And for those of us who would like to have an objective, even scientific, understanding of how to gauge terroir, just remember that there is no scientific method that can even approximate how to measure wine quality.

So how are we to measure the almost mythological concept of terroir?

My conclusion is that the Côte Rôtie wines are just as tantalizing and as unattainable as any of the first growths of Bordeaux or the grand cru wines of Burgundy.

These Hollywood stars of the French wine scene are like any others, are the products of unique environments and winemaking practices that the French have protected in the guise of the word, “terroir.”

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Making World-Class Wines in Va.: Can We Get There From Here?

By Dr. Bruce Zoecklein
Professor Emeritus, Virginia Tech

Johann Goethe once noted that, if you want to understand the point, observe the circumference. Understanding what constitutes a fine or world-class wine is a good example of our limited view and the importance of seeing the entire landscape.

Wine is a theater of sorts in which modern science is, at times, an inadequate guide. Science provides the knowledge to produce consistent, flawless wines, but lacks signposts pointing to greatness. This limit has spurred the debate between the use of technology and non-interventionism in our industry. Minimalists correctly argue that fine wines have been successfully made long before our understanding of science and the use of modern technology.

It has been said that art is not the cultivated taste, but the cultivation of taste. Some suggest that the best wine is an art form, and, as Jean Anouilh affirmed, the object of art is to give life shape.

Indeed, perhaps a superior wine conveys a sense of place, originality and the natural telos of the site, a mantra echoed by virtually all premium wineries in the U.S., but seldom truly expressed in the glass.

In the U.S., there are approximately 7,700 wineries with only 67 making greater than a half-million cases per year. The vast majority of wineries have production volumes under 5,000 cases. Each are attempting to compete, including every Virginia winery.

The question is: How does the Virginia industry continue to differentiate itself and grow market share? Perhaps Samuel Goldwin was correct when he jokingly proposed that one should never make predictions, particularly about the future. It is safe to predict, however, that the market will become even more competitive in the future.

Most U.S. consumer palates are not tuned to the nebulous sensory expressions of site, or terroir. The dominate forces in the marketplace understand that many simply want jammy, lasting fruit-based wines with lots of intensity.

For the most part, these are “feel-good” products, the vinous equivalent of comfort food, as Randall Graham of Bonny Doon Vineyard suggests. Should we be emulating these products, even if we are able?

In order to distinguish ourselves we must veer from the normative trek of simple standardization toward honoring wine’s diversity.

As Doug Frost, the noted wine writer and critic indicated at a meeting I recently attended, we should adopt an iconoclastic, Blue Ocean-type strategy; that is, be unbounded and unconstrained by our limited traditions.

Another wine critic, Robert Parker, suggests great wines should provide these gifts:

- ▶ Please both the palate and the intellect
- ▶ Hold the taster’s interest
- ▶ Offer a degree of aroma/flavor intensity without heaviness
- ▶ Taste better with each sip
- ▶ Improve with bottle age

Regardless of the merits or deficiencies of this itemization, I see two over-arching themes. One is the natural linkage to site or region, the differentiation between varietal vs. terroir wines. Specifically, the simple expressions of the grape compared to the incorporation of the elements of the place (soil, sun, wind, and the winemaker).

The French have a word describing this connection – *garrique*. The expression denotes the relationship between the landscape of Provence, for example, covered with wild, resinous herbs such as lavender, rosemary, and thyme and the smell and taste of these wines.

The other commonality in Parker’s listing is reductive strength. This is a measure of wines’ oxygen buffering capacity and has been extensively discussed in my *Enology Notes* (www.vtwines.info).

Reductive strength is antioxidative power or vigor analogous to a wine’s chi, the Chinese expression for life-force. Reductive strength is strongest in the best wines. It remains one of wines’ most important features, yet very difficult to measure and quantify.

It is impacted mainly by phenolic compounds in red wines and mineral energy and lees in whites. It governs wine’s ability to have and hold complexity and improve with bottle age.

The constructs of superior red wines center

around these attributes that impact reductive strength, which need more attention in both Virginia vineyards and cellars: vine balance, maturity, extraction and stabilizing structure during elevelage or aging. The details of these parameters are provided in my *Enology Notes*. Each relate to the importance and optimization of the tannin/anthocyanin ratio, stabilizing this balance to maximize color, aroma/flavor integration, and aging potential.

At times, the wine industry, including Virginia’s, operates in an almost Manichean-like struggle between the winemaker’s intrusion and the vineyard expression. The idea that the winemaker should become invisible so as to clear the path for the providence of terroir or site is a widely held view, but ignores the reality that the grape is not the entire message.

Naturalness in wine is a bit of an illusion. An obvious example is conducting alcoholic fermentations with so-called ‘wild’ or indigenous yeasts found on the grapes. Modern genomics tells us that even when cultured yeasts are not used, fermentations are largely conducted by cultured indigenous strains which are residence of the winery, not by the yeasts on the fruit.

Naturally or otherwise, we need to concentrate on winemaking resources that provide complexity and texture without deforming the ethereal, essential character of a wine.

Soren Kierkegaard reminded us that life can only be understood backwards, but must be lived forwards. Virginia wines have become cleaner and more consistent as the industry has progressed from an emerging to an established wine region.

Where do we go from here? Is it enough for our wines to simply provide naïve banality or simple pleasure, or must they make a more eloquent statement in order for us to compete in the growing marketplace?

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but in seeing with new eyes. — Marcel Proust

We need to concentrate on winemaking resources that provide complexity and texture without deforming the ethereal, essential character of a wine.

Tough Decisions

DECISIONS, from page 1

removed vines were Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. They were planted from 1988 to 1997.

Many of the rows ran from crest, down to swale and then back up to a crest. It took a while, but eventually I got an eye for seeing vigor hot spots and resulting ripening imbalances based on subtle landscape form differences.

About three years ago, I hired soil scientist and consultant Alex Blackburn to do a complete soil mapping of the farm. This confirmed much of what I was observing.

It also gave me better tools to make replanting decisions with more confidence.

2. Row direction was east/west, which is not efficient for ripening. While this may not be an issue for earlier ripening whites, it can delay ripening for late-ripening reds, which is problematic on our cool, high-elevation site (1,300-plus feet).

Rows were also planted perpendicular to the slope, which impedes superficial runoff of rainwater. Rows planted up/down slopes results in less water penetration and less rutting/soil compaction.

3. Lyre training with low-density (6 feet x11 feet) vine spacing. Once the vines got some age on them (12-plus years), they struggled to fill the trellis. We tried interplanting within rows and even establishing new “in-between” rows. The result was weak, struggling vines adjacent to vigorous vines.

4. Vine-age differences within blocks. Young vine grapes will often ripen as much as 10 days before older vines. This presents a quality problem and a picking nightmare. We have tried to do multiple pass pickings, but this, combined with all the other issues, became unacceptable.



Courtesy of Jim Law

Gray lines show row direction and blocks to be planted in 2018. VSP row direction primarily north/south. Blocks are situated on ridges avoiding dips and swales. Soil types are respected with Cabernet Sauvignon planted on the least water-retentive soils.

Re-planting is scheduled for Spring 2018. We will soon be taking bud wood to send to be grafted (all on Riparia Gloire). Coincidentally, the same varieties will be planted, but in different sections: soil and landscape form dependent.

1. Cabernet Sauvignon always takes priority at Hardscrabble. There are two distinct ridges of granite-based soils where CS will be re-planted. When CS is planted in the right place (low water-holding capacity soils) it makes our best wine. When planted where water is too available, it is picked for rosé.

2. Cabernet Franc likes the same soils as CS, but is more adaptable to less than perfect circumstances. The CF will go on a fairly steep slope that has a slightly higher clay (water-

holding) content. It will be a small planting, as we typically don't use a large percentage of CF in the flagship Hardscrabble blend. Some of the CF block will be where the old CF grew and did quite well, but the original CF was of an “old” (unknown) clone that rarely made wines with structure that we need for blending.

3. Petit Verdot seems to be happy in most reasonably well-drained soils. I've not noticed any great quality improvements that are soil-related with PV. It is a workhorse variety, always making good, but rarely great wine. PV will take up the sections that are less uniform and closer to the swales and dips. These are areas where CS and CF would probably be too vigorous due to too much water

availability.

4. Merlot. None to be planted. I've taken a hiatus on new Merlot plantings due to the winter damage of 2013-14. In fact, we've removed two small blocks and re-planted with CF and PV. Besides, Merlot likes clay. Much of this parcel is more granite-based.

The vineyard block that we just removed made good wine, but rarely good enough to make it into Linden's flagship wine Hardscrabble Red.

One lesson I've learned from my visits to top producers in any viticultural region is that to get to the next level of quality one has to make the tough decisions. In the Old World, where old vineyards are most prized, this means planting for the next generation.

‘Next Year Will Be Better’

“Green Gambol,” a new column for *Grape Press*, focuses on organic grape growing.

By Karl Hamsch
Loving Cup Vineyard & Winery

I’ve often told guests that being an organic grape grower feels like being a Cubs fan — about halfway through the season you start saying, “Next year will be better.” (Now that the Cubs are World Series champions, I will have to find another beleaguered team to relate to.)

The 2016 growing season was easily the most challenging growing season we’ve had to date. In early April, two nights in the mid-20s took 100% of the primaries of our first two varieties. But it was the 11 consecutive nights of overnight leaf wetness with +5 inches of rain (end of April – beginning of May) that broke our spirit. Only one month into the season we were already saying, “Next year will be better.”

We do not have any organic sprays that

effectively control Black Rot. So we pick out diseased leaves, then berries, and eventually whole-clusters. Our hybrid varieties are disease-resistant, but they aren’t disease-proof. And when you have wet leaves for 11 consecutive nights, even wild grapevines at the forest edge succumb to the onslaught of pathogens. So for two months, with buckets clipped to our belts, we removed black rot. The rains did not stop until mid-August, and we tried to walk the entire vineyard before each rain. This is great exercise, sure, but this is no way to grow grapes.

And what did we get for all this hard work? About 1/3 of our anticipated crop. Those April freezes had reduced the yield of our first two varieties to 11% and 23% of pruning goals. Ouch. Granted, the fruit was the best we’ve ever had; there just wasn’t enough of it.

So now that this season has ended, we look

forward with great anticipation to next year. We, of course, generally hope for more favorable growing conditions, but there are a few experiments that we have planned for next year that have me REALLY jazzed.

Next year, we begin trialing 14 new American and hybrid varieties (that you’ve never heard of before) for disease resistance; we’ll try “direct-stick” planting through paper weed barrier on an acre scale, we’ll use Japanese fruit bags to keep rain off the clusters, and we’ll trial a trellis modification that tilts the fruit zone. I expect each experiment will fail dramatically, and I thought this column would give you the opportunity to see these failures as they happen. So enjoy.

Karl Hamsch, the vineyard manager at Loving Cup Vineyard in Albemarle County, is a member of the VVA, an unabashed fan of sweet wines, and a Ravenclaw transitioning to a Hufflepuff. Loving Cup is Virginia’s only vineyard and winery both certified organic.

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Vineyard Survives Massive Wildfire



The Mount Pleasant wildfire in November came dangerously close to Ankida Ridge Vineyards, but never reached the vines thanks to the efforts of firefighters. Surrounding ground and trees were scorched, and the vineyard was covered with smoke for several days.

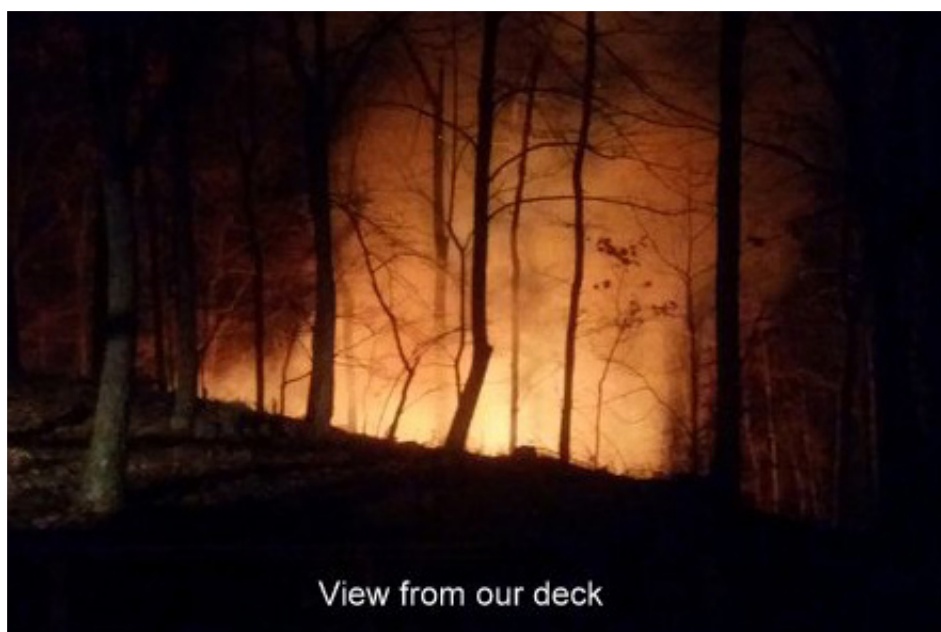
Story and Photos
By Christine Wells Vrooman
Ankida Ridge Vineyards

As dusk was settling in on the evening of Nov. 19, Dennis and I were casually traveling from Charlottesville back down to Ankida, our home and vineyard in Amherst County. We headed south as darkness fell and I began getting a series of rapid texts from our neighbors and our FedEx driver. Before I could decipher it all, the phone call came in, “Christine, it looks like the woods around your house are on fire.”

The forest leaves had fallen; we had had no rain for weeks. The forest was like a tinder box. The winds were howling fiercely ... a perfect storm for a dreadful forest fire.

As we rushed to get there, our neighbors went up the mountain to rescue our dog from the house and the few essentials I

See FIRE on page 10



‘Saving the Vineyard Was Top Priority’

FIRE, from page 9

thought necessary to save.

As we turned west on Rte. 60, we could see the drifts of smoke in the air. Our house and vineyard are set up high at 1800 feet and are visible to the valleys below. The closer we got, the more my hands trembled, so much so that I could not type on my phone.

From those first moments that Saturday evening, a drama was about to unfold that I never expected we would face in our lives. From the comfort of our home, we watched the fires roar up and across Mount Pleasant to our north and all along the ridge and mountainside to our east. The next night it spread west and enveloped thousands of more acres.

The fire grew to 11,200 acres, and some 300 personnel from a number of states came to fight the fire. For seven days, we battled fires and smoke, fires that threatened our home and vineyard for three days and then the smoke that followed, at times burning my eyes inside our house.

At one point on Monday evening, the fire came to within 30 feet of our house and on Tuesday morning burned right up to the vineyard fence on the east side.

Helicopters flew above the house repeatedly with thousands of gallons of water they would dump around us to protect our home and the next day on the edge of the vineyard.

The vibration and air movement of their propellers went right through me as they flew over me. I will never forget their whirring, humming sound, nor the thick smell of smoke that filled the air after the water dump.

I had told all the firefighters and the first responders to the scene that if they had to choose between saving our house and the vineyard, they were to save the vineyard. Next to us and our animals, saving the vineyard was top priority.

I was comforted and reassured when the crews from all the states assured me that they understood they were to save the vineyard.

Insurance to cover the financial loss of losing a vineyard’s income for four to five years is prohibitive. There is no way one



Firefighters heroically battled the blaze on the ground and in the air to keep the fire from spreading.

can realistically pay for enough insurance to cover such a loss.

And who would have ever expected such a fire event would happen here in the wet, humid Mid-Atlantic region? Fires were a California problem. Right?

As of this date, the cause has not been determined, other than they know it was human caused. The eastside ground and trees next to the house are scorched, as well as the east side of the vineyard fence and the woods behind the house to our north.

This fire raged on three sides of the property, wrapping around us like a shawl. All our beautiful views to the south were left untouched. Somehow, somehow, we lost nothing — our Thanksgiving miracle.

We are hopeful that the fire might have put a dent in the stinkbugs that are a huge nuisance in our house. Perhaps it has destroyed the natural habitat for SWD?

But in turn, it might have killed

off a population of beneficials. This entire vineyard/forest fire scenario is unprecedented as far as I know here in the East. It will be interesting to observe any effect the fire might have had on the vineyard.

We are thankful the fire did not occur while fruit was still on the vine, as I am told a smoke taint would be present in the fruit that was on the vine at the time, and the vineyard was covered with smoke for several days.

We are grateful beyond words for the firefighters from around our country who came to fight this fire, who put their own lives at risk to save our properties.

We got to know them personally. We fed them and hugged them. We gave them hot coffee when they came out of the woods. Before heading back in, they grabbed handfuls of baked goods that the Amherst community had baked for them.

On Thanksgiving night, we were able to feed the crews from Alaska and West Virginia a Thanksgiving dinner. They are truly heroes and I will hold them all forever in my heart.

They saved a dream, my priceless dream.



Living With Our Weather

By Bill Freitag
Toll Gate Farm & Vineyards

Sustainability has various meanings, and I am specifically concerned with the health of our vines in relation to the rather extreme weather (primarily the cold) we've experienced at inopportune times over the last several years. Growers I've spoken with, like myself, experienced vine damage caused by the cold of the like we haven't seen since the mid-1990s. Not only dead vines, but split trunks and cordons, have continued to plague us.

With the rather extreme weather, I'd like to point our members to a particular section of our association's Virginia Sustainable Winegrowers Self-Assessment Guide (VSWAG) for some great tips on managing your vineyard's recovery from or preparation for more such weather. For any newcomers, visit the VVA website to find the tool under the Sustainability Tab (<http://vswag.virginiavineyardsassociation.com/login>). The tool is largely intuitive to use, but there are numerous aids under the tool's Help tab to assist you, if needed.

As we approach the final stages of our growing year with harvest just ended, I'd like to focus your thoughts on preparing for the pruning that awaits us in just a few months. Relevant to the issue of our recent cold snaps, the section in the VSWAG titled "Managing the Vine, the Canopy and Crop Load" is particularly important as you look to your pruning.

Avoiding vine cold injury is of great financial importance. Some measures require

action before planting (or replanting): Match vineyard site to variety constraints (American, hybrids, vinifera).

Others require ongoing action: Vine balance, crop status, health, or physical protection (hilling up around graft union). This latter group is of concern in the subsection "Vine Training," which contains seven practices that provide information on pruning to mitigate cold injuries, as well as pruning activities to recover from cold injuries.

These practices cover all aspects of pruning for crop control and canopy balancing while concurrently providing advice such as how to prioritize your pruning schedule by considering the relative susceptibility to winter injury of each variety and the location of the blocks. For example, prune vines on the best sites first and the worst sites last.

It provides techniques for assessing bud injuries if you've experienced extreme cold during the winter and for determining bud count to be left for a safety margin when pruning. This is not just theoretical stuff. It's real world experience, and I've talked to other growers beside myself who have benefited from these activities. So, jump in and learn or refresh what you already may know.

In Closing

For those of you that created score sheets in past years, you will find your old workbooks on the tool with scores as you left them. Let's get them updated with what you've accomplished and completed as you finish 2016. Don't forget to print out your Completion Certificate.

Don't Forget To Register for the VVA Winter Technical Meeting!

Feb. 23-25 at the Omni Charlottesville

Agenda topics will include grapevine yellows, leaf pulling, sustainable practices and sprayable frost protection products.

Register by 5 p.m. Feb. 8 to avoid a late fee. Registration closes on Feb. 15.

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Virginia Wine Council Meeting Focuses on ‘Defining our Future’

By Katie Hellebush
Virginia Wine Council

The Virginia Wine Council (VWC) concluded this year’s statewide events with its Annual Meeting & Pre-Session Legislative Roundtable on Nov. 1.

After a busy year, full of legislative roundtables held across the Commonwealth and a follow-up survey to acquire even more feedback from the industry, the Council led a discussion of how the industry can be more proactive in addressing challenges and new threats.

The discussion raised a number of questions about the rights and privileges afforded under the farm winery license and how we can continue to grow the industry in a sustainable and positive manner.

As part of our annual meeting, we held elections for the VWC’s Board of Directors, which is composed of eight Class I Directors & one Class II Director, all of whom are representative of the greater industry.

Lee Hartman of Bluestone Vineyard was elected to serve as Chairman for the remaining 2016-2017 term. We thank all of our Board Members for their leadership and dedication to the industry.

We were pleased to have Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry Sam Towell present to the group and bring us greetings from the McAuliffe Administration.

Deputy Secretary Towell discussed the administration’s continued support of the industry and their efforts to promote Virginia wine on trade missions. He commented on the necessary budget tightening by the Secretariat of Agriculture and Forestry, including the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Department of Forestry, in response to the FY17-18 budgetary shortfall.

The roundtable concluded with a discussion of issues on the horizon for 2017, a review of local ordinances impacting

farm wineries in Albemarle, Fairfax and Nelson counties, and a brief comment on the federal, state and local contests making up the November General Elections.

As we look to the 2017 Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Wine Council will continue actively working on behalf of all farm wineries, cideries, vineyards and orchards to protect those privileges afforded under the farm winery license and to advocate for wine-friendly policies to promote our industry rather than costly, burdensome policies and regulations that stifle operations.

As always, we thank you for your active participation and financial support of the VWC.

If you have not yet made your membership dues contribution to the council for fiscal year 2016-17, please consider doing so before year end. Your financial support ensures that the VWC is well equipped to represent you

before the Virginia General Assembly!

The Council led a discussion of how the industry can be more proactive in addressing challenges and new threats.

Virginia Wine Council Board of Directors

► Chairman: Lee Hartman, Bluestone Vineyard (2014-2017)

► Vice Chair: Ann Heidig, Lake Anna Winery/VWA (2015-2018)

► Secretary: Mitzi Batterson, James River Cellars Winery (2015-2018)

► Treasurer: Philip Strother, Philip Carter Winery (2014-2017)

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► Tom Payette, Consultant, Class II, (2014-2017)

► Charlotte Shelton, Albemarle Ciderworks (2014-2017)

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