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Moondance Cellars

By James Knight

Bohemians, bikers and garden-variety vacationers have long found a haven in Glen Ellen, a rambling hamlet in the heart of Sonoma Valley, yet forever off the beaten track. Formerly anchoring a co-op tasting room in Kenwood, Moondance is the latest idiosyncratic winery to seek more tourist traffic in Jack London Village, the delightfully funky assembly of restaurants and shops whose ups and downs some blame on an Indian curse possibly associated with legacy landlord General Mariano Vallejo. Or so I've heard.

"A passion for wine" is pretty much a given in such joints: dogs, Cabs and cars—with a bone thrown for Petaluma and Santa Rosa Railroad history buffs—are the focus here. Owner David Cohen is happy to warm up to any of these topics and more. When a supercharged 1965 Corvette is parked in front, it's a sure sign the vintner is in the house. Cohen has been under the hood of one sport coupe or other since age 13. He rolled into the valley for a weekend in the 1980s and never left, first helping cousin Bruce Cohn to manage his new winery and vineyard. David Cohen hauled grapes and held sundry other gigs to make a go of it in the early days, forming relationships with growers that play key roles in his vintage's success today.

Along with the svelte Moondance label, the Cohen's "Orchard Station" is a nod to their south Sebastopol stop on the long-defunct P&SR. David and Priscilla Cohen are also supporters of Canine Companions for Independence, and for case purchasers they will put "any dog on any wine." Any time.

The 2007 "Friendly Dog" Gewürztraminer (\$16) is a really nice sip, with aromas of orange blossom and jasmine, and was recently on sale for just \$60 by the case. The 2003 Sangiovese (\$20) zips to the top of the palate with bright, red cherry fruit, but Cab is Cohen's favorite toy to tinker with, and it shows. While the 2007 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$24) packs in saturated blueberry fruit, it leads to a spritely finish. Ripe with more date, prune and fig flavors, the 2004 Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon (\$46) ratchets down in velvet. While individual aromas don't stand out in the 2004 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$54), neither does extraneous oak in this densely knitted wine.

Graham cracker, dark earth and chocolate meet a bright, raspberry leading edge to get the 2005 Rutherford Bench Cabernet Sauvignon (\$65) going, and then it keeps on going. Nothing funky about this wine, but if it's absolutely necessary to spit after swirling, the spittoon is an old porcelain bathroom sink, in true funky style.

Moondance Cellars, 14301 Arnold Drive, Glen Ellen. Open daily 11am to 6pm. \$5 tasting fee. 707.938.7550.

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