



LIVING AN ECO LIFESTYLE - EVERYDAY

## THE COTURRI BROTHERS ORGANIC THRU AND THRU

Tony and Phil Coturri, 57 and 54, are erstwhile hippies who never quite deserted the cause. It remains, as Tony says, “the guiding light of it all.” The Coturris adhere strictly to organic precepts, from the soil all the way to the glass. The wines they produce are full of personality, hearty, distinctive reds as idiosyncratic as the two men who make them. With an annual production of only 5,000 cases, the Coturris have a devoted following.

The winery traces its roots to Enrico Coturri who emigrated from Italy in 1901. He taught his son Harry “Red” Coturri how to grow grapes and make wine during prohibition in the 1920’s. Red passed his knowledge and enthusiasm on to his sons, Tony and Phil. Tony is the third generation winemaker and has been making wine since 1964. The Coturri Winery was founded on Sonoma Mountain in 1979 by Red, Tony and Phil. The preeminent honor of Red’s winemaking career was when the Coturri wines were chosen to be served to His Holiness Pope John Paul II while he visited San Francisco in 1987. Tony is now apprenticing his son, Nic, in the same methods and traditions. “This is a real family tradition; we’re in this for the long haul.”

While many wineries around the world use organically grown grapes, few go as natural in the winery as Tony Coturri. He uses no chemicals at any point in his winemaking. He relies on indigenous yeast and refrains from filtering and fining. He also uses an old-fashioned basket press and ages the wine in 2 to 4 year-old French oak barrels. It’s winemaking at its most basic.

Tony speaks passionately about organic winemaking. He’s so devoted to the natural ethos that he is pushing to have ingredients listed on wine labels. If he had his way, winemakers would be forced to list all their ingredients – fungicides, herbicides, pesticides, yeast additives – everything. The Coturri bottle would say, “Just Grapes!” “I believe that wine is best at its most basic—crushed grapes, fermented, pressed into barrels and then bottled,” he says. “Nothing added, nothing taken away.”



There’s a slight handicap that comes with being organic, according to Tony. “Over the years, organically made wine has not been considered as high of quality,” explains Tony. “I think the problem was that a lot of people who first got into organics didn’t know what they were doing. You can’t just put

organic on the label and expect that to be enough.” Tony doesn’t use the word “organic” on the Coturri Winery labels. “In all honesty, wine consumers have not embraced quality and organic in the same line yet. They still have the attitude that organic wine is a lower quality than what you can get in a conventional wine. It’s a stigma,” he states. But his reasoning for not carrying an organic label goes beyond market prejudice. In his view, organic practices are the means to a great wine, and a wine’s quality, not an organic symbol on the label, should capture the attention. “These wines have to stand on their own merits,” emphasizes Tony. He balks at the idea of slapping a “certified organic” label on his wines. Tony believes that making natural wine should “just be what you do.”

“The only ingredient in our wine is grapes,” says Paul White, the winery’s general manager. Nevertheless, adds White, “We don’t want to have a USDA-certified stamp. We’d rather be known as traditional fine wine.”

In the end, the Coturris believe that being organic is more than just a back-to-the-earth ideal. They think that it produces the best, most expressive wine. “We firmly believe that it’s not the process, it’s the product,” Tony remarks. “And the product speaks for itself.”

*Vicky Lorelli* Founder 

## Environmental Farming Practices

Phil Coturri is the grower, overseeing the 5-acre certified organic estate vineyard. He is a lifelong farmer and is considered Sonoma Valley's leading organic viticulturalist. He manages over 370 acres of vines certified by the California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). To achieve deep flavors, he keeps yields to 3 tons an acre or less. He uses a biodynamic regime, which is even more rigorous than organic farming.

Only the best agricultural practices are employed by the Estate Vineyard and it receives special handling to ensure that something is growing in the soil all year round. Weeds are controlled by disking, and the resulting mulch captures important moisture for the dry farmed vines. The open head pruned vines or "monkey claw" controls mildew problems. Like all of the vineyards grown and maintained by the Coturris, no pesticides, fungicides, or herbicides are ever used on the Estate vineyard. In 1996, Tony and Phil Coturri earned top honors from the Sonoma Valley Ecology Center for Environmentally Friendly Business Practices with their viticultural farming and winemaking practices.

## The Experts Review Coturri Wine

Organic wines are arousing interest and excitement, according to Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher, wine columnists for The Wall Street Journal. "They're attracting unprecedented attention both from consumers and from today's more skilled winemakers," reports Gaiter. Says Brecher: "The best tasted like grapes and earth, period. They had a certain freshness and honesty about them."

Robert Parker, Jr. is one of the most famous and well-respected international wine writer and wine critic in history. He has been given the highest Presidential Honors by two French presidents and an Italian President. He has written in great detail about Coturri Winery and has reviewed Coturri wines no less than 40 times with 14 wines rated "outstanding – terrific" with 90+ points in the Wine Enthusiast.

"I truly admire this winery that is making wines in a very organic method (no preservatives, fining, or

filtration). If they can succeed, it is the best way of insuring that the full flavor of the grape makes it into the bottled wine...these are wines for the adventurous, but one feels an obligation to support a tiny winery that is trying to make wine in the authentic, traditional manner." **Robert Parker (1984)**

"Warning: lovers of Velveeta cheese, Muzak, and sterile wines with no bouquet or personality should avoid this! California's league of wine writers/technocrats who only look for the technical faults in a wine, rather than its pleasure giving qualities, should have a field day ripping this wine apart for its exaggerated personality and controversial style. But if wine is meant to be appreciated for its individuality, as well as for pleasure, then who cannot admire what this winery has achieved?" **Robert Parker (August 1992)**

"Coturri makes some of the richest, most distinctive, personality-filled wines ... available in California." **Robert Parker (June 1997)**

Even Martha Stewart puts her glass up to organic wine. Body and Soul Magazine – Whole Living (Nov/Dec 2006), quotes Martha as stating, "Now, fueled by consumers' growing enthusiasm for all things chemical-free and sustainably grown, organic wine has entered a flavorful new phase. In the name of research, we tasted 16 organically made red wines." Martha and other wine tasters selected three, Coturri being one, that were exceptional. Martha noted,

## Show Me The Terroir!



Terroir comes from the vineyard, not the winery, according to Coturri. Although California is one of the best grape-growing environments in the world, Coturri believes that most wines still don't express its terroir. He is currently pursuing a biodynamic certificate.