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DUTCHER CROSSING WINERY PRESENTS NEW SMALL-LOT ZINFANDEL
2008 Zinfandel, Bernier-Sibary Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley

HEALDSBURG, CA, April 2010 — Dutcher Crossing Winery, known for its small-lot wine program, recently released the 2008 Bernier-Sibary Vineyard Zinfandel made from a 3-acre vineyard block off Canyon Road in Dry Creek Valley. "The Bernier-Sibary vineyard is a classic Italian field blend of 75 percent Zinfandel, intermixed with 10 percent each of Petite Sirah and Carignane, and 5 percent Matero (Mourvedre)," said Debra Mathy, proprietor. The 5-acre vineyard is owned by Scott Sibary and Jane Kerlinger, and farmed by grape grower, Paul Bernier. "Our goal is to capture the sense of place in the bottle by creating a wine that is definably Zinfandel, but with added nuances from the other varieties," said Mathy.

Paul Bernier learned how to grow grapes from an old, Italian colleague, and the Bernier-Sibary vineyard reflects his hands-on philosophy of using dry farming techniques. Planted in 1999 on a steep hillside with a convergence of six soil types, the head-trained vines are closely spaced. "We do not fertilize nor irrigate this vineyard," said Bernier. "We use cover crops and grape compost, which I make with oyster shells for calcium and trace minerals. We start cultivating the ground in late March or April, and by June, have turned the soil into a dirt mulch. This holds the moisture in the ground for the vines to use in the summer.

 "The vineyard is in balance, producing around 2-1/2 tons per acre. Because the vineyard is dry farmed, the skins are heavier and the clusters and berries are smaller. Unlike most thin-skinned Zinfandel, if it rains, the moisture does not affect the grapes as quickly."

The Bernier-Sibary grapes are usually the last Zinfandel to be harvested, according to Dutcher Crossing Winery's winemaker, Kerry Damskey. "Even in an early, warm vintage such as 2008, the inter-planted Carignane and Matero slow the site's overall maturity," he explained. The 2008 vintage in Dry Creek Valley was defined by a dry spring, April frost and heat spikes and wind in May. After the early difficulties, July and August brought mostly ideal ripening weather with early morning fog and afternoon temperatures in the 80s and 90s. The week before Labor Day, the fog disappeared and daytime temperatures rose above the century mark, remaining hot for several days, quickly ripening the light crop. Fortunately, the fog returned on September 8, slowing down harvest, and allowing a more normal progression. The grapes for the 2008 Dutcher Crossing Bernier-Sibary Zinfandel were picked on September 9. "The grapes were beautiful," said Damskey, "with sugars right where we wanted them. After tasting the wine, it was clear that the year's weather did not negatively affect the flavor components."

In keeping with the Italian field blend model, all the intermixed grape varieties were harvested together and co-fermented with native yeast in open top tanks and punched down by hand. "Because of the 25 percent non-Zinfandel grapes, the wine from this vineyard always ferments to completeness, which is a winemaker's blessing," said Damskey. The wine was given 18 days of skin contact, and aged for 14 months in French oak barrels (32 percent new barrels). "This wine is darker than our 2007 premier vintage," described Damskey. "It is very dark garnet in color, with scents of blackberry, clove, anise and plum. Due to the field blend, the wine is a structured and more complex Zinfandel with great interest and intensity, endowed with a subtle exotic nature. On the palate, there is an elegant, full, long finish that is soft and layered."

The 2008 Bernier-Sibary Vineyard Zinfandel can be purchased for $39 at the winery, 8533 Dry Creek Road, Geyserville, CA 95441, or online at www.dutchercrossingwinery.com.

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