

## Big House and Cardinal Zin go from Bonny Doon to The Wine Group

1 Aug 2006 by JR

Randall Grahm of Bonny Doon is seeking to return to his roots and concentrate on truly terroir- driven, biodynamic wines by selling his two most successful wine brands, Big House and Cardinal Zin to The Wine Group LLC, the management- owned wine company based in San Francisco. The Wine Group produces the likes of Franzia, Concannon, Glen Ellen, Corbett Canyon, Foxhorn, Fish Eye, Mogen David, Casarsa, and Tribuno. Founded in 1981 by a management buy- out of the wine assets of The Coca- Cola Bottling Company of New York, The Wine Group currently claims to be the world's third largest wine producer by volume.

We are not told the purchase price but it will presumably give Grahm some time to breathe, dream up a few of the aphorisms which make him so quotable that he has been banned as a source by some wine editors (he makes life just too easy for us journalists....) and do some strategic thinking rather than just chasing his tail trying to keep up with the quantities needed for these highly successful brands.

"I had envisioned a catchy headline like, 'Big House brand escapes the shackles of the tyranny of terroirism,' but thought better of it," commented Grahm. "We have been joking around for so long, it is hard for people to know when we are in fact serious." Le Cigare Volant, his homage to Châteauneuf- du- Pape, along with other well- known wines this prototype Rhône Ranger has created over the years will continue to be wholly owned, produced and sold by Bonny Doon. It is planned that the Pacific Rim brand, mainly Riesling, will relocate its production to the state of Washington and will eventually function as an autonomous entity distinct from that of Bonny Doon Vineyard.

"The rapid growth of [these two brands] in the last several years has stressed our own resources and infrastructure to the max," stated Grahm. "This sale allows us to return to our roots, as it were, and re- focus on the production of unique and distinctive, biodynamically produced wines, ones that will truly express a sense of place. I have been raving on long enough about the transcendental value of terroir; it is now time to translate mere words into deeds. (We are not so much down- sizing, as doon- sizing, creating a company that is more congruent with our deepest values.) That being said, it has been an exhilarating and heady ride to grow the brands as we have done. I greatly appreciate the contributions and efforts of those dedicated souls who have helped build these brands with us."

Fritz Lance, President of Underdog Wine Merchants, commented, "This is a tremendous opportunity to add two truly iconic brands to our international portfolio of fun and distinctive wines. Big House and Cardinal Zin will be right at home with our emerging brands such as Pinot Evil, Tempra Tantrum, Killer Juice and Herding Cats [at this point I wondered whether this entire thing wasn't some uberspoof – JR]. We don't envision making any changes to Mr Grahm's inspired blends and we hope to build upon his tradition of dynamic and innovative packaging."

Big House, launched in 1990, and Cardinal Zin were among the first super premium California wines to be offered for wide- scale distribution en Stelvin™ screwcap, which began with the 2001 vintage, and has helped to propel the overall acceptance of screwcap closures in the American market.

### **Paul Tudor, Basket Press, NZ:**

Speaking of Pinot Evil and Killer Juice, I note that this story on Randall Grahm's latest (ad)ventures has Last updated "31 July 2006" and Publication date "1 Aug 06". Talk about "uberspoof". This odd conjunction of dates adds an even great air of unreality to the story... And while on Herding Cats, have any Purple Pagets tried the wine? I am REALLY curious (sorry - bad joke.)

me:

Now you, on whom the sun rises first, should most easily understand this strange disjunction. I wrote the article at 8am 01 aug, my time here in Sydney, but when it was published, it was still (just) 31 jul back in the UK where the jancisrobinson.com Meisterclock is kept. As for Herding Cats etc, I have not an inkling either.

### **Mel Knox, San Francisco:**

I heard that Killer Juice is what Mel Gibson was drinking when he got pulled over by a Jewish cop in LA.

I have had the Herding Cats wine...I thought it was a bit mousy...