

# Dan Berger's Vintage Experiences

## The Weekly Wine Commentary

### Ancient Vines

By Dan Berger—June 29, 2006

Getting details on old vines isn't easy partly because the science of ampelography (vine identification) is one of the more arcane of viticultural subjects.

So Will Bucklin had a real research project on his hands when he came home to the family ranch in the heart of Sonoma Valley and began to manage the Old Hill Ranch, which gained most of its recent fame from a special Zinfandel made by Ravenswood's Joel Peterson.

*“Bucklin’s wine style is to emphasize the drama inherent in his fruit, not to embellish with gobs of oak, and his blending skill is evident”*

Bucklin's diligent work eventually resulted in a patchwork quilt map of the dramatic ranch that shows literally a dozen different varieties of grapes here, notably some of the oldest and finest Grenache in the county, along with Carignane, Grand Noir, Alicante Bouschet, and even four old French Colombard vines.

Meanwhile, since 2000, Bucklin (who was wine maker at the highly regarded King Estate in Oregon) has been making wines well under the radar.

His wine style is to emphasize the drama inherent in his fruit, not to embellish with gobs of oak, and his blending skill is evident, with the Grenache used as a top-note for racy fruit character.

Bucklin is utterly fascinated with the Grenache. He said wine makers who have taken some of his fruit say the Grenache makes a dark-colored red wine (rare for this variety that often is deficient in color).

As a result, Bucklin is using the same genetic material to plant additional acreage of it, saying he believes that more of that variety in his blends can only make the wines more interesting and complex.



### Dan Berger's Tasting Notes

#### **2004 Bucklin Mixed Blacks, Sonoma Valley, Old Hill Ranch**

A superb red wine blend featuring Zinfandel, Grenache, and a number of other old grapes from ancient vines. Best decanted an hour.

EXCEPTIONAL

#### **2004 Bucklin Zinfandel Sonoma Valley, Old Hill Ranch**

Racy/jam-y aroma of blackberry fruit and an earthy/spicy note. Needs at least two more years. A superb, deeply flavored red.

EXCEPTIONAL:

#### **2005 Bucklin Gewurztraminer, Sonoma Valley, Compagni Portis Vineyard**

Lychee/gardenia florality, but with a delicate, dry entry. Serve with sushi and sashimi.

EXCEPTIONAL

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