

# FORTRESS

VINEYARDS

With over twenty years of grape growing experience, the Snider family of Fortress Vineyards has consistently implemented innovative practices, raising the bar to produce the highest quality fruit with the minimum impact of farming on the environment. The choice to be sustainable seems logical, as the ultimate goal is to produce natural fruit of varietal character.

The location and environment in the Red Hills Lake County AVA is conducive to reach this goal. Sustainability practices are easy and efficient to implement. Fortress Vineyards, situated on a ridge of Mt. Konocti 2,000-2,400 feet in elevation was virgin land developed into 16 smaller vineyard blocks beginning in 1997. The natural outlines of the land dictated the block development. The high elevation allows for cooler temperatures and longer sunlight hours to produce balanced, ripened fruit.



*Fortress Vineyards Overlooking Clear Lake at 2400 feet*

**Soils:** Located on the *Mt. Konocti Volcano*, highly diverse volcanic soils consistently deliver highly complex Fortress Vineyards wines. (A compelling comparison is Peter Michaels with vineyards singularly located on the *Mount St. Helena Volcano*.) Virgin soils are fertilized naturally with earthworm activity under the rice straw mulch as well as a clover cover crop.

Excess dust increases grape/vine pH affecting wine longevity. Rice straw and cover crop reduce dust levels. At harvest, a water truck is used daily to eliminate dust on the vineyard's roads.

**Rice Straw & Water:** Water conservation is of paramount importance. Few vineyards know how much water is consumed annually. At Fortress Vineyards, we "borrowed" an idea from the Aussies and spread rice straw mulch, a waste product itself, under all vine rows. We have reduced irrigation use to 4.5 gallons per vine per week from a more typical 8.5 gallons. We irrigate the entire vineyard twice weekly at a rate of 2 gallons per vine to maintain soil moisture and temperature under the rice straw mulch.

For 70 acres with 48,000 vines, we use 3,250,000 gallons of water annually. However, we are also saving 2,900,000 gallons annually by using rice straw.

Again, our primary objective has been to grow the highest quality fruit. The rice straw mulch has been highly beneficial in achieving and sustaining this goal along with added benefits.



*Rice straw under all vines enhances sustainable practices*

**Air quality:** Clear Lake (Lake Co.) has the best air quality in the state of California based on official data from the state. Fortress Vineyards benefits from a daily "Lake-effect" wind that helps maintain the acid structure for well-balanced wines from this high altitude mountain vineyard, 2,400 ft.

The Fortress Vineyards property consists of 340 acres surrounding a 70 acre vineyard. We have thousands of native trees on the property. Trees have the natural ability to soak up CO<sub>2</sub>, which is known as "carbon sink" or "carbon sequestration". Some trees have the ability to soak up as much as one ton of CO<sub>2</sub> over a lifetime. Because of the compelling importance of trees, we did not remove any trees while developing the blocks of vineyards.

Significantly reducing the irrigation water used lead to reduced operation of a diesel engine/pump. A 50% reduction in CO2 from pump emissions is a meaningful reduction in our vineyard carbon footprint.

We have never used any sulfur product at the vineyard. We are not convinced that sulfur will not convert to “acid rain”. As recently as 2005, extension brochures have recommended using sulfur in organic wine grapes. At a minimum, sulfur dust could impact air and/or water quality. New York State does not allow sulfur in vineyards.

We use Stylet Oil, an all-natural biofungicide for mildew during 3 months only – April/May/June. Treatment is not required July through September.

**People:** We are blessed with our “Yuba Team”, high-performance, entrepreneurial husband-wife owners with equal numbers of male/female in the group. In particular, harvesting Semillon, late in the season for our flagship wine, Fortress Finale, which is our answer to Sauternes requires their “Midas touch”.

Harvest is a high-risk time for workers as well as the crop. Therefore, we have developed a custom 50-foot night light system to handpick all grapes from 6pm to midnight. Mountain temps quickly drop to a safe and comfortable 60° as well as eliminating the presence of snakes and bees. Importantly, the ultra-cool fruit is trucked from the vineyard by 5:30am to be crushed in Napa at 7:30am ensuring the highest quality wine.



*Hand-Harvesting at night using Custom-Made Lighting System*

One of Nils Venge’s greatest contributions is the “by-the-numbers” optimal harvest date for superior fruit quality.

**DIAM Cork:** DIAM cork is the closure of choice for Fortress Vineyards. This TCA-free cork is a renewable resource as well as recyclable and biodegradable.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Label:** In 2008, we began adding a second label on the back of all of our wines to convey specifically, our viticulture sustainable practices.

Our location and agricultural practice choices have resulted in the production of pristine fruit that is balanced, exhibits true varietal characteristics, and does not have to be manipulated during the wine making process. This transforms the wines of Fortress Vineyards into food-friendly wines that are balanced and fully integrated in terms of fruit, acidity, and alcohol.

The Sniders provide discerning wine lovers the opportunity to try something new as an exploration to heighten the enjoyment of food and wine. They continue to explore new and to refine current agricultural practices to constantly achieve new aspirations.

**Visit us at: [www.fortressvineyards.com](http://www.fortressvineyards.com)**