

Wine Spectator online

New Wines, New Faces: Partridge Proves to Be Good Match With Napa Cabernet

Posted: Friday, October 26, 2001

By MaryAnn Worobiec

Bob Egelhoff is one of the best winemakers you probably haven't heard about. Over the years, he has helped make wine for the likes of Merryvale, Pahlmeyer, Staglin, Robert Craig and Harlan. Currently, he is the winemaker at David Arthur Winery, whose 1997 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Elevation 1147 earned a near-perfect 99 points on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. Now Egelhoff is behind a new label's impressive debut: the 94-point Richard Partridge Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 1998.

The label's founder is Dick Partridge, 62, an electrical engineer who grew up in Indiana. Partridge fell in love with California wines 35 years ago, and in 1996, he bought a vacation home in Napa Valley, bringing him closer to his long-held dream of owning a winery. However, Partridge spends most of his time in southern California, where he runs his own engineering firm in Cerritos.

So when he launched Richard Partridge Wines in 1998, he gave Egelhoff carte blanche to make the best possible wine. "I'm not a frustrated winemaker," said Partridge. "I never tried to make my own wine, and I don't second-guess Bob."

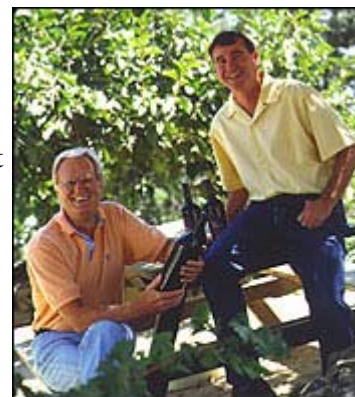
Egelhoff's lengthy CV includes stints as a vineyard manager with well-known Napa Valley grower Andy Beckstoffer and as assistant winemaker at Merryvale Vineyards, back when it also served as a custom-crush facility for new brands. These days, Egelhoff, 42, has set up shop at Amizetta Winery in St. Helena, where he oversees all of his projects, including yet-to-be-released labels Axios, Phelan and his own brand, Egelhoff.

Partridge doesn't own any vineyards yet, and controlling a grape source can be pivotal, especially in a year like 1998 when yields were low and grapes scarce. But Egelhoff secured grapes from proven vineyards: Steltzner in the Stags Leap District and Snowden in Rutherford (both Steltzner and Snowden are longtime growers and established producers), along with Sacrashé in Rutherford.

Many vintners experienced problems with 1998's cold, rainy, late harvest, but the 1998 Richard Partridge Cabernet Sauvignon (94, \$55, 500 cases) shows no signs of a troubled vintage. This is a dark, rich and chocolaty wine, with elegant black cherry and toasty mocha notes. "It's always more fun to make a good wine out of a bad year, than in a year when everyone else is making great wine," mused Egelhoff.

The lack of estate vineyards doesn't have to be a problem in maintaining a uniform style, even in tricky vintages, believes Egelhoff. "Grapes are grapes. If you keep other variables the same, and the winemaking is consistent, then the style will be consistent."

Partridge's follow-up Cabernet indicates that Egelhoff can maintain that consistency. The 1999 (90, \$75, 581 cases) is intense and firm, with rich blackberry and black cherry flavors and hints of anise. With the 2000 vintage, Partridge has also begun making small lots of Napa Valley Chardonnay.



Dick Partridge (left) and wine-maker Bob Egelhoff turned out an impressive Cabernet from the less-than-ideal 1998 vintage.

Partridge says that what he enjoys most about owning his own wine label is talking with customers. An early riser, he shows up to the office around 6 a.m. with a cup of coffee in his hand to take wine orders personally. Proud of his new venture, Partridge isn't shy about using his own name for the label. "I woke up in the middle of the night thinking, if Robert Mondavi could do it, why not me?"

Partridge Cellars
13875 Cerritos Corp. Drive, #B
Cerritos, CA 90703
Tel: (562) 802-7345
Fax: (562) 802-3186
Web site: www.richardpartridge.com
E-mail: dick@rfpartridge.com

###

Read past New Wines, New Faces:

- Oct. 12, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Trading Places--From the Inner City to NapaValley](#)
- Sept. 21, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Alvaro Palacios Heads to the Hills--Again](#)
- Aug. 31, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Zinfandel From the Heart of Cabernet Country](#)
- Aug. 17, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: The Culler Instinct for Cabernet and Syrah](#)
- Aug. 10, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Finding Success Close to Home](#)
- July 13, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Destino Sees Chardonnay's Perks](#)
- July 6, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: No Dyer Straits for Napa Veterans](#)
- June 29, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: An American Goes Native in Burgundy](#)
- June 15, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: All for One, One for All in the Rhone](#)
- May 25, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Putting Coombsville on the Map for Napa Cabernet](#)
- May 11, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Napa Valley Cabernet By Way Of Persia](#)
- April 20, 2001 [New Wines, New Faces: Helen Turley's New Napa Cabernet](#)