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Nobel Banquet Wine



Swedish Winery in California Making a Success

“We felt
Nobel



California grapes, soon to become wine. West Wines, owned by Swedes, is the first U.S. winery to deliver wine to the Nobel Prize banquet.

like we got the prize ourselves!

In the mid-1970s, the famed “Judgment of Paris” competition proved that American wines were just as worthy as their French counterparts. Despite the accolades for Golden State vintages, however, one prestigious venue remained resistant to U.S. wines: the Nobel Prize banquet. From 1901 to 2010, no Nobel winner had ever toasted his or her victory with an American vino.

The streak was finally broken by a wine produced by, appropriately enough, a Swedish couple: Katarina Bonde and Bengt Åkerlind. Their

winery, West Wines, is located on the west side of the Dry Creek Valley near Healdsburg, California, a charming town about 70 miles northwest of San Francisco. The “Nobel wine,” selected by a panel of experts in a blind tasting, was a Cabernet Sauvignon, which was paired with a dish of fried truffled turbot, winter salad with chanterelles and truffled oxtail gravy.

“That was very exciting,” said Bonde of receiving the honor. “We felt like we got the Nobel prize ourselves!”

Bonde and Åkerlind emigrated

from their hometown of Stockholm to Seattle in 1992 to work in the IT industry. After friends invited them to visit Sonoma County, they fell in love with the area and purchased a 60-acre vineyard a few years later. Initially, they planned to use it for weekend getaways, but in 2002, they began producing wines, and Bonde eventually went on to earn a Winemaker Certificate from the University of California at Davis’ world-renowned Department of Viticulture and Enology.

Their Cabernet Sauvignon may be West Wines’ best-known varietal,



A relaxed afternoon, tasting wines at West Wines winery in California. The company is run by a Swedish couple who came to the U.S. to work in the IT industry.



West Wines Prides Itself on Being Environmentally Friendly

but they also make Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Viognier, all under the direction of consulting winemaker and general manager Phyllis Zouzounis. The vintners have just started offering their first dessert wine, Late Harvest Viognier.

“Phyllis and I work closely together,” said Bonde of her relationship with Zouzounis. “She has been making wines for over 30 years, and I have learned a lot from her experience. Each vintage of the various wines we have a specific plan for that I create and discuss with her. Bengt and I are the ones who make the decision on exactly what taste profile and style we are after with each wine. Then Phyllis and I will discuss specific steps at critical stages during fermentation, we sample grapes and discuss when it is time to pick. We will sample wines together and discuss how the outcome relates to the specific harvest, so it is an intertwined relationship.”

West Wines prides itself on being environmentally friendly; they have worked to minimize their use of energy and water while building out their capacity of solar power. They also use natural pest control methods, such as using cover crops between vine rows, which create nutrition for the plants while serving as a habitat for beneficial insects.

Customers in the United States can order wine via the web site, wes-

twines.com, though a visit to their modern and comfortable tasting room is highly recommended. (Visitors to the area should check the web site to see if there are any events planned; the winery frequently offers special tastings, dinners, and even a Swedish glögg-and-cookie party before Christmas.)

In Sweden, all of West’s wines are available via special order at Systembolaget (the government-owned liquor stores), and several restaurants in Stockholm, including Stadshuskällaren, Pontus! and Sturehof, have their vintages on the menu.

Bonde and Åkerlind visit Sweden frequently and host events there as well. Bonde has found that Sweden is home to “a huge number of extremely knowledgeable wine drink-

ers,” even more so than in the U.S. She is always happy to offer tastings to Swedish wine clubs and businesses, and to share information about the history of wine cultivation in the Sonoma region.

On a recent visit to Sweden, Bonde met with members of Munsänkarna (“the cup-bearers”), a 55-year-old nonprofit with over 20,000 wine enthusiasts, at a wine fair in Östersund. Bonde was “blown away” by the members’ interest “not just in wine in general, but all the different styles and methods from around the globe. They are not sommeliers or professionals, but beat many professionals with their professionalism. What a cool organization!”

Susanne Trowbridge



Sunny California is a good place for a winery, where the quality of the wines match those of traditional wine producing countries such as France.