

# Dan Berger's Vintage Experiences

## The Weekly Wine Commentary

Volume X, Issue 42

January 5, 2006

# Best U.S. Wine Makers

Since 1989 I have identified one person as my Wine Maker of the Year. The list over the years is impressive, but over time I began to realize the problems with this system.

For example, if I were to name a "wine maker of the year" for 2005, it would be based on the wines I tasted of this person's portfolio in 2005. But *all* of those wines were made in 2004, 2003, and perhaps even earlier. So the award is for work done years earlier.

Moreover, in the past I have given "wine maker of the year" honors to many persons who continue to warrant such praise, such as Jim Clendenen (Au Bon Climat), Gary Farrell, Chuck Ortman, and Jim Klein (Navarro). The fact that they don't get re-honored, even though warranted, is merely another of the flaws in the awarding of such honors.

And finally I realized there was a major hitch in the process: I collect candidates' names over many months, yet still might forget a few, which is where you all come in (details below).

So this year we begin a new feature, a list of superb wine makers who, we believe, have added to the fine wine scene, but who may not have received proper recognition in some circles. A few of these names may be familiar to you, and some have been mentioned here before.

### California

**Craig Williams:** His Joseph Phelps Insignia is an annual world-beater red and his other wines are in the same quality level, and have been

for decades. His imminent wines from Freestone in western Russian River should be eye-openers.

**Larry Brooks:** His Champion line delivers simply superb Pinot Noirs, wines of real depth and character.

**Dan Goldfield:** The distinctively styled red wines under Dan's Dutton-Goldfield label are terrific expressions of cool-climate fruit.

**Linda Trotta:** A quiet and self-effacing talent who makes bold statements in a wide array of wines at Gundlach-Bundschu.

**Bob Iantosca:** In addition to crafting some of the top sparkling wines in California, he also has added some fabulous still wines to the Gloria Ferrer line.

**Tom Eddy:** A Napa Cabernet specialist, his vital impact on the numerous wineries for whom he consults rarely is recognized.

**Cathy Corison:** Uncompromising in her commitment to Cabernets that have the stamp of terroir as well as their Napa roots.

**Jeff Virnig:** Robert Sinskey's wine maker for 15 years, Jeff has never wavered in his demands for structure in his distinctive wines.

**Greg LaFollette:** Now at DeLoach, this talented Sonoma stylist has made superb wines for small wineries as well as his own, Tandem.

**Miro Tcholakov:** Deep, complex reds are his forte at Trentadue, which has been revitalized in his tenure.

**Dennis Martin:** Long the talent behind the hugely successful Fetzer

*(See Wine Makers on page 2)*

## Wine Makers

*(Continued from page 1)*

wines and its associated brands.

**Ted Edwards:** The longtime wine maker at Freemark Abbey, Ted continues to hit high notes with every new release.

**David Hastings:** Randy Ullom heads a brilliant wine-making team at Kendall-Jackson, and Hastings is the quiet man behind the successful Vintner's Reserve Chardonnays.

### Washington

**Charlie Hoppes:** Under the Fidelitas label (and a half dozen other wine brands for whom he consults), this brilliant fellow has a huge local following.

**Brian Carter:** Brian's stylish, elegant, and perfectly balanced Apex wines are reliable and excellent values.

**Joy Andersen:** Snoqualmie's bright light creates a phenomenal array of lower-priced wines.

### Oregon

**Ken Wright:** Pinot Noirs, Pinot Blancs and Chardonnays with a consistent and dramatic character.

**Rollin Soles:** His Argyle Pinot Noirs, Rieslings, and sparkling wines show depth and real style.

### New York

**Derek Wilbur:** Everything he makes for affiliated wineries Goose Watch and Swedish Hill get awards at international wine competitions.

**Peter Bell:** At Fox Run, Peter's Rieslings and Cabernet Francs make him a superstar on the rise.

### Missouri

**David Johnson:** For 27 years, he has made stellar wines for one of

the Midwest's top award-winning wineries.

### Michigan

**Bryan Ulbrich:** His startlingly fine Rieslings and Gewurztraminers for Peninsula Cellars have become all the rage with white wine lovers.

□

I readily admit that this list of 22 people who make a major impact on U.S wine is not definitive. In fact I can think of another dozen or so who are worthy of mention here as well.

But these were the names that made an impression on me in a major way over the last year or so. And I'm willing to add in other names. If you have a candidate, please e-mail it to me at [danberger@rocketmail.com](mailto:danberger@rocketmail.com).