

GrapeLines

Reviews of Kosher and Non-Kosher Wines, Spirits and Other Liquid Pleasures

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Labors Of Love

Reviews of the **B.R. Cohn Trestle Glen Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2011**, the **Agua Dulce Winery Syrah 2010**, and the **Angel's Envy Rye Whiskey**.

By **Joshua E. London** and **Lou Marmon**

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Beyond all the many good-to-excellent kosher wineries out there slaking the growing thirst of the kosher consumer, we always enjoy it when some well-established and prestigious nonkosher winery gets in on the act and produces a limited batch of kosher wines. These days, as often as not, these limited run wines are pet projects of the winery — more a labor of love by the producer, than a contract-fulfillment for someone wanting to market the next "hot" kosher Bordeaux or whatever.

Pardon the digression, but in fact the vast majority of the various kosher French wines that are available, for example, have been made under special arrangement in this fashion as wine-by-contract for larger entities like the **Herzog's Royal Wine Corp.** Some of these are good wines and some of these are even outstanding wines, which on occasion are even better than the nonkosher version being released by the same producer. Indeed, outside of a couple of domestic kosher wine pioneers, this contract-production arrangement is largely how dry kosher table wines came crawling into the modern kosher marketplace in the 1980s.

It's the other kind of limited-release kosher wine, however, that we particularly look for. Why would a nonkosher winery suddenly jump into the kosher wine market? Maybe the winemaker or winery owner is Jewish and wants to connect to their roots, or prove a point, or lost a bet, or whatever. We don't necessarily care. Their marketing reps, if they are large enough to have one, will likely spin something nice and heimish or schmaltzy anyway. What matters most is that they approach the kosher wine with the pride and integrity with which they approach their other nonkosher wines. If they are actually proud of the wine, and happy that it stands beside all these other wines, then it is probably worth consideration. On the downside, it could mean that their distribution for kosher consumers is probably fairly limited. Here are two worthy examples:

Sonoma's **B.R. Cohn Winery** released their OU certified kosher **Trestle Glen Estate Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2011** (\$50) this past Labor Day weekend. Limited to 300 cases, it is available online (brcohn.com) or at their tasting room and based on the response to their first kosher vintage of 2008, it would be a good idea to place an order soon. When the winery released its 2008 vintage (which was only 400 cases), the Cohn family made clear: "We're a Jewish family and a Jewish winery. We wanted that [kosher] symbol on the front of the label." The 2011 version is softer and more elegant than the bigger cabernets often created in Napa. It shows dark plum, cherry and raspberry flavors within a medium-bodied, slightly spicy and herbal frame along with cedar, chocolate and blackberries in the longish finish.

Further south, brings an even more exciting development in kosher wine. The **Agua Dulce Winery** just released their first-ever kosher vintage: the **2010 Cabernet Sauvignon**, the **2010 Zinfandel**, and the **2010 Syrah** (all OU certified, nonmevushal). These are not only new kosher wines, which ought to be exciting enough, but these wines are the triumphal return of Craig Winchell to the kosher wine market.

The winemaker at the **Agua Dulce Winery** as of August 2010, Winchell is not only a Torah-observant Jew and a UC Davis-trained winemaker, but he is also an old hand at producing incredible wine. Winchell was previously the owner, operator, and vintner of the legendary **Gan Eden Winery** of Sebastopol, Calif. He lamentably sold the winery and got out of the wine

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business in 2005, but returned to winemaking, as the winemaker at the **Agua Dulce Winery**.

Located in Agua Dulce in the Sierra Pelona Valley, in northern Los Angeles County, the winery was established in 1999 by Don and Cathy MacAdam. The Sierra Pelona Valley is a relatively new American Viticultural Area (AVA), producing quality grapes that are very different from Napa or the Central Coast — high desert plains (2,800 ft), alternating between high heat and cool climate. Their nonkosher wine is sold directly through the winery, and its avid wine club — all nonkosher oriented. **Ague Dulce's** limited production kosher wines, by contrast, are being sold exclusively (so far) by just a handful of online wine retailers like kosherwine.com and liquidkosher.com.

Consider the **Agua Dulce Winery Syrah 2010** (\$33). This wonderful syrah offers lovely dark fruits (black cherry), complex herbal notes (violet), rich oak, and vibrant acidity balanced nicely with the well-integrated tannins. Drinking beautifully now, this promises to improve with proper storage over the next few years. This is one to savor with friends and family.

Spirits-wise, with most of the current run of holidays behind us now, we thought we'd finally take a moment to express our sadness on the passing of industry icon **Lincoln Henderson**, aged 75. Henderson was one of the pioneers of premium bourbon and whiskeys at **Brown-Forman**. Among the well-known premium bourbon brands he worked on are **Woodford Reserve**, **Jack Daniel's Gentleman Jack**, and **Jack Daniel's Single Barrel**.

He retired from **Brown-Forman** in 2004, and then continued to pioneer premium bourbon with his own label. Working closely with his son Wes and grandson Kyle in experimenting with bourbon finished in barrels previously used for sherry, rum, tequila, brandy and port, they started the **Angel's Envy** brand in 2006. The next release will be coming out sometime in October, if the previous releases are anything to go by, it'll be very good indeed. Once we've tasted it, we'll report back. In the interim, we toast Lincoln's memory with this:

Angel's Envy Rye Whiskey (50 percent abv; \$70): How on earth the late master distiller Lincoln Henderson came up with this seemingly bizarre process formula for this **Angel's Envy Rye** is absolutely beyond us; on several levels this ought not to work, yet it does — brilliantly! First he sourced rye whiskey (distilled from a mash bill of 95 percent rye and 5 percent malted barley and matured for at least six years in American oak barrels) from Midwest Grain Products. He then subjected this mature whiskey to (up to) 18 months of finishing in French oak casks that were previously used to finish **Plantation XO 20th Anniversary Barbados Rum** for 18 to 24 months (and before that, to mature Pierre Ferrand Cognac). The net result, surprisingly, is a sweetish whiskey with vibrant, spicy rye notes (cinnamon and mint), weirdly tamed yet not smothered by rich maple syrup, and exhibiting additional aromas and flavors of graham crackers, gingerbread, creamy vanilla, nutty toffee, some gentle tropical fruit and golden raisins. The medium-length finish offers more rum than rye notes, but the interplay throughout just works. *L'Chaim!*

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