



ZD Wines – 40 Years, Zero Defects

by Robin Barr Sussman

It isn't every day that a small family-owned winery can celebrate their 40th harvest, a milestone in any history book. ZD Wines in Rutherford was founded in 1969 by Gino Zeponi and Norman deLeuze. The two aerospace engineers immediately adopted an aerospace quality-control term, "zero defects," and applied this motto to their winemaking. Quality, consistency, and style are still the benchmarks of ZD wines.

"Our winery grew from a part-time weekend business to a full-time dream come true," says Brett deLeuze, president and partner of ZD Wines. "My father, Norman deLeuze, was the driving force in starting the business." Sadly, he passed away in October of 2007. Brett's mother, Rosa Lee, is still an integral part of everyday operations. Today, three generations of the family own and operate the winery, including Robert, Julie and Brandon deLeuze.

The turning point for the business was in 1993. A small structure built by the family was transformed into a state-of-the-art winemaking facility with a tasting room. Since then, ZD's world-class wines have won countless awards and gold medals. President Reagan was even a big fan, serving ZD wines at events at the White House with heads of state. But ZD never lost focus and still concentrates on "producing great wine," said Brett.

Strong believers in ecology, recently they have been committed to organic farming. The winery went solar with the installation of a 125 kW system earlier this year. The 712-module design supplies 100 percent of the energy used in ZD's production. ZD had a "solarbration" with several area Napa wineries to raise funds for The Land Trust of Napa County, an organization for land-saving efforts.

The first wine ZD ever produced was Pinot Noir, a wildly stylish varietal today. That Pinot Noir has the historical significance as being the first wine to have a Carneros designation on the label. Over the years, ZD also has become known as a Chardonnay house. One taste of the luscious, perfectly balanced Chardonnay and you will see why. Winemaker Chris Pisani also produces three Cabernet Sauvignons including a limited production named Abacus. On the short list of wines is the rotating wine known as Rosa Lee's Whim. Most recently Rosa Lee's repertoire has included Riesling, Petit Verdot, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah.

To commemorate the 40th harvest, they celebrated on September 6th, just before the grapes were ready to be harvested and crushed. The party of more than 200 guests showcased a series of fabulous food and wine pairings served throughout the cellar all day. Guests were greeted with ZD's benchmark varietal, Chardonnay, paired with a lovely saffron aioli poached halibut. They pulled out all the corks and also served the 1996 ZD

Chardonnay, which recently won a San Francisco blind tasting against at least five French white Burgundies. This amazing tasting Chardonnay was more than 12 years old!

Those who visited the crush pad at the party were treated to the new release of the 2001 Pinot Noir, Carneros, and the 1998 Pinot Noir, paired with marvelous mini sage burgers on Gougere with a bing cherry relish. The finale was consumed in the cool barrel room as guests sipped ZD Cabernet and nibbled chocolate shortbread layered with caramelized pecans and dark chocolate ganache.

Speaking of tasting, mark your calendars for the Special Reserve Library Tasting, October 25, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Vineyard View Room. The tasting will feature the new release of 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2006 Reserve Chardonnay and the 2003 Library Selection Pinot Noir, Carneros. Wines will be paired with artisan cheeses and chocolates.

The highlight of the 40th harvest celebration? "Great people, beautiful land, and wondrous wine and food. Life is good," says Brett deLeuze.

ZD Wines is located at 8383 Silverado Trail, Napa. The tasting room is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call 1-800-487-7757 or visit www.zdwines.com.