

The
D&K
Feature

Great Wine Label Hunt

The second in a series of
"The Story behind the Dogs
on Wine Labels"



BY BARBARA DENZER

When you read that someone had a white dog — and his name was *Blue* — it plants a question in the back of your mind. You can't help but wonder why they named a white dog Blue. You'd like to know. There must be a reason, but you don't pick up the phone and call to inquire, or begin a quest to find out why they named their white dog Blue. You just wonder.

When you see a wine label with a painting of a large white dog's head on it, and the name "Blue" next to it, you have to quit wondering, and find out why a white dog named Blue is on a label from a winery named Dover Canyon. In fact, the white dog is on all the wine labels from Dover Canyon, even their award-winning 1999 Cujo Zinfandel.

Curiosity is the reason I found myself halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles about 20 miles east of the Pacific Ocean on a winding country road a few miles west of Paso Robles, California, just off Highway 101. Stands of oak trees and walnut groves line the rolling ranch land behind split rail fences along Vineyard Drive. Rounding yet another curve in the road, Dover Canyon Winery appears atop the hillside commanding a magnificent view of this part of one of the original great Spanish ranchos, Rancho Paso de Robles.

Vintner Dan Panico chose this site on the west side of the appellation, not far from Cougar Ridge, for his winery. He named it after a nearby canyon. Although many miles from Napa Valley, the recognized jewel of the California wine country, the Paso Robles Appellation is the third largest in California, but perhaps least known. Generally thought to be a hot, flat and dry area, Panico had been making wine in the valley for 15 years. He knew that on the hilly west side crisp ocean breezes kept the vines cool and whisked away the fog and mildew that filled many mountainside vineyards in the area.

The seven acre plot that Panico selected for the winery now also includes a walnut orchard and his organic farming fields of rye, barley, clover and mustard. Herb and vegetable gardens provide abundant pesticide-free produce. Landscaping is meticulously planned to provide a natural habitat for wildlife, birds and butterflies.

Dover Canyon has become known for its premium zinfandels, and Panico is considered an expert vintner. The interesting story for pet lovers is how his dog Blue ended up on his wine labels.

Blue, a fluffy, white Saint Bernard puppy, was Panico's Christmas present the year he was 16. They soon became inseparable. Blue followed Panico everywhere. He supervised Panico's surfing on Santa Cruz, California, beaches, and accompanied him to college at the California Polytechnic State University campus in San Luis Obispo. Blue was even well known outside Panico's favorite local hangout, Mother's Tavern.

One day when Blue was 10 years old, he was standing guard while Panico surfed off the coast of Santa



Dover Canyon

Cruz. Blue was a strong swimmer, but hated water in his ears, preferring to keep watch from the beach. Suddenly the wind picked up, and a storm rolled in behind the surfers. The waves crashed, sending Panico and his board flying high in the air, the board knocked Panico unconscious on the way down.

Blue barked frantically as Panico disappeared into the white caps. Blue charged into the water and swam into the deep waves. He fought the strong currents, and slowly dragged the unconscious Panico into shore. Rescuers found them both exhausted, and bleeding on the sand. Panico recovered quickly from a minor concussion, cuts and lacerations. Blue, however, suffered multiple broken ribs, and never quite regained his health. Nevertheless, Blue remained Panico's devoted companion.

A few months after Blue died in 1992, Panico and one of his investors, Ed Smith, celebrated the first production of Dover Canyon wine, a cabernet sauvignon. It was a gala evening, abounding with toasts. Panico was reminded that he owed his life, and thus his success, to his dear departed dog, Blue. They raised their glasses to toast Blue. Smith decided to paint a portrait of Blue as homage to their beginnings as winery

owners. Panico decided the portrait would become the official Dover Canyon label in tribute to his faithful companion, without whom there would have been no Dover Canyon.

A decade has passed. Panico now produces about 2000 cases of wine per year. You could say that Blue remains Panico's faithful companion. His

picture is still on every bottle of Dover Canyon wine. His spirit no doubt chases the wild turkeys, deer, raccoons, badgers, coyotes and bobcats that inhabit Dover Canyon, which has become one of the National Wildlife Federation's network of minirefuges. In August 2001 Dover Canyon was recognized for its conservation of natural resources and provision of natural animal habitats and designated *Wildlife Habitat No. 29356*.

Dover Canyon has finally adopted a new mascot, a frisky black and white puppy named *Rebel Rose*. Perhaps someday there will be a special label to honor his place in Panico's life, but nothing will ever take the place of Blue, the white Saint Bernard.

Still wondering about that name *Blue*? It was the color of his eyes. www.dovercanyon.com

BARABARA DENZER is a freelance writer and marketer based in Azusa, California. Her specialties are product development, packaging and marketing of consumer goods. Her family shares their home with animals they have rescued.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Paso Robles Appellation
Open Friday, Saturday, Sunday
11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
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Rebel Rose