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## **History of the Mendocino County Wine Industry**

**By Benjamin Bicais**

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The history of wine production in Mendocino dates back to the mid 19th century. The first Europeans to settle in the region were Russian hunters and trappers. They made their living selling seal and otter pelts.

The Gold Rush caused the population of the San Francisco Bay Area to expand dramatically. The local timber industry took off with the increase in demand for building supplies.

The first grapes were grown during 1850s by failed gold prospectors. The wine produced during this era had a mainly local customer base due to the isolation of the region.

In 1851, the Anderson Valley was discovered by accident. Italian immigrants planted vineyards on the sunny hillsides of the valley during the ensuing generation.

Even when the railroads were extended north, Mendocino's Wine Industry remained relatively unknown in the national and international markets. Despite the region's obscurity, there were over 5000 acres of vineyards and several wineries during the late-nineteenth century.

### **Phylloxera and Prohibition**

Most of California Wine Country was hurt by the spread of the Phylloxera Louse in the late 19th century. Despite the damage, the isolated region fared better than some other parts of the state. The industry rebounded after the utilization of Phylloxera resistant rootstocks. In the 1910s, there were close to 6000 acres of vineyards in Mendocino County.

Prohibition was almost a death sentence for the region's wine industry. With a few isolated exceptions, almost all was lost. A few Zinfandel vineyards in the Mendocino Ridge survived and are thankfully still alive today. However, all of the wineries were closed during Prohibition.

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The Parducci Family is credited as being the stewards of the wine industry during the ensuing difficult years. In the 1960s they owned and operated the only winery in the county. It is located near the Redwood Valley.

### The Renaissance

The industry began to come alive with the rest of the California wine industry during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, the Fetzer family established a winery near the McDowell Valley. Finally the Parducci Family had some company. Substantial investment went into planting vineyards, but not much wine was actually produced in Mendocino. Most of the region's grapes were sold to non-resident wineries and used in faceless blends.

Thankfully, this has changed. There are currently many high-quality wineries in the county. In recent

years, the region has gained a reputation for producing many varietals exceptionally well. The practice of shipping grapes to other regions for production lessened as the large AVA's renown increased. It currently contains over 15,000 acres of planted vineyards.

Benjamin Bicais lives in the Napa Valley and is the webmaster of

.

## **Our Visit To Orchard Country Winery In Door County**

### **By Dorrie Ruplinger**

There are so many things to do and places to go in Door County that it is hard to pick what to do. There never seems to be enough time to do everything. There's boating, golfing, a nature center, several parks, biking, hiking, shopping, eating (one of my favorite things to do!), and a host of other things to do and see in Door County. Because I enjoy Door County so much I wanted to share some of my activities and experiences there. One of those was a visit to Lautenbach's Orchard Country Winery and Market.

If you like wine, a really fun thing to do is to visit several of the wineries in Door County (Door Peninsula Winery is another popular Door County Winery). Orchard Winery, located on Hwy 42, just south of Fish Creek, Wisconsin was one of our stops during a fall trip to Door County.

In addition to a winery and fresh Door County cherries (when in season), the main market building on the grounds offers many different specialty food items as well as fresh baked pies. Also offered are scenic trolley tours of the area and tours of the winery. Other seasonal activities at the orchard include horse drawn sleigh rides, haunted hayrides, and a winter wine fest.

When my husband, my oldest grown son, and I stopped at the winery it was later in the afternoon in the middle of the week. The last winery tour for the day had already ended. We were disappointed to

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have missed out on the tour, but instead we headed to the wine tasting bar in the main building. At the tasting bar we were given a list of all the wines offered by the winery. There are over 30. Complimentary tasting of up to 8 wines is offered to all patrons over 21 years of age.

After mulling over the choices for a few minutes we started sipping wines. The winery specializes in fruit wines, particularly cherry, because of the great cherry growing climate in Door County. They also offer one homegrown grape wine made with red grapes grown on the winery grounds, a wine named Audrey Grace. It is a dry wine, a new offering from the winery. The grapevines were planted just a few years ago to see how they would perform in the cool, short growing season of Door County.

Although the winery specializes in fruit wines, they have other offerings made with various grapes, but those wines are not made on the premises because those fruits are not native to the area. Some of the other wines are made on the premises but with juice bought just for that purpose. For instance, our hostess at the wine bar told us the juice for their semi dry wine called Swedish Lingonberry is imported from Sweden.

Other wines that we tasted and really enjoyed were the Autumn Harvest wine, a cranberry apple wine; Sweet Cherry wine, a nicely sweet wine made with Door County cherries; Strawberry Lyte, not a diet wine but a delicious lighter-tasting wine; Blackberry Blend, a very good wine that tasted like sweet blackberries; and Red Raspberry Lyte, another lighter-tasting wine that's a combination of white grapes and raspberries.

We were told the top selling wine at the winery is the Blackberry Blend. The number two seller is the Red Raspberry Lyte. The winery's best-selling cherry wine is their Cherry Blossom wine.

After tasting several wines we headed over to the bottled wine section of the store and stocked up on

our favorites. Back home, we'll be able to enjoy the wine and reminisce about our trip to Door County.

Dorrie Ruplinger is a featured writer for

. For more information on

Door County, Wisconsin including places to eat; things to do; lodging; shopping information; and real estate information visit

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