

## Salute to distributors continues

President, David and Scott each to Vice President. Eventually, Scott moved to South Carolina as General Manager for the state. Additional salespersons outside the family were hired. Most recently, David's wife, Shannon, has joined the company for sales in the NC mountains.

Grapevine now covers the two entire states of North and South Carolina for 99% of their brands. They have twelve sales people between the two states. They sell only fine wine to fine dining restaurants and wine shops. Grapevine's future is bright. They are a major player in the wine industry of North and South Carolina. They are one of very few NC distributors selling wine in the entire state and are the only distributor selling wine in both NC and SC.

What is the key to their success? They are not order takers and most importantly, they know how to sell wine. When I visit the market, I am most impressed with their dedication, professionalism and the courtesy they show both their accounts and myself. Before my trip, a strategy is developed to offer incentives to buy our wines while I am in the marketplace. Appointments are made ahead of time, so that my time calling on key accounts is optimized. I am there to make sales presentations rather than just ride a route with a sales rep. I am also impressed by the fact that Grapevine is focused on wine education. Their sales reps are given seminars followed by tests to assure their team is the most wine knowledgeable in the marketplace. Several times they have journeyed to Oregon and Foris. In addition, Scott brought a group of South Carolina retailers and restaurateurs out to visit us last summer.

Another key to their success is that they are very selective about the wineries they contact for distribution. They do not add a winery unless there is a place for them in their book. The winery must produce excellent wine

trend, which seems to be a recipe to successfully score high in the top wine-rating magazines, does not focus on either the vineyard or the vinification, but rather, on new oak. The recipe seems to be to grow grapes at as high a yield possible to make a simple, ripe, soft and fruity wine, then put the wine in 100% new oak barrels, and wait for the oak tannin to provide the structure, stuffing, strong aromatics and flavor. I do not find artistry, or appealing taste or texture, in wines made this way. I have also been repeatedly disappointed at how poorly these wines age. Even at four years! And I'm talking about some \$100 a bottle Napa Valley Cabs here, among others.

The fourth and fifth dimensions of style most commonly overlooked, or poorly achieved are: time and space. Now, that may sound strange to you, but hear me out! The time of a wine's impression can be a marvelous stylistic achievement: the length of the wine's taste, and most importantly, its finish; the persistence of its smell in the glass; how the wine evolves and changes as it sits in the glass; how the wine ages over time in the bottle. Equally important can be the wine's spacial impression: the intensity of aromas and flavors; the expansiveness of the olfactory impressions; the expansiveness of the texture in the mouth. The time and space dimensions are what impress me most about great wines, and are perceptions I require of our own wines for selection as a special bottling (i.e. single-vineyard, or reserve-type designations).

Certainly, a winemaker imprints their style on a wine, and has the challenge to express all these elements, hopefully in a balanced, delicious way. For this winemaker, however, if the grape does not offer concentration and extract, the three most interesting dimensions of wine will be poorly achieved, if at all. ■

*Photo: dropping fruit to reduce yield.*

