



RUBISSOW

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Second Generation in the House:
Rubissows Reinvent the Family Vines and Wines

NAPA, California, December 14, 2007 -- When the clock strikes midnight in California on the last day of 2007, vintner George Rubissow and winemaker Tony Sargent, who founded Rubissow~Sargent two decades ago, will retire and hand over their 2000 case wine company to the next generation.

George's son Peter and daughter Ariel, both longtime participants in the business, have been working with the founders to prepare for this transition: hiring a new winemaker in 2004, moving all operations from Berkeley to Napa, changing the winery name and label, and adding three new clones and three new varietals to the vineyard. In 2007, the younger Rubissows also took over full ownership of the company. "Our goal is to respect and improve upon all that has come before while making more modern and expressive wines," says Peter, who has served as National Sales Manager for his father's company for the past 14 years. "To speak in musical terms, the volume has been turned up considerably. These new wines are sexier, richer and more powerful than their predecessors."

As National Sales Manager for his father's company for the past 14 years, Peter placed Rubissow~Sargent in the nation's finest restaurants and wine shops, building a loyal family of distributors and fan base of top sommeliers, chefs, wine staff and wine collectors. "Taking over a family business started by your father can be challenging, especially if you're as good friends as my Dad and I are. It's been well worth it, though. The new wines are something we are all proud to have our name on."

More

Reinventing Rubissow

Anyone tasting a 2004 or later vintage will immediately note the increased power and complexity of flavors. “We’ve ramped up hands-on time on every vine,” says Ariel Rubissow Okamoto, who has managed the Rubissows’ 18 acres of sustainably-farmed vineyards and 45-acre Mount Veeder, Napa Valley estate for 15 years. “We’re paying extra attention to every corner, every microclimate, every subtle difference of the land and opportunity to bring out the best of our fruit.”

When George and Tony founded the company in 1986, they sought to marry the best of Bordeaux winemaking traditions with the ripeness of California grapes. And they succeeded. By the late 1990s, Rubissow~Sargent could be found in as many as 23 states, on more than 500 wine lists, and in 150+ wine shops, and Tony was delighted with the recognition his wines attained across the nation. Still, with the last decade's trend to fleshier wines Rubissow~Sargent found itself increasingly focused into a niche market serving those with a taste for tradition.

In 2004, Peter and Ariel began looking for a winemaker with the imagination and skill to reinvent their wines and the integrity to respect tradition. They chose Timothy Milos, a young winemaker who did graduate work in enology at U.C. Davis and in plant pathology at Cornell. Prior to joining the Rubissows in their endeavor, Timothy was winemaker for Cliff Lede (2002-2004 vintages), S. Anderson (1999-2002) and held positions at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars and Opus One.

Beginning in 2004, Ariel and Timothy began dividing the vineyard’s seven historic blocks, which range in elevation from 400-800 above sea level, into smaller management blocks and picking lots. This enables each of the many distinct corners, mountaintops and vales of the vineyard to reach their full potential. The number of harvest lots went from around ten for the average 1990s vintage to 25 in 2007. At the winery, Timothy uses cluster and berry sorting, longer cold soaks, and varied coopers and wild fermentation for greater complexity. He has also refrained from filtering or fining the wines. Timothy believes that 95 percent of any wine is made in the vineyard: “Wine is the shadow cast by the grape,” he says. “Understanding the unusual complexity of this particular terroir, where the same clone and rootstock can produce wildly different characters just a small distance apart, has been an exciting challenge for me.”

Reinventing Rubissow

George and Tony are happy to see their legacy carry on. As their business has grown over the years, so has their friendship. George still remembers his first idea for a name for their wine was “Les Copains” (“friends” in French). Looking back, he also points to an unexpected benefit of starting the enterprise. “It brought the whole family together. Sitting around my own father’s old dining room table at the vineyard, discussing the latest turns of a new vintage or changes in the weather, these have been times of great happiness and togetherness,” he says. “In a world of doubt and greed, making beautiful wines is an oasis.”

The ultra-premium wines produced by the next generation encompass two distinct labels and two redesigned packages. The new core brand is named simply “Rubissow”. Debut releases include 587 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon, 130 cases of Merlot, and 209 cases of Trompettes, a proprietary red made primarily of Cabernet Franc. In addition, the next generation pays homage to the company’s founders with their second distinct label, “Rubissow-Sargent Reserve.” Only 96 cases of this \$125/bottle Cabernet-based wine made in the Napa style will be released.

The 2004 crop, from which all the above wines were made, was unusually intense and limited on the Rubissow estate. “We had half as much fruit, twice as much heat, and three times as much flavor,” says Ariel.

Timothy aged the vintage for 21 months in French oak and bottled the wine in August 2006. “Our 2004 vintage has very ripe fruit, well balanced acidity and concentration, and focused flavor,” he says.

The new wines are significantly more expensive, with the Cabernet Sauvignon anchoring the line at \$75/bottle retail. The higher pricing largely reflects the extra efforts made by Ariel, Peter and Timothy in the vineyard and winery to enhance fruit quality and modernize winemaking. In addition, they have selected the finest cork, glass and artisan French cooperages.

A more affordable line of super-premium Napa AVA wines is in the works for next spring (2008). “These new wines - a \$20 retail Napa Cab and \$15 Napa Sauvignon Blanc (stainless steel) will honor our past success with by-the-glass placements around the nation,” says Peter.

Reinventing Rubissow

National sales of the new 2004 Rubissow releases, meanwhile, are planned to begin in late spring 2008 via allocation to existing distributors, wine club, and mail list. Release of the 2005 vintage will follow in fall 2008.

"We're continuing the family tradition of making limited production, single-vineyard wines, while reinterpreting the founders legacy through our own ambition and vision. I know we have many fans who might prefer we stay exactly as we are. We believe they will be very pleasantly surprised," says Peter.

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Reinventing Rubissow

RUBISSOW 2004 - DETAILS

2004 Production

Rubissow: 926 cases
Rubissow~Sargent Reserve: 96 cases
Release Dates: April / May 2008
Crush Location: Calistoga, Napa Valley

Estate

Location: Lower Mt. Veeder
Elevation: 600-850 ft
Property: 45 acres
Planted: 18 acres
Individual Vines: 22,700
Cabernet Sauvignon : 8 different clones
2004 Yield: 24 tons (decade average 35)

Information

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