

# From the Grape Vine

Volume 08 - Number 1

Winter - 2008

## The 2007 Growing Season

by Randall Vos

The growing season of 2007 cannot be described by any one word other than variable. Some areas of Iowa suffered from a lack of water whereas others received too much precipitation during harvest. This typifies the main difficulty in growing grapes in our region. Short growing seasons, humid summers, variable precipitation, and late spring frosts are just a handful of the obstacles to producing quality grapes in Iowa.

*Since we cannot control the weather, we need to implement practices in our vineyards to protect our fruit quality if we do encounter less than ideal conditions. It is not certain that we will receive rain during harvest, but waiting to spray until your fruit is rotting, is not effective. Protect your fruit quality and your financial investment.*

Practices such as canopy management will also increase fruit quality and decrease the risk of damage from some adverse weather conditions. To a point, increasing fruit exposure will increase fruit quality. This will also increase the cold-hardiness and fruitfulness of buds in the interior of the canopy due to increased exposure. In general the 'hands off' method of canopy management does not lead to ideal conditions for fruit and bud quality. For the high wire cordon systems, orientating the shoots vertically, known as combing, is very important to allow exposure of the fruiting zone. Regular tucking and orientating of the shoots upward is important for mid wire cordon or VSP systems. Canopy management is most effective when implemented early rather than too late.

## Viticulture and Enology Programs at DMACC

In the summer of 2007 Des Moines Area Community College initiated the Mid American Wine Competition. The industry response was great with over 500 entries, and it provided the Iowa industry with a lot of public exposure. This competition will be an annual event with new aspects to the competition to be introduced in 2008.

*The spring 2008 semester also marks the beginning of more new classes available in the Viticulture and Enology programs at DMACC. This spring we will be offering Intro. to Starting a Vineyard, Grape and Wine Science, Cellar Tech. and Operations, and Intro to Wine Science. The classes in the program are offered in a blended format where most of the course work is online, but then the class comes together for a Thursday-Saturday, 3 full day session, to do all the hands-on portions of the class at DMACC. This allows for those not living within commuting distance to DMACC to be able to take these classes.*

If you have any question related to grape growing or the DMACC programs feel free to contact me.

Randall Vos. [rjvos@dmacc.edu](mailto:rjvos@dmacc.edu)

## ANNUAL MEETING: W.I.G.G.A.

Date: Saturday, February 16th

Time: 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

(Registration begins at 9:30)

Location: Fox Run Club House in Council Bluffs

Proposed Agenda has the meeting lasting 2 hours (10 am - Noon) with the Social Time beginning at Noon with appetizers and wine.

Contact Roger for a list of cooperative buying opportunities. He has prices for items that have been requested in the past, but if there is something that you are looking for, contact him at :

[rwebster@treynorag.com](mailto:rwebster@treynorag.com)

If you have items that you would like on the agenda, please send them to me as soon as possible.

Thanks all! *Sheila Rohatsch*

**For your convenience, we have tentatively scheduled all member meetings and workshops for the 3rd Saturday of every month. We have plans for activities through July 2008.**

We hope to have an Activity List posted on the website soon. February is the annual meeting, March a pruning workshop, April - Annual Wine Dinner!

The dues continue to be \$40 for growers & processors and \$15 for affiliates. You may mail your dues to me or bring them to the annual meeting on Feb. 16th.

Please consider working on a committee. Member input is what keeps us going!

*Diane Forristall, Membership Chair*

## 2008 Siouxland Garden Show

This year's Siouxland Garden Show, Friday, March 14th and Saturday, March 15th, at South Sioux City, Nebraska promises to be even bigger and more varied than last year's. Hurry! Deadline for reserving space is February 15th.

Winery and viticulture exhibits will be right at home amid the booths exhibiting gardening equipment and supplies, shrubs and flowers, landscape design, educational demonstrations, and master gardeners.

Contact Information:

Iowa State University Extension-Woodbury Co.

712-276-2157

[www.extension.iastate.edu/woodbury](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/woodbury)

and [www.dakota.uni.edu](http://www.dakota.uni.edu)

*From the Grape Vine* is the newsletter for the Western Iowa Grape Growers Association.

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### *From the Editor's Desk -*

I'm sorry to be so late in getting this final newsletter printed and sent to you, the W.I.G.G.A. members. To paraphrase Bernie's excellent article on page 4, "Stuff Happens!"

I think you readers will find much to enjoy and titillate in this issue.

Mike White has submitted two interesting articles. There are articles by Randall Vos and Bernie Havlovic about the unusual weather of 2007. Karen Foster has also submitted a perceptive article on the affects of weather on the King's Crossing vineyard. Kent Bohlman sent interesting observations on the concept of *terroir*.

I am grateful for those "regulars" who have contributed so much during the past two years to make this newsletter interesting - at least to me! There have been excellent articles, also, from the membership. My gratitude and thanks. Several members sent great pictures.

This is my final issue of *The Grape Vine* as editor. It's been an interesting and instructive trip. I have been enriched by the experience and by the people whom I otherwise would not have met.

### *In the Grape Vine*

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Articles on several subjects I had hoped for from the members were not forthcoming. I had hoped for very subjective articles on the qualities of the wines being made here in western Iowa. I'd hoped for some good recipes using wine.

Thanks for your support and patience during these two years. It's been a great learning experience for me.

I expect to continue nosing around. One day you may see me idling down a row of grapes in your vineyard or sipping wine in your winery.

I wish you the greatest success in your endeavors. One of the things I learned is the superb support the state offers through the agricultural experts and programs from Ames.

Again, my best wishes to all of you.

Thank you.

*Floyd Pearce*

## Wine Market Cycles - Where Are We?

by Mike White, ISU Extension Viticulture Specialist

Steve Fredericks of the Turrentine Wine Brokerage in California authored Chapter 18 of "Successful Wine Marketing" by Kirby Moulton & James Lapsley.

In this chapter Steve describes four phases in wine marketing:

Phase 1 - rapid sales growth and increasing margins

Phase 2 - good sales growth but narrowing margins

Phase 3 - drop in growth rate and disappearance of margins

Phase 4 - slow growth rate and reappearance of narrow margins

The phases do not necessarily follow each other. Large swings in grape and wine production and inventory are very unpredictable. Consumer demand can change quickly. Who could have predicted the huge increase in red wine consumption after the 1991 showing on 60 Minutes reporting on the "French Paradox" of French eating rich cuisines but still maintaining healthy hearts. Or, better yet, what about the 2005 movie "Sideways" and the huge increase in U.S. Pinot Noir demand. (Personally, I stayed with Merlot.)

So what do these phases represent:

**Phase 1** is characterized by rapid growth in sales and good margins to strong demand. The grape prices have not responded to the increased demand and the wineries get to pocket the difference.

**Phase 2** represents good sales demand but higher grape prices. Margins are narrowing.

**Phase 3** may indicate a change in the economy, government regulations in wine merchandising, a negative national health report or maybe a consumer shift to another beverage may have slowed sales at a time the wineries were still purchasing grapes at a higher relative price.

**Phase 4** represents a maturing market where grape prices now reflect a slower market and the winery can make a narrow margin.

Exactly what are the wine markets these phases describe? Could they be varietals, locations like Napa vs. Australia, generic private label wines, sparkling wines, or maybe Midwest hybrid wines? Yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes! If you can identify a wine niche, you can also identify a market phase it probably is in.

So, what phase do you think "Iowa Wines" would fall in right now? Something to think about.

PS: Check out "The Wine Wheel" at Turrentine Wine Brokerage. It will provide you a little more insight into these four wine market phases.

<http://web.turrentinebrokerage.com>

## Observations in Karen's Vineyard

As everyone knows, the Easter freeze this year hit most of us in Western Iowa pretty hard. Five of our varieties showed the following for a dead primary bud count:

Percent of dead primary buds:

Steuben 22%

Edelweiss 78%

St. Croix 80%

La Crosse 18%

Vignoles 18%

Fortunately, I long pruned my grapes, anticipating the possibility of a late freeze, so I had extra buds to make up for some of the dead buds. But my Edelweiss and St. Croix crop load was still down about 50% from the previous year. These two varieties had quite a bit of secondary and tertiary bud damage, as well.

I did not go back and prune more off after the freeze, per the instructions Dr. Domoto's and Mike White sent out after the freeze. The freeze already did the pruning plus more than I wanted. What I found interesting was my La Crosse and Vignoles were up about 10% and 20%, respectively. Part of this could be because the vines were a year older, I ended up with more buds than in past years (surviving primaries plus secondary and tertiary buds) and they are apparently hardier than my other varieties.

*Also of interest was that my La Crosse had less sour rot than previous years, which I believe was due to the increased number of clusters. Increasing the number of clusters distributes the vigor among more clusters which reduces cluster size and berry count within a cluster. The clusters were looser, so the berries in the middle of the clusters were not crushed. I wouldn't recommend going over board with this method, because tons of small clusters are a lot harder to harvest than fewer large clusters. I am definitely going to leave at least an additional 10 buds per plant this year to see the impact. I can always thin them later.*

My Vignoles clusters looked different this year, too. I talked to another grower this summer and he noticed a difference in his Vignoles, also. Instead of having small, short clusters, our Vignoles had long, corn-cob shaped clusters. I hope this is a permanent change. I love Vignoles.

One other benefit I found resulting from the freeze (gotta' look for those silver linings) was that it caused latent buds to form on bare areas of my cordons. Two years ago, I had problems with apical dominance, where the vine is very vigorous at the yoke and the ends, but is 'naked' of buds in the middle. To correct this situation requires laying down a new cordon or cutting off the cordon starting at the bare section and laying a partial cordon down, so you lose part of your production that year. With latent buds filling in my cordons, I won't have to lay a new cordon down for, hopefully, a couple years.

Experiment and share your findings,

Karen Foster

## WEATHER HAPPENS!

by *Bernie Havlovic*

Over the years weather clichés have been passed down through generations of Midwestern farmers. “Red sky in the morning, sailor take warning” and “more rain, more grain” were examples of weather lore I learned early while growing up on a grain farm in eastern Nebraska. After five years as caretaker of the ISU Armstrong Research Farm vineyard I am convinced that each year’s weather is at least as important in determining the success of a grape crop as it is for corn and soybean crops. The old saying that “the weatherman always bats last” is true for everyone involved in Iowa agriculture.

As I see it, three separate weather events defined the 2007 grape growing season in southwest Iowa.

**The first occurred on January 16th** when the low temperature for the winter was recorded as 12 degrees below zero. The 12 below zero reading was the coldest recorded low since the vineyard has been in production and second only to a minus 14 reading in 2003. Winter injury was generally greatest on the cultivars considered to be “moderately hardy” for this area, while those considered to be “very hardy” exhibited very little or no injury. **Perhaps more significant to this year’s grape yields in southwest was the second weather event that occurred on April 6th.** An overnight low temperature of 14 degrees damaged the swollen primary buds on several cultivars.

Injury was most severe on cultivars that typically break bud early and on this date we had cultivars in the research vineyard that varied from “dormant” to “full swell”. Our winter injury bud ratings (which we had just completed), had to be retaken and adjustments in bud retention were made based on the primary bud mortality when injury exceeded 15% for American cultivars and 20% for French-American hybrids.

**The third weather event occurred on August 16th** and probably had more effect on the vineyard’s infrastructure than yield, but was damaging nonetheless. A severe thunderstorm produced very heavy rain and sustained winds with gusts over 65 mph for nearly 45 minutes. Saturated soil from previous rains and heavy fruit laden vines were whipped in the winds causing posts to lean or break and several end posts to be pulled from the ground. Temporary repairs to the broken line posts were made with steel fence posts to get us through the harvest season. After completing harvest the end post H-braces were reset and line posts straightened or replaced. Shawn Shouse (area extension ag & biosystems engineering specialist) suggested we strengthen our end posts by installing earth anchors 18 inches outside each end post and using a cable or wire tensioning tie to provide additional strength to the H-brace. The 28 inch anchors were installed prior to ground freeze-up and the cables will be installed next spring prior to tightening up the trellis wires. Hopefully this modification will help to prevent future problems.

What will next year’s weather be like? I have no idea, but there is one thing I know for sure — “average” Iowa weather is good for growing corn, soybeans and grapes and the closer to “average” our weather is the better I like it!

### King’s Crossing Winery is Looking to Buy White Grapes in 2008. . .

King’s Crossing is looking for more white grapes for 2008. We are also willing to supply cuttings of the varieties we grow at no cost to serious growers if they agree to sell the resulting crop to us. We are also available for hands-on training in the vineyard. Call Karen at 712-526-2486 or 712-526-2873 for more info.

King’s Crossing has a wonderful selection of dry, medium and sweet wines. We have won 3 medals in two wine competitions. Come taste what Iowa can produce.

Visit our website:

[www.kingscrossingvineyard.com](http://www.kingscrossingvineyard.com) for details.

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Option 1:

Set an earth anchor about 18" outside the end post and use a cable or a twisted wire tensioning tie to help hold the end post in the ground.



If setting earth anchors in post holes, I think you’d want to make a slight bell on the bottom of the hole using a spade or some other tool. Then pour just enough concrete to fill that bell area. The remaining hole could be filled with earth or rock for Option 1. The bell probably only needs to be a couple inches larger than the post hold.



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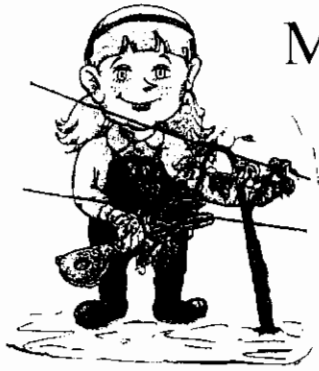
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### *Kent Bohlman Writes about Terroir*

Here are a few thoughts about *Terroir* and Iowa wine. Or maybe I should say Crawford County wine.

I have been a follower of Russian born New Jersey wine guru, Gary Vaynerchuk since he started his web cast of Wine Library TV. He is a young man who, since he was seventeen, has trained his palate and nose to discriminate differences in the aroma and flavor components of wine. I don't know if I would call myself a Vayniac, I don't have a Vayniac wrist band anyway, but watching him has taught me to have confidence and trust my own palate – as everyone should.

<http://tv.winelibrary.com/about>

There are things I have smelled and tasted in wine over the years that have caused me great concern – like not liking a wine when everyone around me is enthusiastic. I don't think I get it; I must not be a wine drinker.

But then Gary started sharing his descriptors of the world's wines, and many of them were similar to my own. Cool! I no longer doubt what my own palate is telling me about any given wine. Probably the one thing that has been the most problematic for me is the notion that vegetable characteristics are a no-no in red wine. But these are actually *preferred* by some people, and indeed are a characteristic of some grape varieties. For instance, take Cab Franc which I have labored to grow here in Crawford County the past eight years. Often

attempts are made to make it like a Cab Sauvignon. Preposterous, they are entirely different grapes. A good Cab Franc has vegetable in character. Yey! So does mine.

Now let's dig deeper. Often I will hear about the flower components in a wine. Violets, lavender – you get the idea. But guess what! The flower components are most likely intimately related to grape blossom. I was never fond of DeChaunac. People who were drinking a DeChaunac and ooing and aahing, I thought were just being nice. One spring I was walking by my DeChaunac and the scent of the blossoms was so cloying that it almost made me pass out right there in the vine rows. But a light bulb went on in my head, and I realized **that** is what I was tasting in the DeChaunac wine. It doesn't mean I like it any better, but at least now I know what it is that I don't like. (Yes I have had a couple that were quite good, in my estimation, but the aroma was not so heavy with grape blossom.)

I have become aware of the aroma of grape blossom in a good number of the wines wine from my vineyard. Certainly the French hybrids – and the black grapes especially. It may be if you are a wine drinker, but do not get out in the vineyards at bloom, you may perceive grape blossom aromas and flavors as violets, lavender, honeysuckle or what ever blossom you use to identify this character. But it is my belief what you are picking up on the nose and on the palate is the grape blossom of that grape. At least in my vineyard you are. I

[continued from page 6] can't wait to get into a Shiraz or Merlot, or Cab vineyard at blossom so I can learn the aromas of those blossoms and see if I pick it up in the wines.

Okay, I may be sharing something that everyone knows, at least everyone who has spent some time in a vineyard and spent time with the wine of that vineyard. Well, I do get it now.

*Now I would like to share my experience in discovering the terroir of the vineyards in the grapes that grow there. Having 33 or so varieties, I have come to pick up a connecting aroma and more so a flavoe (this may be silly because in tasting a wine the aroma still has a lot to do with flavor given the number of receptors we have in are head compared to the number on the tongue) that I can find in most of my grape wines. (By the way I am not a wine maker, I only make wine trials from my grapes.)*

Most of my white and black grapes deliver these earthy flavors and aromas. What I call smoky flavors are most noticeable in the whites but also present in the reds. And the reds have a candy corn and caramel corn component present in most of them. HmMMM, can't be the corn growing everywhere around here prior to growing these grapes. Coincidence, I think. Not the same kind of corn at all.

In most cases my team of tasters and sniffers and I have come to recognize the loess clay in my wines. These feature a mushroomy, truffle, earthy, humus, sweaty sock, mineral, spice, cinnamon, clay - and something else that I have not been able to name. In many cases the combination of the terroir and grape blossom along with whatever fruit (normally sour cherry, raspberry, strawberry, blueberry, cassis) or vegetable (asparagus, bell pepper, broccoli, green tomato) happens to show itself in the wine - all of this about gives me brain-overload. I have to stop the evaluation for the day and come back later. In many cases I try to blend in a way that will tone all this noise down. Thank goodness for my team of tasters. And yes wine makers, you do need a team. Even the guy that tastes pig shit in your St. Croix is giving you good service.

I have to admit that I spend a great deal more time in **my** vineyard than any other vineyard here in Iowa. I am finding that my wines taste a lot more like some nice Italian reds I have tasted. Even some French wines - the Rhone Valley and even more western French regional wines. Not too many remind me of California wine. When I get a fruity one - which isn't as often as I would like, at least today - I get pretty excited. (I love the Aussie fruit bombs).

Deciding on whether to approach our wines with new world or old world sensibilities, or just using a pragmatic approach, can be difficult. But whatever the approach, it is imperative that we recognize the aromas and flavors in our wine. But for me my best blends have come about once I

learned to recognize the *terroir* from my soil. Fruit bomb, or veg to the max, it's there! Recognize it and use it. It can be wonderful. It may just be my good fortune to have a desirable location for my grape growing efforts. Time will tell. I love that in making great wine, time is on your side. There is no rush.

After the past four years I am at last sitting here with a three gallon blend of what I believe to be some of the better red wine from my vineyard and it has the *terroir* that I have come to recognize from the grapes that grow in Mira-Nat Vineyards on the eastern slopes of the west Boyer River Valley here in Crawford County Iowa.

*Blind tastings with other world-class wines have been a blast. The problem is my tasters now know the terroir of my wine, and it has been hard to fool them. But they are sometimes not sure which one is mine; they only guess and question, "Is it this one?" I suppose I should be a sport and tell them, "Yes it is", but instead I only advise them, "Trust your own palate."*

*Kent Bohlmann - Mira-Nat Vineyards*

[Editor's Comment: Because of the Loess soil, excellent drainage conditions, and agreeable climate, I fully expect the viculturists and winemakers of Western Iowa to produce wine to equal the very best French and German wines.]

**"Terroir" and "Gran Cru" are two terms that are sometimes used (and misused) by wine fanciers. Here, in abbreviated form, is what Wikipedia has on the subject:**

**Terroir** was originally a French term in wine, coffee and tea used to denote the special characteristics that geography bestowed upon them. It can be very loosely translated as "a sense of place" which is embodied in certain qualities, and the sum of the effects that the local environment has had on the manufacture of the product. At its core is the assumption that the land from the which the grapes are grown imparts a unique quality that is specific to that region. The amount of influence and the scope that falls under the description of terroir has been a controversial topic in the wine industry.

A **grand cru**, French for "great growth", is a regional wine classification that designates a vineyard known for its favorable reputation in producing wine. It is not a classification of wine quality per se, but rather the potential of the site or terroir. It is the highest level of classification of AOC wines from Burgundy or Alsace. The same term is used in Saint-Émilion and Champagne, but there it refers to a differing level of classification. In Burgundy the level following Grand cru is known as premier cru.

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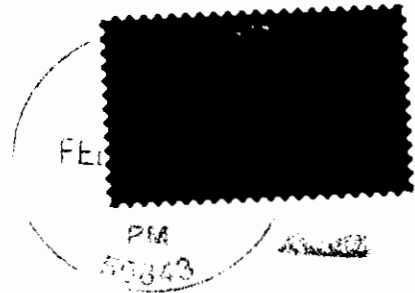
"Nothing equals the joy of the drinker, except the joy of the wine in being drunk." — French Saying  
 "To take wine into our mouths is to savor a droplet of the river of human history." — Clifton Fadiman  
 "The wine urges me on, bewitching wine, which sets even a wise man singing and laughing gently." — Homer  
 "This wine is too good for toast-drinking, my dear. You don't want to mix emotions up with a wine like that. You lose the taste." — Ernest Hemingway  
 "Good wine is a necessity of life for me." — Thomas Jefferson  
 "To Alcohol: the cause of, and solution to all of life's problems!" — Homer Simpson  
 "Wine improves with age - I like it more the older I get." — Anonymous  
 "No poem was ever written by a drinker of water." — Horace  
 "Water separates people of the world; wine unites them." — Anonymous  
 "Wine is life." — Petronius  
 "Wine makes daily living easier, less hurried, with fewer tensions and more tolerance." — Benjamin Franklin

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