



**PLUMPJACK**  
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

## July 2009

The grape is one of the oldest cultivated fruits. Hieroglyphics show that Egyptians were involved in grape and wine production, and the early Romans were known to have developed new grape varieties. *Vitis vinifera* was first cultivated over 8,000 years ago in the region between the Black and Caspian Seas near northern Iran. Grapes have been grown in California for more than 300 years. In 1769, Spanish explorers established missions throughout the state and planted a European grape variety known as the Mission. Native American wild grapes (of the species

*Vitis girdiana*) grew along stream banks, but as more settlers came to California, new European grape varieties (of the species *Vitis vinifera*) were introduced and used for making wine. Recently, Spain has developed a market for its native grapes in California that is inspiring many California winemakers. Our two wines this month showcase where this inspiration has led. These wines allow us to organoleptically explore the potential and flavors of Spanish varieties grown in California's diverse vineyards and appellations. These are very small-production offerings and supply is extremely limited.

*2008 Trenza*

*"Blanco"*

*Albariño-Garnacha Blanca  
San Luis Obispo, California*



*2007 Straight Line*

*Tempranillo*

*St. Helena, California*



For close to 40 years, since family patriarch Jack Niven pioneered the planting of wine grapes in the Edna Valley, the name Niven has been synonymous with vision, innovation and leadership in the wine industry. Today, the third generation of the Niven family, led by cousins John H. Niven and Michael Blaney, is continuing that tradition on several new projects. The company, now named Niven Family Wine Estates, believes in sustainability, quality, community, tradition when warranted, and keeping themselves, and the consumer, interested in the ever-changing world of wine. The latest innovative introduction by the company is the addition of Trenza to their existing portfolio of labels, Bailyeana and Tangent. At Trenza, each wine is made of Iberian varieties typically grown in regions of Spain like Ribera del Duero, the Priorat, and the Rías Baixas in Galicia. The wines are made in the spirit of the New World, with an avant-garde approach to blending these traditional Spanish varieties. The wines are also meant to showcase the fruit from both warm and cool climates of San Luis Obispo County. Niven says, "The original inspiration was to just come up with an incredible red blend that encompasses what San Luis Obispo County is all about." San Luis Obispo County has it all when it comes to climate diversity. The Edna and Arroyo Grande Valleys in the south county are cool and windy, making wines with higher acidity and concentrated fruit characteristics. In the north county, the Paso Robles area is much warmer, resulting in bolder, riper wines. Niven says, "Selecting grapes from both warm Paso Robles and cool Edna Valley couldn't be more different." Winemaker and master blender Christian Roguenant, is a native of the Burgundy region of France and decided early on to become a winemaker. His studies at the University of Dijon focused on enology and winemaking and included graduate coursework in wine marketing. His experience includes fifteen years with Champagne Deutz, and his travels brought him to wineries in Argentina, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Korea (where he made sparkling wine for the 1988 Olympics) and finally to the Central Coast of California. The name Trenza, which means "braid"

in Spanish, describes how the wines from the different regions are blended together. The 2008 Trenza Blanco veers from the original Trenza vision of warm and cool climate wines; the Blanco is made entirely of fruit grown in the SIP Certified Sustainable estate Paragon Vineyard in the Edna Valley. It is a blend made of 40% Garnacha Blanca (Grenache Blanc) and 60% Albariño. Trenza's New World approach blends these two traditional Iberian white varietals, but in Spain they are rarely seen blended together. The two varietals were fermented separately following three hours of a cold soak to enhance richness and varietal character. The Albariño underwent fermentation in 50% stainless-steel, 50% neutral oak. The Grenache Blanc was fermented in 95% neutral oak, 5% new French Oak. The wine was further enriched by adding the lees from its sister winery Tangent's Albariño into the Trenza barrels. Christian writes, "I call this my 'Yin Yang' wine. The Albariño is tight with loads of citrus, and bright acidity, while the Garnacha Blanca is rich, chalky and full-bodied. The finished blend is exotic, with citrus aromatics, particularly tangerine, and a mineral-driven wet slate character. It's nicely balanced, with nuances from creamy sweet oak in the background." This wine pairs beautifully with traditional Iberian dishes such as *Ameijoas à Bulhão Pato* (clams cooked with garlic, white wine, cilantro, lemon juice and olive oil,) *Paella con Molluscs* (rice with shellfish,) or *Arroz con Pollo* (rice with chicken.)

**The 2008 Trenza Blanco is \$18.99/bottle, \$205.10/case.**

Tempranillo is one of Spain's most important red grape varieties, and is often thought of as Spain's answer to Cabernet Sauvignon. The root word in Tempranillo is temprano, which means early in Spanish. One reason behind the name is because it ripens earlier than most red varietals. It is the primary varietal used in Spain's popular Rioja wines. As a young wine, Tempranillo is more approachable than Cabernet Sauvignon, and still has the alcohol and tannins to age for years. Straight Line Wines was founded by Jon Grant. Jon is the assistant winemaker at Turley Wine Cellars and has worked in the cellars of Napa Valley's top wineries, including PlumpJack Winery, Corison Winery and Robert Mondavi Winery. He has a well-rounded background that allows him to understand the intricate correlation between the vineyard and the final bottle of wine. With this knowledge, his winemaking procedures are deliberately minimal, recognizing that the right grape, grown in the right vineyard can produce wines of great character and great expression. Jon fervently believes different vineyard sites create different wines, each expressing its own nuance and character. The 2007 Straight Line Tempranillo is a blend of 90% Tempranillo and 10% Graciano. The fruit comes from two vineyards, Madder Lake and Sueño. Located north of Napa Valley in the appellation of Clear Lake in Lake County, the Madder Lake Vineyard is a higher altitude vineyard reaching elevations up to 2,200 feet. This high altitude provides cooler days and evenings, and the late autumn winds that blow off of Clear Lake extend the growing season. The Madder Lake Vineyard is composed of red volcanic soils with very little topsoil and an extremely rocky terrain, forcing the vines to struggle for growth. The site was planted in 1998 to the Del Duero clone of Tempranillo, and this low vigor vineyard yields less than two tons of fruit per acre, resulting in fruit of great intensity and character. The Sueño Vineyard sits to the east of Lodi in the Clements Hills Appellation. The Sueño Vineyard soils are composed of silty loam providing the vines the right combination of available water and nutrients. Extreme care was taken during the harvest to prevent spoilage and oxidation of the fruit during harvest of the 2007 Tempranillo. The grapes were hand-harvested and hand-sorted into half-ton picking bins, keeping the different vineyards separate. Fermentations for both varieties were similar, starting with a three-day cold soak to assure good tannin management and color extraction. The primary and secondary fermentations took place in barrels (40% new) with two gentle punch-downs per day. Jon writes, "The Tempranillo showed classic characteristics of ripe blue and black fruits, dark earth and warm tar. The Graciano demonstrated stewed red fruit characteristics with streaks of racy red flavors, exotic spices and earthen tones." The finished wine was racked after 6 months on its lees and blended with a total production of 7 barrels (150 cases.) The 2007 Straight Line Tempranillo is a complex wine with notes of blackberries, stewed red berries, minerals and spice. It has medium weight on the palate balancing rich fruit with its ample acidity and tannins. It is a wonderful wine to have with your weekend barbeque or Spanish *morvillo* (black pudding) - the first sausage to be made from the freshly killed pig, flavored with spices and herbs, usually including garlic and oregano.

**The 2007 Straight Line Tempranillo is \$22.99/bottle, \$248.30/case.**