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## The Crush is On

By Andrea A. Firth



Dave Parker and daughter Jessalyn picking Photo Andy Scheck

Dave Parker turns and waves his hand high above the row of grapevines behind him in response to the sounds of his daughter who is yelling goodbye as she departs for kindergarten. Allie knows just where to position herself on the driveway so that her father can see her from where he is perched up on the hill between two long rows of vines. They exchange a few secret hand signals, and she heads off to Rheem Elementary School down the street from their home. Although Dave and his colleague Mike have been picking grapes-today it's Voignier-since the break of dawn and they face another four or five hours of picking to complete the harvest, he is relaxed. Parker is dressed comfortably in shorts and sweatshirt and has a few days facial stubble-a winegrower's uniform. Allie and her sister Jessalyn were out helping him to pick earlier, and he plans to take a tray of the sweet, marble-sized green grapes to Allie's class for a taste test later that day. This intermingling of work and family life suits Parker whose commercial wine making venture, Parkmon Vineyards, has grown consistently over the past three years. This is the tenth lot that Parker has harvested in the past eleven days. Parker picked lots of Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc grapes in late August. His first harvests in Moraga were at the start of September: three lots of Pinot Noir grapes from the backyards of local vineyard owners who have Parker produce their wine. "In 2007, we ended up picking about 12 tons of grapes and making close to 600 cases," states Parker "This year, I've planned for about 14 tons and about 700 cases, but so far, yields have been coming in so low that we may end up a bit short of that estimate." Parker has reached capacity for what he can produce and store in his home-based wine making operation. If he decides to expand-and he and his wife and business partner Shari are not quite sure that they want to-he'll have to look elsewhere for space. The wine-making facility tentatively included in Moraga's draft plan for downtown development has peaked Parker's interest, but he's too busy to think about that now. New vineyards seem to be regularly popping up on the Lamorinda hills. "I think we have had 10 to 15 new vineyards join the Association over the past year," states Parker, who is President of the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association-a young but growing group of local residents who raise grapes and make wine. Parker's love of grapevines and wine is infectious, so it is no surprise that he has helped his new neighbor to plant about 1,000 vines on an empty lot across from his property. "I think many people are evaluating how to manage weeds, erosion and the potential for landslides associated with parts of their properties. Maintenance is difficult and landscaping can be expensive," he says. According to

Parker, an initial investment of approximately \$40,000 per acre will cover planting the grapevines complete with an irrigation system and trellises. The annual maintenance of the vines costs about the same as landscaping, but grapevines require less water. "The vines get established in a couple of years and are fairly drought resistant," he explains. "You only need to water when it gets really hot." Parker, like many other growers, was forced to turn the water on during the hot days of this past May. "Our vineyard has produced a very light fruit set due to this effect," he states. "And the harvests from vineyards across northern California are down an average of 30% to 40% secondary to the heat spell in May and frost damage in March," he adds. But as is often the case, adversity yields character. "Everything is coming in really high in sugar which will produce some big, great wines," says Parker with an insuppressible sound of excitement in his voice. "It's not a year for finesse, but there should be some great wine." This fall, Parker will be releasing a few new wines from Moraga vineyards: two single-vineyard Pinot Noirs and a Cabernet Franc/Merlot blend. "I'm also going to experiment with a Cab/Syrah/Merlot blend from the Lamorinda area that, if successful, might become a more prominent member of our line-up in 2008." Parkmon Vineyards' wines are available in a number of restaurants, wine bars, and wine shops throughout Lamorinda and the Bay Area. Parker will be pouring his wines at a tasting at Michael's Ristorante on Tuesday, September 23rd and at Terzetto's on Friday, October 3rd for a food and wine pairing.



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