

## Great wines from little Acorn flow

Special To The Star Tribune by Tim Teichgraeber

The cool Russian River Valley in Sonoma County near the northern California coast always has been regarded as a great place to grow pinot noir and chardonnay grapes. But the foggy, cool weather also produces terrific slow-ripening zinfandel and zesty sauvignon blanc.

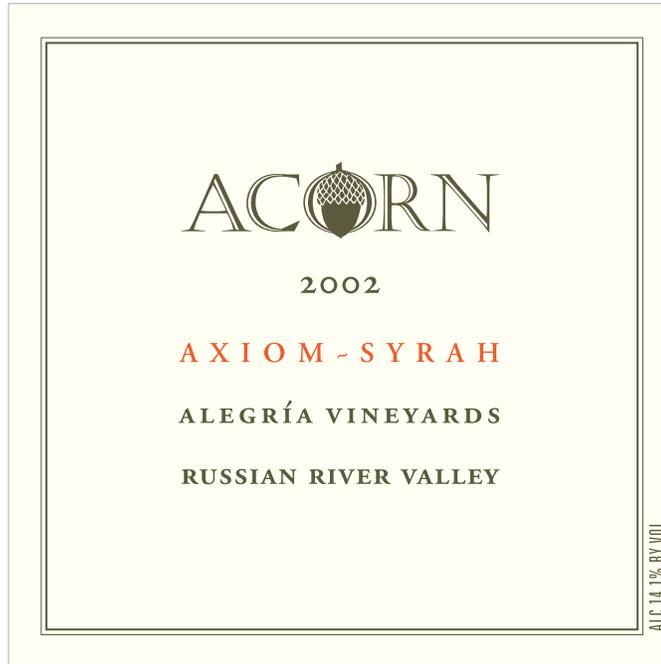
Acorn Winery, established in 1990 by Bill and Betsy Nachbaur, is a small Russian River Valley winery that has taken risks on other grapes with great results. Rather than planting pinot noir grapes in their Alegría Vineyard, the Nachbours decided to focus on zinfandel, syrah and Italian grapes such as sangiovese and dolcetto.

Bill Nachbaur, a third-generation grower, decided to interplant the core varieties with small amounts of blending grapes to achieve a “field blend” of grapes that complement each other and can all be harvested and fermented together. It’s an ancient – and very effective – technique that has fallen out of favor recently with modern vintners who want to isolate every element of the blend. At Acorn’s Alegría vineyard, the zinfandel is interspersed with petite sirah and alicante bouschet, and the syrah is mixed with smaller amounts of cinsault and viognier to produce more “seamless” wines.

The Russian River Valley’s cool climate and Acorn’s old-school approach to planting combine to produce trim, remarkably consistently wines with pretty floral aromas, compact, concentrated fruit flavors and mild oak notes.

There’s no indication that this acorn-size winery – it produces fewer than 3,000 cases of wine annually – has any intention of growing into an oak anytime soon, but wines like this will find an eager audience of squirrely sippers.

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*A field-blend Syrah, Acorn's Axiom is a well-balanced wine with lots of personality and class.*

• **2002 Acorn 'Axiom' Syrah Alegría Vineyards Russian River Valley** (\$28). Taut, cool-climate syrah with sweet flower, blueberry, plum, cherry, cinnamon, vanilla, coffee and pepper flavors and an almost salty quality that seems to be a combination of the spicy oak and syrah's typically meaty character. Interesting, well-balanced wine with a lot of personality and class. \*\*\*

• **2002 Acorn Dolcetto Alegría Vineyards Russian River Valley** (\$22). This one shows more restraint and refinement than many Cal-Ital wines with

cherry, blueberry, almond and mild spice notes, medium in body and intensity with well-integrated tannins and a very Italian balance. Easy to drink, not goopy or sweet like some warmer climate wines – just a very well-balanced, food-friendly wine. \*\*\*

• **2002 Acorn Sangiovese Alegría Vineyards Russian River Valley** (\$22). Clean and fruity with plenty of finesse to the cherry, berry, milk chocolate and herb flavors. What's most impressive is what it isn't – overoaked, overextracted and overcolored. This wine is made for food, but there's no shortage of fruit, either. \*\*\*

\*\*\*\*- **Exceptional**

\*\*\* **Highly recommended**

\*\* **Recommended**

\* **Satisfactory**

### Local distributors

Acorn's wines are distributed by Vintage One Wines, which can refer you to retailers that carry these wines.

• **Vintage One Wines, 763-323-8086.**