

# The Juice

Is it the Vineyard or the Winemaker? By John Falcone, Winemaker



Does a great vineyard make great wine, or is it a winemaker that makes a wine great? I am often asked this question. I believe it takes both; however, a well farmed vineyard in the right location can

often make great wine. You hear about a great vintage, which often means you had great weather for a particular part of the world i.e. Burgundy, Chianti, Napa Valley or the Central Coast of California. Yet without a great winemaker, how could a great wine be produced? Typically, with basic winemaking skills and knowledge, most winemakers can produce a great wine from a great vineyard in a great vintage. However, you rarely hear that a winemaker made a great wine from a mediocre vineyard. Could this happen?

In Santa Barbara County, many small brands often purchase from the same high quality vineyards, yet the wines can be noticeably different from brand to brand. This is where the winemaking part comes in. Winemakers may have different ideas of how they want their Chardonnay or Syrah to taste. Some of this comes from what the vineyard gives you, but also winemakers have a variety of barrel types, yeasts, fermentation containers, modern or older facilities that all can have a large impact on a wine's quality. Believe it or not, sanitation has a huge impact on quality. Knowing how to keep your tanks, barrels, floors and drains maintained is very important. This is critical in keeping microbes that can negatively affect the aroma or flavor in the wine at bay. Knowing your vineyard and grape growing is key. We often share blocks of vineyards with different wineries, and will have our rows sectioned off. Working with the grower and making sure important viticultural practices,

such as proper pruning techniques and canopy management at each vineyard, is key, and can differ each year depending on climate and yields. If a relationship can be developed between the grower and winemaker, it can improve vineyard and wine quality.

A winemaker can have a huge impact on the "style/fingerprint" and quality of the wine based on his or her direction. For example, do you like big, full, rich buttery Chardonnay or do you prefer a well balanced and leaner style? Once this fingerprint is imparted into the wine, it is up to the consumer and the media to determine whether one wine is preferred over another. Unique styles are particularly evident when wines are made from the same vineyard by different winemakers.

I mentioned great vintages; well, what about an average or difficult vintage, such as extreme weather during harvest? This is where I feel you separate the men from the boys when it comes to winemakers. There is no substitute for experience when it comes to making wine in difficult vintages. An experienced winemaker has more confidence and quickly reacts when challenged by extreme conditions. Having worked through these extremes can have positive results; for example, in an extreme heat wave the winemaker may decide to remove red grapes off skins during fermentation earlier (pressing,) to keep the wine from picking up overripe characters due to the dehydration of the berries.

I'm not sure if I answered the question, however, these are some of the reasons why it will always be up for discussion. Even great vineyards can be challenging during extreme conditions, and yet we still want to mention the vineyard name when we talk about the wines. Maybe some years the winemaker is responsible for making the wine great versus the vineyard...I sure like to think so.



# Rusack Vineyards

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Anacapa Cellar Club Notes

## Featured Wines

### All Wines:

2009 Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County  
2008 Anacapa, Santa Ynez Valley

### Red Only:

2008 Anacapa, Santa Ynez Valley  
2008 Sangiovese, Santa Ynez Valley

### 2009 Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County

The distinctive flavors from the cool Northern and Western extremes of Santa Barbara County came together in this bottle. Here, our love of blending has resulted in a marriage of exceptional fruit aromas with carefully balanced acidity, capturing the best qualities of the area. Honeydew melon, Asian pear, orange blossom, as well as citrus notes, are highlighted in this appealingly crisp white wine. Total Cases Produced: 1978  
ACC Price \$18.40

### 2008 Anacapa, Santa Ynez Valley

This year, our flagship Bordeaux style red wine, Anacapa, is comprised mostly of Cabernet Franc (82%), but also of Merlot (2%) and Petit Verdot (16%). Our Anacapa captures aromas of star anise, rose petals and coffee bean with flavors of black cherry, dried cranberry, cocoa and the beautiful texture of lush, velvety tannins. Total Cases Produced: 395  
ACC Price \$32.00

### 2008 Sangiovese, Santa Ynez Valley

The great grape of the Chianti region of Italy, Sangiovese grows exceptionally well on the hillside slopes of Santa Barbara County's Ballard Canyon vineyards. Our 2008 Rusack Sangiovese is a wonderful example of a California-style version of this Italian gem. It is fruit forward and well balanced, with aromas and flavors of raspberries, currants, maple syrup and cocoa. Sangiovese is well known for its food pairing versatility, and this vintage goes well with grilled fish, pork and wild game. Total Cases Produced: 376  
ACC Price \$25.60

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# The New Robert Parker

Article by Sao Anash, Muse Management

For years, Robert Parker visited the Central Coast on an annual basis, to assess a wide breadth of Central Coast wines for his famed Central Coast and Rhone Rangers Issue of *The Wine Advocate*. Wine collectors from around the globe became accustomed to reviewing the Central Coast issue, not only to learn how tried and true producers were faring, but also to discover the next hot property or the next rock star winemaker. Robert Parker made historic pronouncements about the Central Coast over the years like this one: “The explosion in quality and diversity of wines in various parts of the United States... includes pinot noirs from the Santa Rita Hills.” This led to a feverish interest from wine geeks in the Pinot Noirs of the Sta. Rita Hills appellation, which then led to a renewed interest in the wines from Santa Maria Valley as well, and Ballard Canyon, Happy Canyon, the Santa Ynez Valley, etc. Parker anointed the Central Coast an appellation to watch. He coveted the wines of producers like Sine Qua Non and Alban. His perceptions of the Central Coast, once published, elevated this region to a new level of understanding by sommeliers, chefs, retail buyers and consumers. For years, Robert Parker did the Central Coast a great service in presenting its wines, on a global level, to wine lovers around the world.

In 2010, though, Robert Parker announced that he would no longer be reviewing the wines of the Central Coast. Instead, he was passing that torch, as well as the reviewing of Napa Valley and Sonoma’s wines, to his protégée, the relatively unknown Antonio Galloni. Esteemed in some circles as the pre-eminent Italian wine critic, Galloni has nowhere near the fame and high-profile of Robert Parker. What he does have going for him is the fact that the most powerful wine critic in the world, which Robert Parker undisputedly remains, has anointed him as able to carry forth the wine criticism mantle. It is a blessing that few critics ever hope to receive. In the last few months of 2010, Galloni has stepped into Parker’s shoes, and his influence, especially on the heels of the newly published 2011 Central Coast and Rhone Rangers issue, has been uniquely felt and dissected.

Galloni’s Central Coast and Rhone issue does not veer too far off of Parker’s mark. He praises the same producers that Parker tended to like, though perhaps not as effusively or emotionally. His editorializing tends to be strictly about the wines and place, whereas Parker occasionally wrote of winemakers he esteemed or specific wines that he loved in terms poetic and oftentimes refreshingly hyperbolic. Galloni, on the other hand, tends to hold his cards closer. While he obviously enjoys the wines of the Central Coast, his written reviews, as well as the numbers that he doled out, are on the whole, more conservative and close to the chest than were Parker’s reviews.

Rusack reviews from Antonio Galloni’s first Issue #196 in August 2011:

- 2009 Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County — **91 points**
- 2009 Reserve Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley — **91 points**
- 2009 Reserve Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills — **92+ points**
- 2009 Pinot Noir, Solomon Hills Vineyard — **93 points**

There are reportedly many nervous winemakers in the Napa Valley these days, anticipating the upcoming Napa Valley Issue of *The Wine Advocate*, Galloni’s first since Parker’s retirement from California. The overall sense is that Galloni will be underwhelmed by the generally bigger, monochromatic Napa Cabs. Producers that were very favorably reviewed by Parker for years...often referred to as “Parker’s Darlings,” are, at least according to the prevailing gossip, concerned for their wines and how they might fare with a palate that is decidedly more restrained and subtle. Whatever the results may be of the Napa Issue, it is a widely held notion, and one with which we concur, that new blood on the wine criticism landscape can only be good for all of us. An additional palate, with new viewpoints and new ways to talk about wine, will give the wine consumer yet another informed opinion from which to choose. The more critics, advocates and champions of wine are out there talking about it, demystifying it and make it more easily understood, the better it is for wine lovers everywhere.



Lisa Gerbac

## Employee Spotlight

Our spotlight is currently on Lisa Gerbac, our Retail Operations Manager and Marketing Coordinator. You may have seen her running around the winery and through the Tasting Room from time to time. She is behind the scenes, not unlike the Wizard in the Wizard of Oz, and plays a very important role here at Rusack.

Lisa was born in Sacramento, California and raised in the small town of Placerville, located in the foothills above Sacramento. Lisa was bitten by the wine bug while attending Sonoma State University, where she studied business and wine marketing.

After returning home from college, Lisa discovered that she had been living amidst El Dorado County wine country her whole life. She soon began her career in the wine industry as a Tasting Room Manager at Perry Creek Vineyards in Fair Play, Ca. Several years later, she was looking to move to a new area and, while vacationing in Santa Barbara, discovered that the Central Coast was emerging as an up and coming wine growing region. Subsequently, Lisa made the move from Northern California to the small town of Solvang. During her job search, Rusack quickly moved to the top of the list of places she wanted to work. Thankfully, Lisa contacted us, and we welcomed her to our team in October 2005.

While working at Rusack, Lisa not only found a great place to continue her career in the wine industry, but also her husband to be! Lisa recently married Steven Gerbac, our Assistant Winemaker, who you may remember was featured in a recent spotlight.

Lisa currently lives in Santa Barbara with Steven, and enjoys spending her free time at the beach, hiking, and exploring new foods and wine.