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Early Harvest on Lamorinda Hills

By Cathy Dausman



Dave Parker pulls open the netting that has been protecting his ripening grapes from birds as the sun rises on harvest day at Parkmon Vineyards. Photo Andy Scheck

Lamorinda area, all of which are racing against the clock while the harvest comes in two weeks ahead of schedule.

"They picked two vineyards in Orinda yesterday," Parker said.

Their east by southeast hillside is sheltered from wind and fog by nearby Mulholland Ridge. The couple grows the Rhone varietals viognier, grenache, syrah, and mourvedre, as well as zinfandel, all of which thrive in clay soil and warm weather.

The white wine grapes as well as pinot noir and merlot were harvested by early September, with the focus now turning to cabernet, sangiovese, and syrah. With help from Clifton, Rodrigo Loera Garcia, and daughter Ali, Parker expected to finish picking that morning's round of grapes "in about three hours."

With the art of gardening completed, the science of winemaking begins.



Parkmon Vineyards owner Dave Parker and his daughter, Ali, pick grapes while wife, and co-owner Shari Simon looks on from the distance. Photo Cathy Dausman

The early morning sunshine splashed along the hillside and the enticing scent of ripe grapes made the awkward slope-side climb a bit easier. It was 7 a.m., first light, and already Parkmon Vineyards owner Dave Parker was outside, pulling back nets to prepare for the harvest.

"This is a pretty busy time of year," Parker said, explaining that weather wise, this could be one of the best harvests in their 10 years as vintners. "It was an even, uniform growing season" - never too hot. They expect fruit exceptional in quality and quantity, but said "it's going to be a race between the birds and yellow jackets."

Yellow jackets like the sun-ripened fruit as much as humans do, and they're not shy about burrowing into a ripe grape.

Those who dare disturb the clusters they light on may feel them burrowing into fingers, so pickers, beware.

Gathering the harvest is "hot and sticky work," Parker said; he was stung at least once while working the slopes.

After picking, the grapes get pressed and prepared for fermentation. Parkmon Vineyards (Parker supplies the label's first syllable; his wife, co-owner Shari Simon makes up its second half) expects to put up about 1,100 bottles of wine this year, said assistant winemaker Scott Clifton.

Parkmon is one of approximately 18 vineyards in the

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