



Mutt Lynch Winery

Third in the series
 "The Story behind the Dogs on Wine Labels"

BY BARBARA DENZER

In the previous wine label stories, we met Kent Rosenblum, DVM, a veterinarian who developed Rosenblum Cellars, a world class winery in Oakland California. Rosenblum named his Cote Du Bone Rhone wine Chateau La Paws after

his four-legged clients. Then we traveled further south to Paso Robles, California, to Dover Canyon Winery where winemaker Dan Panico uses a painting of his dog Blue on all his wine labels as a tribute to Blue who had saved his life.

Now our quest for the story

behind the dogs on wine labels takes us to Healdsburg, California, just off Highway 101 north of Santa Rosa in the Sonoma wine country north of San Francisco. This area is part of the Dry Creek Valley appellation. Unlike its name, it is a lush valley with thick forests on the valley's western slope and woodlands of oak on the east. Real estate in this part of Sonoma has been maximized with evenly spaced vineyards in the valley and more terraced up the hillsides. Here we find Mutt Lynch Winery, a small but definitive winery with an unusual name and several wine labels that feature dogs.

To most of us, Mutt Lynch Winery may seem an odd name, but it has a very simple reason for being. Brenda and Chris Lynch own the winery, and they've always had mutts for pets. What could be more natural to a pair of dog lovers than to name their business the *Mutt Lynch Winery*? It combines their love of dogs, their passion for wine, their offbeat sense of humor, and their name into a reason for being.

Brenda and Chris met when they worked at Gallo, one of the better-known wineries in California. They married and continued their wine career as home winemakers, making barrel wine with a group of friends in their garages and calling themselves Woof-Woof Winery. In 1995 the Lynches began living out Chris's dream of owning their own winery when they formed Mutt Lynch.

"Apply Dog Logic to Life: Eat Well, Be Loved, Get Petted, Sleep a Lot, Dream of a Leash-free World" — Sark, a simple motto the Lynches have developed, which will surely be appreciated by most dog lovers.

Fully realizing that most of the wine world takes itself much too seriously to appreciate their motto and their sense of humor, the Lynches are individuals for whom the pleasures of enjoying wine with friends is more important than living up to someone else's standards of propriety. They focus on producing serious wines with a definitive style

but whimsical names.

At the present time, Mutt Lynch produces about 1500 cases of wine a year, divided among three basic labels. Now sold out, the merlot named *Merlot Over and Play Dead* is full and rich with sweet fruity qualities and French oak flavors. Its taste is described as big. In 2000 its label featured a stocky brown and white bulldog on a grassy, green knoll with fluffy white dog bone-shaped clouds in a clear blue sky. Immediately attractive, this label made customers stop and ask, "Wow, what's this?" Of course, labels may attract attention and induce purchase, but the taste and the quality of the wine is what kept customers coming back until it sold out.

The second label called *Portrait of a Mutt* is a zinfandel/carignane wine. A full flavored, hearty red wine similar to that made by the original Italian immigrants of the region's early history, *Portrait of a Mutt* is half Dry Creek Valley zinfandel grapes and half Alexander Valley carignane grapes. Brenda Lynch describes it as a dark berry fruit with spice notes. Need we add that the label features a portrait of a mutt?

The third label is named *Domaine du Bone*, a Dry Creek Valley zinfandel. It's described as having classic aromas of berry fruit, a spicy, floral note and a medium-full sweet palate. Dogs and bones are the label theme on this wine that retails for about \$20 a bottle.

Lynch can explain their "style" of wine in intricate details from the temperatures, to the mixing methods, to the soaking, to the day they picked the grapes. Reduced to its most elementary terms, she says their style is simple, "fruit first, oak seasoning, balance in the mouth, and ripe tannins." Her statements affirm the Lynches' more than 20 years of experience in wine making. The passion they share for their vineyard and their detailed explanations of winemaking makes it clear that the Lynches have every bit as much savvy as their fellow Sonoma vintners, they just prefer not to take

themselves quite as seriously.

This cavalier attitude toward wine marketing means you won't find Mutt Lynch Winery listed in the "Wine Bible" or "The Insider's Guide to California's Wine Country." Although that doesn't bother the Lynches a bit, it does, however, present a challenge when it comes to selling their wine. Luckily for many area dog charities, the Lynches have chosen to market their products by supporting dog rescue groups and organizations and donating product to raise money for charities. K-9 Companions, Second Chance — a San Francisco animal group that saves unwanted animals from shelters — and the Healdsburg Animal Shelter's program "Paws for Life" are a few of the organizations that receive donations from Mutt Lynch. In return, the Lynches have developed many loyal customers from the charity events.

While more traditional wine connoisseurs may have problems with the Lynches "dog humor," dog lovers and wine lovers alike are lucky that Brenda and Chris Lynch treat their dogs as family, and have the same passion for wine that they do for pets.

The artwork on Mutt Lynch wine labels is refreshingly graphic and colorful. As in our previous discoveries, it was worth the search to track down both the labels and the people behind the dogs on the wine labels because dog lovers are special people. Aside from this, the wines will keep us coming back for more. *DOG*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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 Merlot Over and Play Dead
 Portrait of A Mutt Zinfandel
 Domaine du Bone Zinfandel
 Coming Soon: 2000 Lynch Canis Major