

For immediate release

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SMITH-MADRONE HARVESTS THE 30TH YEAR

“Diamond” crush for mountain winery

Spring Mountain District, St. Helena, Napa Valley, December 2003---On the occasion of Smith-Madrone Vineyard & Winery's thirtieth crush, winery founder and general manager Stuart Smith summarized the key points of **this year's crush, which began on September 16 and ended on October 10**. “The color extraction for the red wines was immediate and intense and the flavors were vibrant and pronounced,” Smith says. In general, Smith-Madrone’s yields were down---its whites (Riesling) by 30% and reds (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc) from 5% to 30%.

At a 1,900-foot elevation on top of Spring Mountain, with slopes up to 35%, Smith-Madrone is a "textbook" **mountain vineyard**; the grapes are dry-farmed in red volcanic soil. Current releases are the **2000 Cabernet Sauvignon**, **2001 Chardonnay** and **2002 Riesling**. This fall Smith-Madrone took the unusual step of re-releasing a limited quantity of its **1997 Riesling** (detailed explanation at www.smithmadrone.com).

Stu continues: “It was a strange and unusual harvest. In the spring we had a very warm weather during bloom which dramatically sped up and condensed the growing cycle ---it seemed like you could literally watch the vines grow right in front of you. We had a mostly cool summer, but with several heat spikes. In August there were several monsoonal storms which could have been very destructive but weren’t because at that time the berries were small, thus the grape clusters were quite loose, allowing the rain water to dry out even in the middle of the cluster. Simply put the white were late and the reds were early. "We started with merlot, unusual for us, and went for several weeks, picking every day, with ideal conditions. The chemistry of the grapes was great, with low pHs and high TAs, marvelous color extraction and great flavors. In the modern Zeitgeist of what a great harvest means---this was it: ripe grapes, brown seeds, chewy skins, good flavors and powerful aromas coming out of the stemmer-crusher.”

“The Cabernet Sauvignon came in early while the Riesling was late. In mid-crush we had a cool-down where things stopped. It was almost like the following short period of very cold nights confused the vines that they should start winter and stop ripening their grapes. We went into a prolonged period of lovely weather for people...but the vines couldn’t get it into their heads that they needed to start ripening. Finally the sugars started going back up and the harvest ended about three weeks later. This was a universal experience in Napa Valley year and it illustrates two ongoing controversies about harvesting grapes.

After 5,000 or 10,000 years you'd think we'd figured out when the grapes are ready to pick, but in fact **the premium wine grape industry still struggles with how to define maturity** and what parameters should be used in deciding when to harvest grapes. Is it sugar content, the flavors we perceive as we chew the skins or is it the shade of brown as the green seeds transition to brown! Just when are the grapes at the physiological peak of maturity, is there some means of testing that reduces human variability?

“The second controversy has to do with **‘hang time.’** In many post-harvest reports winemakers remark positively on the harvest by mentioning “long hang times.” Some winemakers believe that the longer the grapes “hang” on the vines the better quality of the grapes and hence the wine. This is marketing rubbish. The best vintages in Bordeaux are the warmest ones, early ripening, proper sugar and short hang times. Conversely, if hang time was really important than the coolest and latest ripening vintages would be the best, and this we all know is not true. The need for marketing and publicity often leads to creative ideas, however unfactual they may be.

THE MEANING OF 30 YEARS?

Stu estimates that in walking these vineyards over the last thirty years he has driven up and down Spring Mountain road over 20,000 times. He has worn out at least 25 pairs of boots and over a 100 pairs of blue jeans. Multiple generations of deer and turkeys have roamed Smith-Madrone's vineyards over these past three decades as well countless generations of winery cats, but only three dogs, Brandy, Sunshine and Rooster. Most of the grand masters of the California wine industry when Stu entered the wine industry are gone---Andre Tchelistcheff, Chuck Carpy, Louis Martini (Sr. and Jr.), Maynard Amerine, Lee Stewart, Joe Heitz, Carl Wente, Hans Kornell, Myron Nightingale, and Brad Web.

At the beginning of his career at Smith-Madrone Stuart also taught viticulture and enology classes in Napa and Sonoma. In three decades **he's seen several paradigms "shift" in protocols of winegrowing.** "Today we look for brown seeds before harvesting," he says. "We've moved from stressing cleanliness---today seen as 'sterility' in the vineyard and winery---to an appreciation of nature. Today we work with nature and not against nature. We intervene much less in the vineyard, we allow wild yeasts (or 'bronco fermentation' as I like to call it) to run the fermentation, we don't fine or filter," he explains. We constantly challenge the prevailing opinions for both growing grapes and making wines. Smith has also seen the public's interest increase over time in all aspects of the wine business: "I've had *The New York Times* write about what was in my briefcase and Jim Conaway quote me about land use in the Napa Valley and The Ahwahnee invite me to conduct tastings for many years," he says.

WHAT ELSE IN 1974?!

The year that Smith-Madrone first started on the trek to winegrowing saw other momentous developments: the world population reaching 3.9 billion, U.S. population at 212 million, the U.S. GDP \$1,382 billion, an 8-cent first-class stamp, *The Godfather* won the Academy award for Best Picture, the Grammy-winning song of the year was *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* and the deaths of Betty Grable, Pablo Picasso and Lyndon Johnson.

THE WINERY

Smith-Madrone is a family-owned estate-bottled winery dedicated to producing fine wines exclusively from its own vineyards. It was founded by Stuart Smith in 1971 with the purchase of 200 acres on top of Spring Mountain west of St. Helena in the northern Napa Valley. One of the least-known and most scenic appellations of the Napa Valley, the Spring Mountain District was recognized by the B.A.T.F. in May of 1993. The winery enjoys dramatic views of the floor of the Napa Valley, as well as of its own steep dry-farmed vineyards. In exploring the property before purchasing it, Stuart Smith discovered old grape stakes interspersed with the forest's tall trees, evidence of a vineyard planted in the 1880s and abandoned with the onset of Prohibition. The name for the winery came as a tribute to the Smiths who pursued their dream and to the Madrone trees which distinguish the property.

THE SMITH BROTHERS

Brothers Stuart Smith and Charles Smith are the partners, vineyard managers and winemakers at the winery. Their family lineage includes David Hume, the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher. Stuart has served as 1986 Napa Valley Wine Auction Chairman and he founded Farmers for Napa Valley, aside from other wine industry leadership roles. Charles Smith is a world-ranked croquet player and currently holds the World Croquet Federation record for the longest single match (7 1/2 hours in a tournament in Newport, Rhode Island, which he won).

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