

Delta Wine Tasting *Variety Abounds at Old Sugar Mill*

Story & Photos by Jan Vick

A not-so-hidden gem of the Delta is waiting for you in Clarksburg: The Old Sugar Mill, converted about twelve years ago from a derelict former sugar beet mill to a vibrant site for eleven wineries.

The Sugar Mill was relocated piece by piece from Utah to Clarksburg in 1934 to process sugar beets grown extensively at the time in the Delta. The mill operated into the 1970s when it eventually closed. It sat deteriorating until Carvahlo Winery began to rehabilitate the mill and turn the site into a wine lovers' destination. Six years ago it was bought by the Clarksburg Wine Company and has grown to the current eleven wineries. In addition to the wineries, an event center is used frequently for weddings, meetings and receptions. Soon, another part of the old building will be rehabilitated, which will allow events for up to 300 people. There are lawns, a few tables and a food truck on weekends. One winery is planning on adding a bistro, which will expand food options. Many people bring lunches and enjoy the day.

The eleven wineries offer wines from a variety of appellations. An appellation is a legally defined and protected geographic district within which specific kinds of grapes are grown. All wineries within the Sugar Mill building offer wine tasting, usually a flight of 5 glasses of wine for \$5.00, which is credited if a bottle is purchased. Some wineries, such as Clarksburg Wine Company, Rendez-vous

Winery and Carvahlo Family Winery, crush 100% Clarksburg Appellation grapes. Others use grapes from as far away as Trinity County to Lodi, Russian River and the Foothills.

Clarksburg Wine Company, established in 2010, produces a range of full-bodied red and aromatic white wines from grapes. The Clarksburg region grows some of the best Chenin Blanc, Petite Sirah and Cabernet Franc grapes in California.

Similar to the Napa-Sonoma region, over 35 varieties are grown in Clarksburg; some are bought by renowned wine makers from that better-known region. Located at the Sugar Mill, Clarksburg Winery has one of the few large crush facilities in the region and crushes for a number of private and boutique wineries.

It takes some looking for Draconis (Dragon) Winery, hidden in the back of the Sugar Mill along with Perry Creek Winery, but is worth the effort to find. Matt Powell, the wine maker has been making wine for over three years from his own vineyards in the Peltier Road area of Lodi. This small winery produces 850 cases of exquisite wines per year, including a French Oak Zinfandel, Petit Sirah and a "dark style" Zinfandel which is 95% Zin and 5% Sirah. Matt is an avid Dungeons and Dragons fan and makes beer in addition to his wines.

Wines made from Italian grapes are harder to find outside the foothills, and Due Vigne di Famiglia Winery offers "Italy in a Glass." Wine maker Ken Musso's grandfather came to San Francisco and made wine in the basement of a mortuary. Ken, a firefighter for 30 years, was always fascinated by this piece of family history, which was rekindled when a cousin found some wine bottled in 1937 in a basement. Although the wine had not survived well, Ken bought some Zinfandel grapes and began to make wine for his family and friends. Ultimately, in 1995, he and his wife bought a parcel of land on Cinnamon Hill in El Dorado County at 2,400 feet and began to grow the classic Italian grapes: Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, Barbera and later Sangiovese. Today the Musso Family Vineyard produces some of the best Nebbiolo and Dolcetto in El Dorado County. The soils of El Dorado County and the foothills are ideal for growing the Italian grapes in addition to Zinfandels and other lesser known varieties.

In 2004, Due Vigne (Two Vineyards) di Famiglia was formed by Ken Musso with business partners Ron and Barbara Houle and Nina Fadelli. Now Due Vigne provides the Italian wines from El Dorado County along with the Houle's elegant Napa Valley Cabernet.

The Old Sugar Mill is well worth a trip upriver. Take Highway 160 north from the Rio Vista Bridge, crossing the river at Isleton. Stay on the west side of the river through Clarksburg and follow the signs to Willow Point Road, then take Willow Avenue to the center. Bring a lunch and plan to spend some time enjoying the wine. All wineries are open weekends and some are open during the week. The web site for the Sugar Mill is: www.oldsugarmill.com.



Draconis Winery



Old Sugar Mill



Old Sugar Mill



Ken Musso, Wine Maker