

Journal Entry - 10/21/04

It has been a very busy fall.

In August, I noticed that the blackberries near our home in Seattle were ripening more quickly than in past years after a very hot summer and I thought about my grapes in eastern Washington. I started heading out to the vineyards each weekend starting in early August and it was clear that there had been some damage to vines from the frost back in October and the freeze in January when the temperatures in eastern Washington got down to -20* F in some locations. Fortunately many of the vines were in perfect condition and actually looked better than ever. Merlot was the biggest concern as it is least “winter hardy”, but the Merlot at Stillwater Creek, Aldercreek and Ciel du Cheval look fine.

August turned to September and we were picking Sauvignon Blanc from Klipsun in the first week of September. The fruit has never looked better and the balance between sugars and acid was excellent. We picked three tons and five hundred pounds of Semillon to blend into the wine. I de-stemmed both the Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon and pressed it. The juice flowed into stainless steel tanks and settled for 24 hours. I then racked the wine off of the lees in the tank by pumping it gently and carefully into another tank. I added yeast to the wine, set the temperature to 55° and began fermentation in the tank. Once fermentation had taken off after two days in tank, I racked the wine into barrels (30% new French oak and 70% once used French oak) and placed the ten barrels into the barrel room at a temperature of 55°. The fruit is outstanding on this wine and it is now completely dry..

By the third week in September I had Klipsun Merlot, Klipsun Syrah, Ciel Merlot, and Milbrandt Merlot in. The Klipsun Syrah was early because the young vines (planted five years ago) were stunted by the freeze and they only produced at roughly a ton an acre. This made the ripening process speed up, and frankly I was a bit concerned about how the wine would work out. The fermentation on the Syrah was excellent and it was clear that the depth of color and flavor was the best I have seen from Klipsun Syrah in three years of working with the fruit. The other Merlots fermented nicely, and things looked good at that point.

September 21st is my Birthday, and it always comes at a bad time during harvest. It also signals the end of summer and the beginning of autumn. This year it signaled a week long cold snap that included daily rain in eastern Washington. This is the first time in seven harvests that the weather has done this. I halted all picking and let everything dry out before resuming my pick schedule. The good news was the weather went back to the Indian Summer temperatures in eastern Washington we are used to and as the fruit started to ripen again it was evident that we were going to see hang times on the vine reminiscent of 1999, my favorite year.

It was also helpful to slow down the process as my day job was picking up speed quickly. I am now running the F5 Networks Security Products sales for North America and our fiscal year end was the end of September. The pressure to close business was intense, the

hours were long and my focus had to be split between two very important things while the most important part of my life, my family, had to take a brief backseat. Even at that, I made a number of soccer and football games, but I am very lucky to have three boys who are very understanding of what I need to do to make this lifestyle we lead work. Jack is playing football for the high school team, and Tommy and Joe are playing soccer. We have had an ambitious tasting schedule as well to promote the wine, and it had felt like there is just not enough time in my life to get it all done.

I am currently sitting on an airplane heading to Denver for another F5 meeting, and I am almost done with harvest. We will have crushed 22 separate lots of fruit, 48 tons including Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Roussane, Viognier, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc. I feel great about this fall.

John