
Fresno State's Viticulture & Enology Program

The viticulture and enology program at Fresno State celebrates the 10th anniversary of its on-site winery, the oldest and still the only bonded wine production facility on a university campus in the United States.

Tony Correia

On a hillside high above the Douro River, **Jerry** and **Carolee Luper** pick the last of their Touriga Nacional. Soon these grapes will find their way into bottles of their superb red table wine, Quinta da Carolina, which may eventually make its way to the United States and, perhaps, even back home to California. It has been a long path to the Douro Valley from the campus of **California State University, Fresno** (once called Fresno State College), where they first met in 1972 as Jerry was completing his studies in enology.

This year the viticulture and enology program at California State University, Fresno celebrates the tenth anniversary of its on-site winery, the oldest and still the only bonded wine production facility on a university campus in the United States. Today, the program is a full academic department and research center under the direction of Dr. **Robert Wample**.

The enology program at Fresno State was initiated in the mid-1950s when a group of local wine producers determined that it was important for the local industry to have trained, hands-on enologists and winemakers. While some enology classes had been offered by professor **Vincent E. Petrucci** within the viticulture discipline, there was not a full enology program at that time. The only other school offering training for enologists and winemakers was the **University of California at Davis**.

The California State Legislature was persuaded to apportion funds to construct a winery on campus, and it was completed in 1960. It was equipped almost exclusively with equipment manufactured by **Valley Foundry and Machine Works**, which was owned by

the late **Leon S. Peters** and his brother **Pete P. Peters**. The first enologist was **Joe Heitz**, who left after a year to open his eponymous Napa Valley winery. **Elie Skofis**, **Raoul Desoto** and others taught enology classes until **Dick Norton** was hired from industry to lead the program. Norton stayed on until Dr. **Fred Nury** came on board in 1967. **Ken C. Fugelsang** was hired as winemaker in 1972, and a year later, Dr. **Sigmund Schanderl** was appointed to oversee the enology program. Dr. **Carlos Muller** was appointed to direct the enology program, as of January 1979, until his retirement in 2004.

Shortly after his arrival, Muller prevailed upon the university administration to give due visibility to enology and the Department of Enology, Food Science and Nutrition was born. Unfortunately, there were too few majors to justify a whole department. Yet, the visibility given by the departmental name change gave sudden impetus to the program and, in 1984 Dr. **Charles Smallwood**, dean of the then School of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, included a new commercial winery, something that had been in the planning stages since 1980 as part of the Fresno State Farm Renovation Plan. Monies were allocated, engineering drawings were completed and the new winery was finally delivered to the program in February 1995. However, cost overruns and inflation took a toll on the monies available for the entire project. Nonetheless, the program received an excellent building, utilities, catwalks and most of the stainless steel tanks needed to produce wine commercially.



From left to right: Fresno State Winery 2005-2006 intern and enology students Curtis Vincent, Michelle Snyder and Susan Charlebois.

The first commercial crush was in the fall of 1997. The first vintage, an estate white table wine, was dedicated in honor of professor Vincent E. Petrucci who was at the helm of the viticulture program for 45 years. The first bottling of 497 cases sold out in about four hours.

Fresno State wines continue to earn top awards, including the "Best Shiraz of California," which scored 99 points out of 100 at the California State Fair Competition in 1999. This wine sold out in two weeks.

A host of alumni and industry players, including individuals, wineries, suppliers and manufacturers, have donated funds for special projects and have provided annual cash donations and new and used equipment to the

winery. Remembering the old adage, "a good house is never done," however, it will never be finished inasmuch as the winery must keep pace with new developments in the industry and technology.

The list of donors to the viticulture and enology program reads like a "Who's Who" of the wine and grape industries and includes the enthusiastic efforts of the Viticulture and Enology Alumni Club. The club's legendary annual "Celebration of Wine" held each June continues to be one of the major wine events in the Central Valley and has generated generous donations to the program for many years.

Today the enology program is world-renowned and continues to train international students from virtually all

wine-producing countries of the world, including Argentina, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, Croatia, Israel and South Africa. **Ken Fugelsang** now serves as an associate professor of enology in the department of viticulture and enology and is also the university's winemaker. In 2005, **John Giannini**, a graduate of the Fresno State enology program, joined the winery team and holds the position of winemaker for this award-winning program.

Viticulture and enology graduates seldom need to look for jobs, as most are employed in the grape, wine or ancillary industries. The program is renowned for its pragmatic, "hands-on" curriculum, and graduates are recognized as ready to work when they receive their diplomas. Some have gone into teaching or on to professional schools, and alumni are making contributions to vineyards, wineries and associated enterprises in the far corners of the wine world.

Along the way, the program has graduated many students who have gone on to successful careers in both viticulture and enology. Included on this list is **Greg Coleman**, who came to Fresno State in search of the "real world, hands-on" education for which the program is known before proceeding with his career as head of grower relations for the **E&J Gallo Winery**, his family's winery business. As do so many alumni, Coleman fondly reflects on the powerful program patriarch, Dr. Vince Petrucci, for his abilities as a great teacher who understood how to balance academic learning with the practical knowledge of viticulture. As Coleman recalled, "He made the subjects both interesting and adaptable to the real world. Dr. Petrucci combined life lessons with the subject of viticulture."

Bob Cabral also came to Fresno State in search of similar pragmatic education, learning the skills of the winemaking profession before advancing to his present position as winemaker for the legendary Pinot Noir producer **Williams Selyem**.

As winemaker of the huge **Beringer Vineyards**, **Ed Sbragia** also lauds the program's ability to combine the theory of the classroom with practical applications in the campus winery. Sbragia

recalls his days at Fresno and counts them as some of his most enjoyable experiences. He also repeats a refrain heard throughout the world of wine: "I also made life-long friends there that I still see after 30 years on a regular basis. It was great!"

Nat DiBuduo may have one of the most challenging careers in the industry as president of California's largest body of grape growers, **Allied Grape Growers**. Guiding this ship through the difficult waters of the past several years required all the political and diplomatic skills DiBuduo polished during his years involved in campus politics during the tumultuous years of the late 1960s. His encyclopedic knowledge of California vineyards is legendary, as his growers can attest.

Juggling many hats is nothing new to **Glenn Proctor**, who came to Fresno State from the Dry Creek region of Sonoma County. Proctor has enjoyed a long career in the industry, from positions with the largest multinational wine companies to his present position as a grape and wine broker for the **Joseph Ciatti Company**.

This summer, the Fresno State viticulture and enology alumni gathered to honor one of their own who recently passed away. A dinner on June 8 remembered the energetic, effervescent **Ron Radoicich**, and was held at the **Fresno State University House**.

Meanwhile, our industry continues to move forward through the inexorable cycles of supply and demand, shifting consumer preferences, aggressive foreign imports, complicated laws and regulations, and the constant challenge of plain old farming. But whatever the future holds, we know Fresno State's viticulture and enology alumni will be in the midst of the process, wherever and whenever, throughout the world of wine and world class agriculture. **wbm**

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