

Hyampom Valley home to their 45,000 vines producing a variety of wines

Over the years, Ray and Robin Merlo have visited Ray's family in Genoea, a small northern town of Italy. There they have a family legacy of more than 400 years that brings viticulture offerings from growing wine grapes to making trendy wines from their own backyard.

The couple have a great interest in growing grapes and Hyampom is where it began for them.

Most of the self-learning processes for the two came with assistance from Weaverville doctor and grape grower Randall Meredith. Ray Merlo has a science background, with a major in biology that has helped with his business. He also has a minor in theology.

Both Merlo and Meredith went to school together and both are family practitioner doctors and serious grape wine growers.

Merlo notes Meredith planted his first vineyard in Hyampom in 1985. Robin and Ray visited Meredith over the years and said they learned an abundance of knowledge.

This is when they became interested in growing wine grapes themselves and in 1998, Meredith took Ray Merlo in as a joint partner in the business.

The two split their partnership in 2001 and Ray and Robin invested in their own winery.

Two years earlier they purchased their property and planted their first vineyard in 2000. They have about 1,200 plants per acre, which calculates to about 45,000 plants producing a variety of admirable tasting wines.

The couple have a 130-acre ranch in Hyampom, known as R. Merlo Estate Vineyards of which 47 acres has a rich abundant natural acidity soil.

In return, this crop produces some



Contact person: Robin Merlo

R. Merlo Estate Vineyards

Lower Southfork Rd., Hyampom, CA 96046

Business number: 224-1537, Winery 628-5381, Vineyard 682-5305

email: info@merlo.com, or r@merlo.com

Vines: Syrah 15,750, Pinot Noir 2,600, Zinfandel 8,000, Chardonnay 8,300, Merlot 4,500

Total vines: 39,150

of the finest elegant fruit for wine throughout northern California.

Ray and Robin have another 10 acres of planted stock in the Hayfork area of Trinity County.

They built their winery in Hyampom which was bonded in 2003.

Ray Merlo says what makes his grapes different from other vineyards/

wineries is the climate and elevation where they are located.

The climate change in temperature dropping to 45 to 50 degrees at night is a major factor in grape quality, the intense color and the acids.

They consider their wines not a typical Californian wine but more of a European wine, which is heavier and

bolder because of the fruit they grow and from where they are located.

He believes that a grape reaches a certain quality that is similar to a musical instrument or a stereo system, and that they reach such a high quality that the taste comes down to one's personal taste or experience.

The Merlo philosophy is that

they want their wines to taste like the grapes.

They want their wine to be the varietal as it is.

If it is a Cabernet, then it should be a Cabernet. They do not blend their fruit, and the flavor of their wine is the grape flavor that is grown in the fields.

The Merloes said that their wines are not stripped and recreated, but taste like the terrain, interpreted to mean one can actually taste the valley in their wines.

The couple's favorite part of the process is harvest time. They know harvest takes a lot of work, but the enjoyment is working hard with their hands. Their least favorite is the bee stings and the long learning process. They leave all the technical decisions to their production manager Vix Lane.

He is the main creator of growing their grapes and making their wines. He does everything using bench trials and through an instinctively learning process along the way.

He also does all the chemical analysis.

For a high quality wine, Lane looks for balance and tannins structure. Lane's advice to people who want to get into the wine making business is figure out what you think you can grow and start with half. The Merloes add, have a big bank account.

Ray and Robin would like people to know that it is imperative in letting the communities understand and know what kinds of wines are coming out of Hyampom Valley.

People will be surprised if they take the time to come to Trinity County and try the wines.

It will be well worth the drive.

-Kat Andrews