



## **2001 Hop Barn Hill SYRAH**

My father's first experience with Syrah was straight out of the barrel one morning when Helen handed him a glass full of the Rhone varietal. He swirled the inky liquid and held the rim to his nose. As his brows furrowed, Helen asked him, "What do you think?" As I had said before, my father's experience with the Syrah grape before this had been nil. He slowly sipped and replied, "I don't know how to tell you this." He didn't want to hurt Helen's feelings. She offered, "Does it taste gamey?" "Yes, it tastes like venison!", he exclaimed with relief. The great white hunter was pleased as punch. Their pleasure was two-fold that day as this was the first time that my father, Lee Martinelli, Sr., had ever grown Syrah and the first time that our winemaker, Helen Turley, had ever made it. The vintage was 1998 and one barrel made up the entire production, equating to 22 cases. Our family likes to hunt and camp and drink great wines, usually all on the same weekend, so we kept that first minute bottling for familial purposes.

The *1999 Hop Barn Hill Syrah* was the first vintage that we released to the waiting public. We had all of three barrels full. It put us on the map of great Syrah producers. The 2000 vintage caused certain folks' socks to go up and down, thus adding to the craze for wonderful Syrah. The 2001 is another complete and fine example of what stunning wines young vineyards can produce when farmed properly. The *Hop Barn Hill Syrah* vineyard is one acre and is now in full production. When Mother Nature is at her most generous, we bottle 125 cases total.

When my father first designed to plant this little plot of Syrah on the hill bordering the tasting room there was protest from my mother, Carolyn. One ton of daffodil bulbs had been planted on the slope years before and the flowers were well known in the county and much enjoyed by passersby with their resplendent yellow during the dead of winter. So after three years of discussion between the two, they came to a creative agreement. Lee Sr., would plant the vineyard without ripping or tilling the soil. To plant the Syrah vines he drilled 18" holes in the ground by using an auger. This method did not disturb the flower bulbs and left the topsoil intact. The small vineyard is dry farmed and all of the cultivation is done by hand. It is strictly non-tilled and the ground cover is controlled by weed eating and mowing. During the grapevines dormant season in late winter the yellow daffodil blossoms brighten the day. When the flowers drop their petals in early spring, the vines are just beginning to push out their soft buds and a garden of green foliage once again decorates the hillside.

*Cheers, Julianna Martinelli Fall 2003*