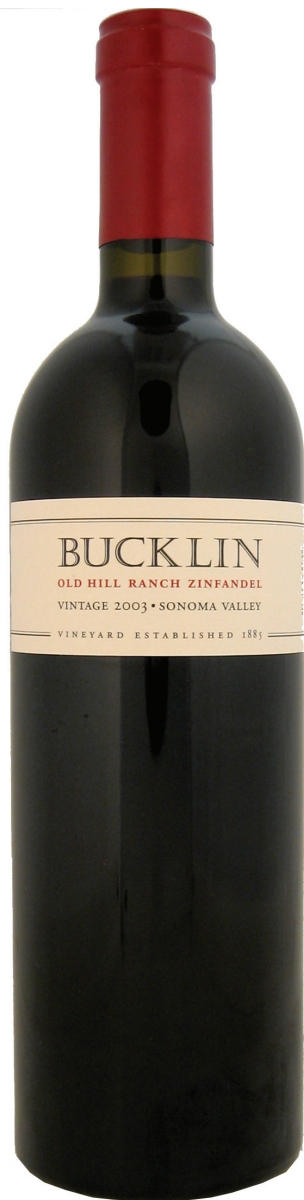


“I’ve never experienced such calm beauty in a California red”

THE OLDEST KID ON THE BLOCK

By Arturo Ciompi • July 12, 2006



This is one of those fabulous stories that grab right at the heart. Imagine California’s first vineyard planted to the classic field blend of grapes that later proliferated and prospered among Italian settlers at the turn of the 20th century. Spurred on by the California gold rush of 1848, William McPherson Hill sailed around Cape Horn from Philadelphia on a seven-month journey to stake his claim. He prospered handsomely and eventually bought himself a ranch in Sonoma County.

Until the 1850s, most California acreage was planted to the mission grape variety, ubiquitously favored for the sweet wines that the

Spanish Jesuits used for Mass and related

religious ceremonies. Hill decided to replace his mission vineyard by importing a mix of varieties from Peru (!) that included zinfandel, petite syrah and mourvedre, along with smaller amounts of carignane, grenache and alicante. A more careful investigation in recent years discovered tannat, lenoir (new to me--a hybrid originating in Madeira), bastardo of Port fame, and one single vine that in the winery’s own words is “easy to distinguish, but no one has identified it with any confidence.”

Dating from 1856 with continued planting over the next two decades, we are talking

about a grouping of 130- to 150-year-old vines left intact. Winemakers are aware that there just isn’t as much “activity” in a centenarian vine as in a pubescent 18-year-old. As far as these ancients are concerned, all of their mojo goes toward promulgating just a few sparse bundles of fruit. It’s all a concentrated focus of effort into a miniscule production.

So, the now-named 2003 Bucklin Old Hill Ranch Zinfandel is made from this resurrected mélange of 14 acres. How’s the wine? Almost unexplainable with its unfathomable depth and generosity. No “grabbing” your attention is involved; it’s

all seduction yet demonstrably grandiose. So “fat,”

“ALMOST UNEXPLAINABLE IN ITS DEPTH AND GENEROSITY”

so intensely textured with an engulfing richness and tremendous length of flavor. I’ve never experienced such calm beauty in a California red. I served this chilled among my other “experiments,” and brother did it deliver, and just kept on giving as it warmed. Look for this 2003 (limited availability), and let’s all look out for the just-released 2004 as well. Get on their mailing list at www.buckzin.com (\$36/94).

PHENOMENAL--BEST WINE OF TASTING

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