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## Under the Caranos' Stewardship

By Bob Johnson

The last time I'd been to Lazy Creek Vineyards, an elderly gentleman named Hans Kobler was the owner, winemaker and chief barrel washer. And I recall that his wife did everything else. It was a "family" winery in every sense of the word.



(<http://winelinesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/LazyCreek1.jpg>)

*Lazy Creek Vineyards has been producing world-class*

*Gewurztraminer for years, and now is focusing on Pinot Noir.*

Kobler was friendly enough, but he had a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude about his wines. He wasn't interested in talking about trellising or barrel charring or engaging in the then-raging real cork-versus-synthetic cork debate. All he cared about, it seemed to me, was what was in the glass.

Did the wine have a pleasant aroma that echoed the grapes from which it was made? Was there appropriate weight to the mouthfeel? Were the fruit and oak flavors happily married, rather than quarreling with one another? Was the finish long and clean?

Kobler was a hands-on winemaker who considered what he did a craft. He wasn't sure he was born to make wine, but he knew how to make wine that he liked.

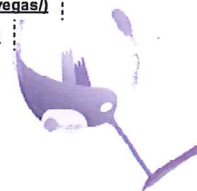
Take it or leave it.

At the time of that first visit, Kobler had two wines available for drop-in customers to taste: [a concentrated, fruit-sweet Gewurztraminer \(http://winelinesonline.com/1997/12/1996-lazy-creek-gewurztraminer-anderson-valley/\)](http://winelinesonline.com/1997/12/1996-lazy-creek-gewurztraminer-anderson-valley/), and a rather simple [Chardonnay \(http://winelinesonline.com/1997/12/1996-lazy-creek-chardonnay-anderson-valley/\)](http://winelinesonline.com/1997/12/1996-lazy-creek-chardonnay-anderson-valley/). Utilizing Kobler's take-it-or-leave-it approach, I would have taken the Gewurztraminer and left the Chardonnay. (And if I recall correctly, I purchased a case of the Gewurztraminer, the best I've tasted from a winegrowing region — Mendocino County's Anderson Valley — that's known for the variety.)

Since that visit, Lazy Creek has changed hands — twice. I missed the second proprietors, Josh and Mary Beth Chandler, entirely. But when I heard that Lazy Creek had been acquired by Don and Rhonda Carano of Ferrari-Carano Vineyards, I knew I had to get reacquainted.

Tasting partner Glen Frederiksen and I did just that recently with Lazy Creek's not-yet-released [2012 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir \(http://winelinesonline.com/2014/04/2012-lazy-creek-vineyards-pinot-noir-anderson-valley/\)](http://winelinesonline.com/2014/04/2012-lazy-creek-vineyards-pinot-noir-anderson-valley/), a gorgeous wine that's drinking nicely now and figures to get even better with two or three more years of bottle aging.

For most of its existence, Lazy Creek was a well-kept secret, a place you'd find only if you were looking for it. Its sign along Anderson Valley's main drag was easy to miss, and if you happened to see it and successfully negotiated the turn without being rear-ended, a long, winding, mostly one-lane dirt road awaited. I remember traversing that road at about 5-mph and, after about five minutes, wondering whether it actually led to a winery.



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BUT WE'RE NOT AS OLD AS  
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**WINE TIP #97:**

Your nose is your friend. Use it or lose it.

## RATINGS EXPLAINED

**80-84 points:** A sound wine that shows varietal character. **85-89 points:** An unflawed wine that shows some depth and concentration of aromas and flavors. **90-93 points:** A Gold Medal wine of its type, showing balance, depth and secondary flavor profiles found in the best of its style. **94-97 points:** Hedonistic pleasure in a glass. Remarkable balance, aromas, flavor and length. A pure expression of the varietal or type. **98-100 points:** A wine for the ages! Will drink sublimely for decades. [Learn more here \(http://winelinesonline.com/our-ratings/\)](http://winelinesonline.com/our-ratings/)!





(<http://winelinesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/LazyCreek3.jpg>)

*The original winery structure has been retained by new owners Don and Rhonda Carano.*

It did. Sort of. The "winery" was more like a barn, and the "tasting room" consisted of a few planks of wood placed atop a couple of oak barrels. Kobler greeted us, almost wearily, but brightened up a bit when we expressed pleasure in drinking his Gewurztraminer. It was his favorite wine, but because of its tricky-to-pronounce name, it could be challenging to sell — until people tasted it.

In the ensuing years, as outside investors populated Anderson Valley and expanded vineyard plantings, Pinot Noir has emerged as the star variety. It's obvious that Lazy Creek's new owners plan to emphasize Pinot, and they'll be selling it not from a barn, but rather an ultra-modern winery and tasting room that opened to the public last month.

While state-of-the-art on the inside, the new facility was constructed to blend with the terrain and the original winery structure. This was accomplished by utilizing several small, interconnected structures, and the use of a native stone wainscot treatment with natural finished redwood batt and board siding.



(<http://winelinesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/LazyCreek2.jpg>)

*The expanded facility is state-of-the-art, yet blends in nicely with the terrain.*

As for the future, Don Carano is clearly focused on Pinot Noir.

Said Carano in a media release: "We truly believe that with the unique blocks of land we have acquired and developed these last five years in the Anderson Valley, Lazy Creek Vineyards will continue to produce Pinot Noirs of exceptional character, complexity and nuances."

And here's hoping Lazy Creek continues to produce outstanding Gewurztraminer as well.



## BLOGROLL

**DC Fud** (<http://www.dcfud.com>)

**Fermentation: The Daily Wine Blog**  
(<http://fermentation.typepad.com/>)

**Herb Lamb Vineyards**  
(<http://www.herblambvineyards.com/>)

**New Ruby Press** (<http://www.newrubypress.com/>)

**Reverse Wine Snob**  
(<http://www.reversewinesnob.com>)

**Sediment** (<http://sedimentblog.blogspot.com/>)

**Terroirist** (<http://blog.terroirist.com/>)

**Traveling Liz – L'Appel du Vide**  
(<http://www.travelingliz.com/>)

**Vino Freakism** (<http://vinofreakism.com/>)

**Vinography** (<http://www.vinography.com/>)

**WSR Wine Blog** (<http://wsrgroup.wordpress.com/>)



**WINELINES**  
not your typical bunch

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[Lazy Creek Vineyards \(http://www.lazycreekvineyards.com/\)](http://www.lazycreekvineyards.com/) is located at 4741 Highway 128 in Philo, Calif. The new tasting room is open Thursday through Monday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For further information, call 707-895-3623.



(<http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwinelinesonline.com%2F2014%2F05%2Fazy-creek-vineyards-a-new-chapter-begins-under-the-caranos-stewardship%2F>)



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This entry was posted on Thursday, May 8th, 2014 at 1:25 pm. It is filed under [Apellation Trail](http://winelinesonline.com/category/apellation/) (<http://winelinesonline.com/category/apellation/>), [Blog](http://winelinesonline.com/category/blogs/) (<http://winelinesonline.com/category/blogs/>) and tagged with [Ferrari-Carani](http://winelinesonline.com/tag/ferrari-carani/) (<http://winelinesonline.com/tag/ferrari-carani/>), [Lazy Creek](http://winelinesonline.com/tag/lazy-creek/) (<http://winelinesonline.com/tag/lazy-creek/>). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](http://winelinesonline.com/2014/05/lazy-creek-vineyards-a-new-chapter-begins-under-the-caranos-stewardship/feed/) (<http://winelinesonline.com/2014/05/lazy-creek-vineyards-a-new-chapter-begins-under-the-caranos-stewardship/feed/>) feed.

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