

# Orangewood Wines

*Small Wineries, Great Wines*

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## Introduction

This month brings us to our twentieth year of selling wine in Arizona. Leslie writes about Orangewood Wines' first winery.

## Vino Noceto

### Portfolio Notes - by Leslie Zellmer

It all started with one wine: Vino Noceto Sangiovese. Richard and Laurie were gifted some bottles of this wine from a friend. They really liked the wine, but couldn't find any to buy in Arizona after they depleted their supply. So, like any wine lovers would do, they jumped in the car and headed for the Shenandoah Valley of California. They showed up at the Vino Noceto Winery, did the tour and happily filled their vehicle with cases of wine. Richard suggested to Suzy and Jim Gullett, the owners of Vino Noceto, that they should find a distributor in Arizona. (In those days, wineries were prohibited from shipping wine to Arizona directly.) Jim suggested Richard and Laurie should do it. So it began.

During an extended trip to Tuscany, the Gulletts had learned all they could about growing Sangiovese, and they declared their property in Amador County to be a wonderful place to do that. They returned home and procured cuttings from 1970's suitcase vines (a popular way to get vines to the U.S. from Europe back then) from famed Sangiovese vineyards. Jim and Suzy released their first vintage of Sangiovese in 1990 from those plantings. They now have 25 acres planted to mostly Sangiovese, with a sprinkling of Moscato, Barbera, Zinfandel, Aglianico and Pinot Grigio.

When I worked at a restaurant/wine bar called D’Vine (Hey, Mark and Ramon!), we often had Vino Noceto Sangiovese featured on the "by the glass" menu. It was my favorite wine for converting white wine drinkers to red wine. It worked 99% of the time, due to its low tannins, beautiful fruit profile and lovely acidity. It is amazing with food, yet oh so delicious by itself.

When I joined Orangewood, I was delighted to learn Vino Noceto wines were in the portfolio. That meant that I would still get the chance to sell (and drink) their wine. It also has offered me a chance to work with Jim Gullett a couple of times. He came here to represent the winery at KJZZ's First Press Arizona, a black-tie charity event. The picture featured is from that event. My favorite "Jim moment" is when we took a selfie together. He said it was his first selfie! We had a good chuckle about that.



Cheers to 20 years, Richard and Laurie!

## The Rambler

Wow! Twenty years. As Leslie summarized above, we had no idea that we would be wine distributors, but following our visit to Jim and Suzy Gullett at the end of 2000, we studied the opportunity and took it. One of the things we did before signing up, was to establish a thin thread of feasibility. Could we get the requisite Federal and Arizona licenses (yes)? What winery would like us to distribute their wine (Vino Noceto)? Where would we warehouse the wine? How would we ship the wine here? Who would deliver the wine (me)? Who would sell the wine (me)? Who would buy our wine? This was a key question. We asked the Territorial Bar and Grill in Cave Creek (now defunct) whether they would buy our wine if we became distributors. As we ate there twice a week, the answer was “of course”. It was the wrong question. We should have asked if they would sell our wine, to which the answer was actually “no”. They bought two bottles, put them on the shelf and they were still there when we brought friends to drink them. They did replace them, but there was not much ongoing business.

So, here I was, the only sales person trying to sell wine. But, I got so much help from owners and sommeliers. I would go along with my bottle of wine, and forget my corkscrew. Then I would find the potential customer liked the wine, but did not feel that Sangiovese would work in their restaurant, so, what else did I have in my portfolio? “What’s a portfolio?” I asked. We soon found more wineries.

Then I realized that I could not manage so many customers. I couldn't remember their names; I didn't take notes on what we had tasted; some wanted to "taste" all afternoon, so that I struggled to drive home. I found my first sales person. Yes, Dick, that would be you.

Now that we were doing better and had more sales, I couldn't keep up with deliveries. My father-in-law's best man, Greg, was bored. He had bought a truck and was looking for work. We bought a big white cooler to put in the back and some ice packs. He could deliver 3 cases. A second cooler, 6 cases. Then we bought a little van for Greg to drive. It could hold 14 cases.

Our portfolio grew and needed care and attention. One of our sales people stepped up to the plate. Thank you, Leslie.

The rambler looks forward to the continuing challenges...

Cheers,

Richard and Laurie  
Orangewood Wines

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