

In wine, these names mean quality

When you see Latour, Eddy and Davies on the label, you know the wine's worth a sip.

By Chris Sherman, Time Staff Writer



Winemaker Tom Eddy

With all the words on wine labels, some names get lost: the people.

Merchants and critics, present company included, can dwell tediously on the other terms. The variety of grape, some say, comes first. Then the geography: Is the cabernet from California's Napa Valley or the Medoc of Bordeaux, and which part of them?

Grape and place are key, yet humanity brings them together in a bottle of wine. People who own vineyards and wineries, make the wine or ship it add another multitude of names. In an era of corporate brands, it's still people who choose where to plant, when to pick and how to ferment, age and blend who make the difference.

Among them, the names of some men and women stand out as much as grape or geography. In bad vintages, this is even truer.

Three of those names came to life as they made sales calls to the Tampa Bay area this spring.

California winemaker Tom Eddy, who made wine for others, now puts his name on the label; Louis-Fabrice Latour carries on the name of a famous maison, and broker Jeffrey Davies hunts the rich but unfamous wines to ship as his signature selections.

The winemaker

For years wine drinkers did not know Tom Eddy's name from the background noise of corporate wine machines.

He emerged when Christian Brothers revived in the 1980s and hired Eddy to make good on its potential and historic property on Napa's mountainsides.

He made wines fine enough to show at Vinexpo in Bordeaux.

Ten years later Christian Brothers had new owners and less quality; Eddy was on his own and had more. He consulted widely and searched the state's vineyards for a dream winery.

He found a site to match his reputation on Diamond Mountain, above Calistoga. The cabernet sauvignon is mountain fruit, rich and deep. The distinctive petit verdot grapes he grows himself. The barrels are France's finest oak and the aging is long '02 is just out now.

Production is small and expensive, 2,000 cases or so (\$20 to \$70) slowly coming to Florida.

He makes a few wines named Elodian after his wife's family, a TEO Oregon pinot noir and TENZ sauvignon blanc. Most bottles carry two words that mean prime Napa cab: Tom Eddy.

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