Silver Oaks: Two locations, one varietal

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

NAPA, Calif. — Silver Oaks winery bottles only Cabernet for two enticing reasons: sustainability and DNA.

“Above all else, at Silver Oak we are focused on continuous improvement,” said CEO David Duncan. “Because Silver Oak is the epitaphy wine for so many people, we equally need to maintain the DNA of the wine people fell in love with.”

More than 400 acres of vines are planted in two valleys. Silver Oak celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022.

Both Silver Oak wineries — Napa Valley and Alexander Valley — are the first two LEED Platinum wineries in the world. LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a program that, since its introduction in 1998, has become an international standard for buildings that aim to meet a variety of green goals for the health of the environment and its inhabitants.

Water-recycling systems, renewable energy, waste-management and a healthy employee workspace are among the design components the U.S. Green Building Council assesses when considering LEED certification.

Energy conservation is also paramount. The winery has more than 2,500 solar panels and a battery system that stores energy generated by the panels, with the goal that the 109,100-square-foot facility produces 5% more energy than it uses.

The winery is also one of only a few commercial facilities to employ a carbon dioxide heat pump for sanitizing water, using ambient carbon dioxide in the winery rather than fossil fuels.

American oak barrels come from the cooperator Silver Oaks owns in Higbee, Mo. This is one of the ways the winery creates a truly California Cabernet with aromatic complexity.

American oak allows for integrated tannins that result in expressive and luxurious wine with an even, balanced finish, according to the winery.

Duncan said the reasons Silver Oaks is unique include the flavor profile, the sustainability, leadership and the fact that the wine gets passed down from generation to generation as a wine for special moments.

“The California and greater American wine industry needs to be the greenest industry in the world on every level,” he said. “First and foremost we need to be stewards of the land.

“This includes viticulture, energy efficiency, and resource conservation — with water right up front in that resource equation,” he said.

Duncan said Silver Oaks’ founders would be proud of how he is stewarding the land and proud that we brought truth to their statement that “we’ve yet to make our best bottle of wine.”

Henry Estate Winery: Celebrating 51 years

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

UMPQUA, Ore. — Fifty-one years ago, Scott Henry moved back to his family’s ranch and began its transition from hay, sheep and prunes to a vineyard and winery.

Henry Estate Winery has since grown into an operation of 25 acres of mature vineyard, 10 acres of a young vineyard that is a couple years away from being productive and a winery that most recently produced 5,000 cases of wine.

“Dad (Scott Henry) has been the leader, the inspiration for what we do here,” said Syndi Beavers, Henry’s daughter and the company’s general manager. “I’m proud of what we have here. It comes from the dedication Dad had. This was his heart and life and soul. Through his dedication and hard work the winery is where it is today.”

Henry, 86, retired from working at the winery early this year due to health issues.

Henry grew up on the family ranch. He left to attend Oregon State University. After graduation, he worked as an aeronautical engineer with Aerojet in the San Francisco Bay Area. During his 13 years in California, he helped friends develop a winery in the Napa Valley.

When he and his wife, Sylvia, decided to return to the family homestead in Oregon, he had experience in the wine industry. In 1972, 12 acres were planted in Pinot noir, Chardonnay and Gewurztraminer.

When those vines were fully established, there was so much foliage, the sun and the airflow was limited in reaching the grapes. Being an engineer, Henry worked to solve the problem, eventually designing and creating a two-tiered trellis system that increased the quality of winegrapes. The system soon became popular with select winegrape growers and the Scott Henry Trellis System has since been adopted around the world.

“Dad developed the idea to split the canopy, high and low,” Beavers explained. “That exposes the grapes to good air flow and to the sun.”

The grapes from the vineyard’s first few years of harvest were sold to other wineries. A winery facility was added to the operation in 1978 and the first Henry Estate wines were released in 1980.

Annual production grew from 2,000 cases to 18,000 cases of wine in a year, but then a grape disease hurt the harvest for several years. With the young vineyard soon to be productive, the goal is to return to 10,000 cases a year.

In making its wines, Henry Estate uses all of its own grapes and buys about 10% more from other local vineyards. The winery’s main wines are Pinot noir, Pinot gris, Gewurztraminer, Muller Thurgau, white Riesling and Veraison.

Henry Estate has a wine club with 200 members. Several local stores carry Henry wines, a distributor sells it around Oregon and Yellowstone National Park buys Henry wines for its summer season.