

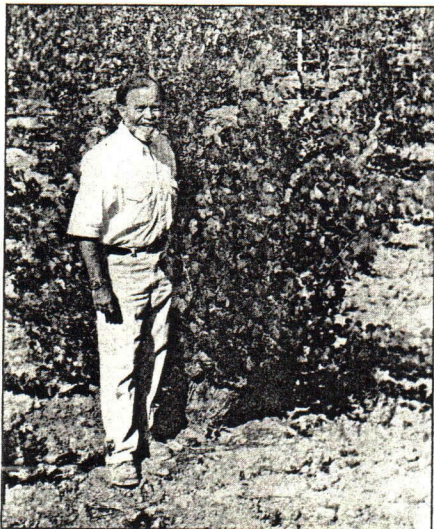
Field Stone

John Staten, Vintner

Personal Notes

Fall & Winter 1994-95

Field Stone's 100 Year Old Petite Sirah Vineyard: A Rare Survivor



Vintner John Staten with one of his rare survivors.

Musing on the course of his life following an illness at age 91, my beloved late friend, André Tchelistcheff, once remarked, "While the odds of me getting to a hundred are looking better, the odds of a vineyard lasting a hundred years here in America are almost nil." We were nearing the end of a walk through our old Petite Sirah vineyard – a vineyard seven years older than André – and he was in one of his wonderful reflective moods. "Vineyards like this one," he mused, "have had to survive not only the battering of age, pestilence and disease but other things we never think of." The other things he had in mind were the more subtle dangers of history and human nature. "These vines had to survive the devastation of the Prohibition, the life sapping entanglement of post-Prohibition tax laws, and the suffocating regulations and restrictions of state and federal bureaucracies. And more recently," he reflected, looking at me in a curiously personal way, "such old vineyards have had to survive the hard realities of farming economics. This one is located on some of the best vineyard land the winery owns. If values are measured simply by price per ton, you can see how a five ton per acre Cabernet vineyard would easily replace a meager two ton per acre Petite Sirah vineyard, and all in the name

of good business!" And so he talked while he stooped to study the old gnarled vines one by one, as if he were a physician making the rounds of some dusty army field hospital, quietly studying the faces of the lone survivors of a great battle.

What was André telling me that day? There were those times when he gave me technical advice: how to grow this, how to prune that, what to grow there, when to pick here. That day he was definitely not a technical consultant. He was something better: a gracious bearer of wisdom, my unexpected sage. There are only a few people you encounter in life whose wisdom helps you clarify what you ought to really be living for and what values ultimately count when all is said and done in this world of striving and making and taking and spending. It is not that such people are born geniuses or have some natural monopoly on truth. Sages like André acquire their wisdom through long, impassioned life experience and an acquired knack of seeing another dimension in the things we see every day. He was telling me, don't be tempted to get rid of this great old vineyard under any circumstances. It is a priceless survivor. It won't give you a lot of fruit, but what it does give you will have the intensity of color and depth of flavor and aroma that you will find no where else. Preserve it, and share it with others while you can. This holiday season join with us in a toast to a rare old vineyard on its 100th birthday, and remember, like the grand winemaker himself, great wine, as hard earned wisdom, doesn't come until at least your nineties! *John Staten, Vintner*