

Bob Eisenman - Ayrael Vieux

Rarely has the term “great things come in small packages” applied more appropriately to a boutique winery than in the case of Ayrael Vieux Vineyard and Winery.

BY KEN YOUNG — WINE EDITOR

TUCKED ON ABOUT SIX ACRES JUST SOUTH of Murphys in Calaveras County, Bob Eisenman and Linda Stockstill take great pride in sharing their handcrafted estate wines with visitors.

DV How did you come up with the name Ayrael Vieux (pronounced “aerial view”)?

Bob Eisenman Ayrael was the name of our first border collie when we bought the property and was such a presence that, among ourselves, we called the place Ayrael’s Farm. When we established the vineyard and winery, we added the French word for old — Vieux — as a play on words.

How about a little background?

I was born and raised in Savannah, Georgia, went to college in southern California and earned a PhD in Sociology from Yale. I retired after working for Kaiser-Permanente for 26 years. Linda grew up in Southern California, has an arts background and runs her own soft goods toy design business.

How did you first get interested in being a wine grower?

Linda and I have always been interested in growing things like flowers and plants around our house in Oakland. It turns out that Linda had always wanted to grow grapes so we started looking for a place.

How did you choose this location?

We started by looking in the usual areas like Napa and Sonoma but never found exactly what we wanted. We have had been coming this way for years so we began to look around the Murphys area and found this place. We bought the property in 2001 and planted the vineyard in 2004.

What grape varieties do you grow?

We make four wines, all from about an acre and a half of estate grown grapes. We grow a head trained Zinfandel that is the Du Pratt clone from Mendocino County. It’s pretty unusual to plant head trained vines today, but it concentrates the flavors by lim-



iting production and we like the old-world look of the head trained vines. We grow Sangiovese from a special clone that makes the *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* wine from the Tuscany region of Italy. We also have a small amount of Montepulciano which is an Italian variety widely grown in central and southern Italy. The grape is fairly rare in California. We also make a dry Rose` wine.

What has most influenced your wine growing and winemaking?

Probably the experiences we had traveling in France and Italy tasting great wines. And our approach of working with nature to organically produce the best fruit possible from our Sierra Foothills vineyard.

What is your winemaking philosophy?

Our winemaking objective is to use the splendid fruit from our marvelous winegrowing area to produce wines in the old world style of exceptional balance and structure. We strive to make wines that are elegant, food friendly, and can be enjoyed anytime.

Tell us a bit about your winemaking techniques.

We make truly handcrafted estate wines. We work with a consulting vineyard manager, Steve Collum, to grow outstanding grapes. With Kate MacDonald, an experienced consulting winemaker, we do everything by

hand. We harvest when the pH, sugar, and taste are at the peak of ripeness then hand pick the grapes. We destem the grapes and crush into half ton bins. We cold soak the must for a few days before inoculating with cultured yeast. Fermentations take about a week and we use a small stainless steel hydraulic basket press to control the tannins in the finished wine. New pressed wine goes into stainless steel tanks to undergo malolactic fermentation. We rack into predominately French oak barrels where the wine is aged about 14-16 months. The wine is coarse filtered and then aged in the bottle for a year or more.

Anything else you would like to share with our readers?

Come visit us! We have a beautiful property in a great location and we love to give visitors a tour of the vineyard and winery. You’ll be greeted by Ollie our vineyard dog. Our dream is to have a good time growing grapes and producing delicious wine for you to share with your family and friends.

Current Ayrael Vieux Wines

2007 and 2008 Zinfandel - Lighter style with aromas and flavors of raspberry, blackberry, white pepper, and rose petal with soft tannins and a soothing finish.

2007 and 2008 Sangiovese - Soft and fruity with great balance of strawberry, violet, ripe cherry, vanilla and cinnamon flavors with silky tannin.

2009 Montepulciano - Smooth, dry and medium bodied with flavors of dark berries, caramelized sugar, and pleasant spice backed by soft tannin and a clean finish.

2011 Rosé - A delightful dry rosé from estate grown Sangiovese and Montepulciano grapes, made in the style of an Italian or French dry rosé.

Ayrael Vieux Vineyard and Winery is open on Saturdays or by appointment. Located at 1690 Monge Ranch Road in Douglas Flat, about two miles south of Murphys off Highway 4 www.ayraelvieux.com