

The Modesto Bee

LIVING

Modesto wine columnist: From vegetables to grapes, vineyard finds its way

BY RUSS WINTON

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Follow these basic tips for experiencing the most enjoyment when buying wine at the store or out at a restaurant to go with your meal. BY [BOB BRAWDY](#) ✉

One of my favorite family owned wineries is Balletto Vineyards in Santa Rosa. Their Pinot Noirs are incredible and so is their story. Here's a brief summary: In 1977, John Balletto graduates high school and in the same year, his father dies. He decides to pass on a collegiate athletic scholarship and stay home to help his mother on their five-acre vegetable farm. Three years later, a big supermarket chain asks him to be their vegetable supplier. In 1981, John buys his first property. This expansion phase continues into the early 1990s, making Balletto Farms the largest vegetable farm in Northern California, growing 70 different vegetables on 700 acres. The water damage of three El Nino storms and the NAFTA Agreement in the 1990s creates challenges for vegetable farmers. In 1999, John decides it's time to turn his 700 acres into estate vineyards.

Balletto Vineyard's first vintage was in 2001 with 391 cases of Chardonnay and 689 cases of Pinot Noir. Today, production is about 25,000 cases of estate wines using just the top 10% of their harvest. The rest is sold to well known Sonoma wineries who recognize the quality of Balletto fruit. Consumers also became aware of his award winning wines made under the direction of winemaker Anthony Beckman. John Balletto's success in growing vegetables or grapes or producing wine, would not be complete without mentioning the continuing help and support of his wife Terri and their two daughters.

In 2002, Balletto workers asked their boss if he would support their Mexican-American baseball team. John said yes. He would supply the equipment and materials if they would supply the labor. He surprised the workers by tearing out 4 acres of Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir right behind the winery. One year later, Los Uveros (the Grapers), had their own regulation-sized baseball field, one of the best kept in Sonoma County. Every Sunday the field of dreams is packed with families big and small. Cheers to Balletto Vineyards.

WHAT'S ON OUR TABLE

The **Steal** this week is the 2019 Coppola Cabernet Sauvignon. It's an easy drinking house red for just \$5.99 at the Grocery Outlet. The **Deal** is the 2019 g3 Red Blend from Goose Ridge Vineyard in Washington. The SRP is \$15. It is sale priced around \$12 and available at most markets. The **Splurge** (\$27) goes to Casto Oaks Winery in Mariposa. The 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon Red Blend, called Man's Best Friend is a Gold Medal winner in the SF Chronicle Tasting. A day trip to the Casto Oaks tasting room followed by a lunch would be a perfect reason to take a Friday off. Cheers!