

## Rhone Wines Focus of New Winery



**Richard and Candace Dixon at Les Chenes Estate Vineyards.**

Livermore Wine Country welcomed its newest winery in early April, Les Chenes Estate Vineyards. The site provides sweeping views of the nearby hills, many covered with vineyards.

Les Chenes, which is French for The Oaks, is located at the end of Victoria Lane off of Tesla Road. Owners, Candace and Richard Dixon, bring to the venture family history, a love of entertaining, and an enthusiasm for wine. Richard tends the vineyard and creates the wines. Candace focuses on the food.

According to the website, "The Oaks" not only reflects the vineyard site but the rich flavors and tradition of the wines.

The winery specializes in Estate Rhone Wines. Currently they offer a 2005 Viognier and two Syrahs. Two additional wines are planned for release. One, a blend, is called Deux Rouge; the other is an estate grown Rousanne. Richard describes the current wine releases as food friendly. There are plans to make future 'big bomb' wines."

"We chose Rhone wines because the terroir of the area suggested it was the right thing to do. This is a great place to grow them. Plus, we like Rhone wines," said Richard. He explained, "There is more opportunity for blending. There are seventeen varieties of Rhone grapes, all with different characteristics depending on where they are grown. This provides us a bigger palette to work with."

Candace added, "We are passionate about using Livermore grapes. We will do everything possible to purchase local grapes, before we go anywhere else."

Richard anticipates producing about 1000 cases of wine a year. There are no goals beyond that number. "We will try very hard to control the winery, rather than have the winery control us," Candace stated.

The Dixon family is the second generation of premium wine grape growers that started in Sonoma and Lake counties in the 1960s. When Richard and Dixon purchased land in Livermore eight years ago, they decided to sell the Sonoma vineyards.

"I didn't want to get in a car and drive to the winery. I wanted home and winery in one location," Richard explained.

"This was an old farm," said Candace of the Livermore site. "Dr. McFarlane, a longtime dentist, owned it. He grew wheat. The property was sold to someone else and got pretty run-down. We spent the first six months doing nothing but cleaning up the area."

The vineyard was planted for them by the Wentes. Rousanne and Mouvedre varietals were grafted over the original plantings.

Richard designed the label. Each varietal will feature a different photo taken somewhere in the world during their travels.

He also spends time in the vineyards, trimming away unwanted growth, dropping fruit in an effort to produce quality grapes. The goal is to grow the grapes and pick them at the optimum level so "we don't have to go through heroic measures to make wine. You can't make good wine out of bad grapes," he added.

Together they designed the building and tasting room. Candace recalls spending hours on-line trying to find the right lights, for example.

There are barrels filled with aging wine There is winemaking equipment to process one to two tons of wine at a time on site. "I don't want to process more than three or four tons, because I want to do justice to the grapes. When you begin with each crush, you don't know how everything will turn out. You say I will do this, this and this. The grapes don't know that," Richard laughed.

Richard calls the winery a second career. He worked in the paper and packaging business previously. Candace worked as an officer manager for a medical group.

They say they love Livermore. "I feel like I've come home," declared Candace. "I'm glad we landed here."

Richard adds, "I have a great deal of admiration for the current grape growers and wine makers. There are a lot of really good wineries and vintners. We're privileged to be associated with them."

Both feel that owning the winery and hosting events is an extension of their life experiences. "I believe we were predestined to do it," declared Richard.

The tasting room is open the first weekend of each month from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and by appointment at 5562 Victoria Lane, Livermore. For information, call 373-1662 or go to [www.leschenesvine.com](http://www.leschenesvine.com).