**Orin Swift Cellars**

**Orin Swift Cellars** was started by winemaker David Phinney in 1998 when he created **The Prisoner**. David has a long history of winemaking at high-end wineries in the Napa Valley including **Robeth Mondavi** Winery and Whitehall Lane. **He paid tribute to his parents with the name of this winery – Orin is his father’s middle name and Swift is his mother’s maiden name.** He started this winery when he was working for other wineries and as a result started small and worked part time. When you combine excellent wines with creative labeling you are bound to grow fast and now his full time job is with Orin Swift.

**The Prisoner** label was their flagship wine (in 2010 Dave sold just the Prisoner label to Huneeus Vintners – also owners of Napa’s Quintessa Winery). In April 2016 The Prisoner label was again sold, this time to Constellation Brands who opened a new dedicated hospitality center to the The Prisoner wine and related brands in November 2013 along with an artisan community on site called The Makery.

Before Dave sold this label 75,000 cases were being produced annually (up from merely 385 cases during their first vintage!). The label is an etching of a prisoner drawn by the famous artist Goya – **Dave’s parents first gave him a print of this image as a Christmas present.** The grapes for this wine are sourced from high quality vineyards throughout the Napa Valley. When owned by Orin Swift this label was typically a five varietal blend including Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Charbono and Petite Syrah.

**Orin Swift’s Mercury Head** is a wine that people go crazy for. It is released in May and quickly sells out of wine shops often within a week’s time. Some of the Cabernet Sauvignon for this wine is sourced from the well-regarded **Morisoli Vineyard in Rutherford. One winemaker we met with had to wait over 4 years just to acquire a small block of fruit from this vineyard.** Grapes are also sourced from additional premium vineyards mostly in Rutherford and Oakville – the best barrels are selected once this wine has aged and are used to create the final blend.

**Dave is known for his clever, catchy and creative labels. As a child he used to collect coins including the silver winged Mercury Head dimes – it takes one to think outside the box to come up with a wine bottle where the label is merely a silver dime that is no longer in circulation. This coin was minted by the United States Mint from 1916 to 1945. Orin Swift constantly scours for sources of these dimes from brokers, coin dealers and from recycled bottles. Their bottles typically use Mercury Head dime coins from the late 1930s and early 1940’s.**

**At the time of this review they produce about 2000 cases of the Mercury Head wine annually. And their standards for this wine are held very high; they do not make it every year – recent years in which they did not produce this wine were 2010 and 2011.**

The 2013 vintage is young at the time of our tasting; the nose is voluptuous and full of fresh and lively fruit tinged by secondary tones of toasted oak including mocha and vanilla. It shows ripe blackberry, cherry and black currant leading to a soft rounded entry on the palate that quickly gains in complexity showcasing a “Napa boldness” often found with this variety produced from the region. The finish is long both with fruit and robust long lasting tannins containing a perceptible sediment quality.

**Papillion is one of their most sought after wines and and is instantly recognized from the memorable label. A photograph taken by the famed celebrity photographer Greg Gorman graces the front of the bottle; the label is an image of human hands with the word Papillon showing. And these are farming hands – the hands of one of the nicest old school vintners in the Napa Valley you will ever meet**, Vince Tofanelli. Incidentally Greg Gorman learned a bit about wine making from Dave Phinney and now has his own wine label, GKG Cellars.

**Papillon is always a Bordeaux variety based Cabernet Sauvignon dominated blend.** The 2013 shows bright lively aromatics with hints of mocha on the bouquet. The palate has a broad appeal with notes of cherry and blackberry. The tannins are refined for such a young wine – are well integrated yet linger for some time on the long finish.

**Eight Years In The Desert** it gets its name because he made **The Prisoner** wine for eight years and after he sold it, he signed a non-compete, agreeing not to make Zinfandel for eight years. **8 Years in the Desert**. Like **The Prisoner,** 8 Years is a blend of Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, and Syrah. It’s powerful, with a core of briary blackberry and plum fruit layered with pepper, espresso, mocha, and earth. This is a wine (not shy on the alcohol front) for lovers of ripe California fruit, but it has impressive complexity in the form of gravelly nuances.

Starting next Friday we will be adding **Eight Years In The Desert in** to our high-end wine by the glass program, we’ll be doing a staff training and tasting at 4:30pm, it’ll be great if you are able to attend.