

daily news

Napa Filmmaker Plans Documentary about Merlot

By Mary-Colleen Tinney

From Daily News Links, 09/14/2007

Filmmaker Rudy McClain has embarked on an ambitious full-length documentary project hoping to "shed the light" on Merlot, which he feels has been unfairly maligned in the recent past. Filming on the documentary, "Merlove," has already begun in California, with plans to expand the project to Bordeaux and possibly other locations.

"Merlot has been limited somewhat by bad press, bad movies and people kind of thinking that the wine is no good--I'm trying to reverse that," said McClain. "In doing that, what I also want to do is relay the message that all these wines are part of a family and that no single variety should be singled out as a good wine or bad wine."

McClain feels that the film will help inspire wine drinkers to take a closer look at the varietal "I think it is going to be really cool for Merlot wine in particular," he said. "Maybe it will help people bridge the gap between the \$4 and \$5 Merlot and the \$20 to \$60 Merlot."

McClain was prompted to do the project after overhearing Swanson Vineyards winemaker Chris Phelps, a personal friend, discussing a possible Merlot movie. "I checked it out and told him that I had to do this," said McClain. "After interviewing [Phelps], everything started falling into place. I got him, Jean Claude Berrouet from Chateau Petrus, Larry Stone [from Rubicon], Tom Rinaldi from Provenance, Andy Beckstoffer and then some of my friends. We have a huge list to do, so we are doing some fundraising right now." McClain is hoping to raise enough funds to support a planned filming trip to France in November and has developed a prospectus to offer potential investors.

Ultimately, McClain hopes the film will be distributed in theaters and, eventually, DVD. He has already begun contacting Los Angeles-based distributors, though filming is far from over. Before the film is ultimately finished, he hopes to have a series of wine country screenings to get feedback and suggestions on the direction of the film.

The project's website, www.merlove.com, also features suggestions for a Napa-focused Merlove tour. "I'm passionate about giving back to the [Napa Valley] wine community. I'm originally from Wisconsin, but being out here and growing up here, it felt like anything was possible. I kind of want to make a mark and say, hey, here's something really cool that I am giving back. Part of this whole thing is the people who don't drink Merlot, they may not know too much about wine. So, this is a translation of how to enjoy really great wines. It's also a way for me to give back to the people who helped me out with the movie."