



J. RICKARDS WINERY

'Darn Fine Barn Wine'



by Sue Straight, *The Wine Wench*

“Darn fine barn wine!” is the slogan at J. Rickards Winery, and it sums up the atmosphere and attitude of this small, friendly, down-home, hands-on winery perfectly. This little secret gem of a place is 100% pretension-free, but their wines rock!

Located just a couple of miles north of the tiny town of Geyserville (A handful of restaurants, a couple of wineries, a post office, feed store and PG&E office – that’s about it!), J. Rickards Winery sits atop a small, old vine Zinfandel covered knoll. Their narrow driveway gently winds up the hill between Zinfandel vines that were planted way back in 1908. If those vines could talk, just think of the stories they could tell!

Owners Jim and Eliza Rickards live on-site, right next door to the winery. Their modest, yet elegant wooden home is surrounded by flowers and, of course, grapevines. Their dog, a sweet older Labrador Retriever mix, greets all visitors with a happy bark (or five) and a gentle wag of her tail.

Jim and Eliza purchased the 60 acres that would eventually produce their wines way back in 1976. The old vine Zinfandel vineyard is comprised of 80% Zinfandel, the rest is made up of varying numbers of Petite Sirah,

Carignane, Alicante Buchet, Mataro and even some white varieties including Palamino and Muscat Canelli. In addition, Cabernet comprises about 40% of the acreage planted.

The winery itself is a small, unassuming barn-like (hence the “darn fine barn wine!” slogan) building, surrounded with the requisite cement pads, stainless steel fermentation tanks, crusher-stemmer, press and other necessary winery accoutrements. The tasting room is tiny – a small bar, two barstools and an assortment of cases and bottles of wine take up part of the front of the winery’s cellar. The view is of barrels and cases of wine in the back of the cellar. When you visit J. Rickards, there’s no doubt that you are visiting a winery!

Eliza explained to me with a smile, “We use a “Tom Sawyer” method of production around here – during harvest, there is a faithful group of friends that volunteer their services every year and they are rewarded with a big harvest dinner in late August.” There are only five “real” employees at this tiny gem of a winery – Jim and Eliza Rickards, Juan Favela (Vineyard Manager) and the husband-and-wife team of Alex (Winemaker) and Annie (Sales & Marketing) Holman.

This is a working grape farm along with being a winery. The Rickards sell much of

their fruit and only produce about 2500 cases of wine annually under their own label. The J. Rickards logo looks like something you’d find on the flank of a longhorn steer – another nod to their complete lack of pretension.

Let’s talk about the wines – this humble winery produces some kickin’ wines at reasonable prices. I tasted a variety of wines during my visit – the following wines were my favorites:

2005 Sisters Meritage, \$28 – This is an \$80 Meritage in a \$28 dollar dress! What a deal! Mouthwatering aromas of cherry pie, mocha, vanilla and cigar box continue as flavors in the sumptuously textured mouth. Gorgeous!

2005 Voigt Family Zinfandel, \$24 – Simply a classic Zin! Aromas of blackberry and raspberry jam, brambles and peppery spice delight the nose. The huge mouth is packed with berry, dark chocolate and spice flavors, which linger through the finish. Yum!

Take it from *The Wine Wench* - don’t miss this place!

Visitors are welcome from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and by appointment. For more information, call (707) 758-3441 or visit the website at www.jrwinery.com.