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From an Acorn a Mighty Wine Grows

The wrong Acorn has been in the news lately. The tiny Sonoma winery called Acorn was news to me as I tasted the wines for the first time at the first (annual we hope) [Wine Bloggers Conference](#) held in Santa Rosa last weekend. [Betsy and Bill Nachbaur's Acorn Winery](#) is very good news indeed.

In a California wine world dominated by squeaky clean, but personality-free wines, the wines of Acorn are packed with personality. Producing wines exclusively from their estate vineyard in the Russian River they once again challenge conventional wisdom on so called “warm” climate varieties. In the cool Russian River Valley, which is known for its pinot noir, the Acorn Vineyard is planted with syrah, zinfandel, sangiovese, petite sirah and other varieties that aren't usually associated with pinot territory. It seems zinfandel and syrah like a little fog too.

Acorn is doing some things that seem cutting edge in the new world, but actually go back to the very first wines. They are co-fermenting field blends instead of picking and fermenting each variety separately. There is no doubt that varieties that are co-fermented together have different characteristics than a wine made from those same varieties made separately then blended. The chemistry that takes place during co-fermentation is just different.

For example, their [2005 Heritage Vines Zinfandel](#) (1005 cases) is 78% zinfandel, 10% alicante bouschet, 10% petite sirah and the

remaining 2% includes carignane, trousseau, sangiovese, petit bouschet, negrette, syrah, muscat noir, cinsault and grenache. All of these varieties were harvested and fermented together. The wine is rich, but with a firm backbone of tannin and acid and loaded with layers of flavors and aromas like coffee, chocolate, porcini and deep ripe blackberries. The **2005 Sangiovese** (1022 cases) is easily one of the most interesting New World examples of this variety I've tasted. Produced from 98% sangiovese (7 different clones), 1 % canaiolo and 1% mammolo, which is a blend I wish more Tuscan wineries would use instead of overwhelming their sangiovese with the strong varietal character of cabernet sauvignon. This is a decidedly robust, California style wine, but like their Zinfandel it has the zesty backbone to carry the heft. It is interesting to note that while these wines come from an Acorn they are blessedly not over-oaked. They are also not overpriced running around \$30 a bottle.

All of the Acorn wines have just the right touch of what I call a rustic character. While being very well made they have just a bit of wildness or *sauvage*, as the French call it. Rustic does not mean **brett** or other wine faults, but means that the character of the varieties and vineyard really show through in the wine and are not polished away leaving only artificially gleaming simple fruit flavors. With this edge of wildness, the wines of Acorn are not only delicious, but interesting, which is just the way I like them.

Acorn may be small, but they're making some mighty fine wines.

Technorati Tags: [California](#),[zinfandel](#),[sangiovese](#),[wine](#)

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