



The Lolita Ranch

The buggy came to a stop with a lurch and the pair of dappled grey horses put their heads down in well practiced unison and began to graze. The long, black leather reins lapped against their backs and shoulders, the metal bits made a pleasant clacking sound as the animals chewed and chomped the thistles and grass that grew near the gate alongside the dirt road. The man slept on. His head lolled to the side and jiggled just slightly on his neck at the small pulls of the moving grazers outside. This nameless character was the original responsible party goer to hire a designated driver, or in this case, two. He was a hired hand that worked on the cattle ranch back in 1899. Legend has it that fairly often the old wagon man would go into the nearby logging town of Forestville and frequent his favorite watering holes. After he had acquired plentiful doses of liquor in his belly, he would climb back into his buggy and promptly fall asleep. Reins hanging free, the horses would start off on their own and confidently find their way home, as horses will. Eventually the snoring fellow would wake from his soaked nap as the early morning sun made its climb into the starry night above, with horses and buggy resting surely once again at the gate at the bottom of the drive.

Things have greatly changed on the Lolita Ranch on Martinelli Road in the last 100 years. Fourth generation farmer, Lee Martinelli Jr., and his wife Pamela purchased this very steep piece of property from Bob and Lolita Young in 1999. The Ranch is named for Bob's late wife, Lolita. Lee Jr. planted the steep hillside with four different grape varietals suitable to this specific climate and geographic area. He chose Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Zinfandel. The gate is still at the bottom of the drive where a mysterious old timer once napped a century before, but now, instead of a pair of horses, a tractor and trailer wait.

The vines are trained on a vertical trellis system and are tightly spaced at 2,000 plants per acre. Each grapevine is thinned to bear between 2 and 3 pounds of fruit per vine, with the clusters hanging 24 inches above the ground. The grapes are picked between 25 and 27 degrees brix to ensure mature ripe fruit flavors. They are hand selected at harvest time by consulting winemaker, Helen Turley, who taste the berries and choose when to pick according to the developed concentration of flavors. After picking, the whole berries undergo a cold soak and short fermentation process. Each of the four varietals are fermented with wild yeast, resting in 75% new French oak on gross lees for 10 months before bottling. The wines are neither heat nor cold stabilized and are un-fined and un-filtered.

Julianna Martinelli
Farmer's Daughter