



Monticello Sangiovese Debuts and Sells Out

More than two centuries after Thomas Jefferson first planted grapes on the grounds of his mountaintop plantation, red wine was produced from a vineyard at Monticello and offered for sale to the public.

It sold out in less than a week.

A vintage of 1,152 numbered bottles of 1999 Monticello Sangiovese was made from grapes grown in the Southwest Vineyard at Monticello, which was established by Thomas Jefferson and replanted in 1993 entirely with the Sangiovese grape, a variety documented by Jefferson in 1807 and the principal ingredient of Chianti.

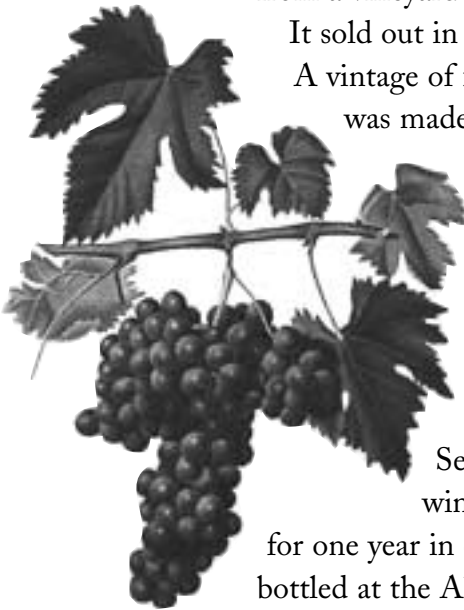
The grapes were hand-harvested at Monticello in

September 1999. The wine was produced, aged
















for one year in oak barrels, and bottled at the Albemarle County winery of Gabriele Rausse, Monticello's associate director of gardens and grounds and one of the founders of the modern wine industry in Virginia.

"The Monticello Sangiovese is a hearty yet mellow wine with hints of blackberry, cherry and violet," said Rausse, a native of Italy who helped establish the first modern wineries in Virginia in the mid-1970s. "The conditions at Monticello are excellent for the Sangiovese grape, and the wine has an intensity of flavor typical of grapes produced in a vineyard so intensely planted that all work has to be done by hand."

Jefferson's long-lasting fascination



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MONTICELLO



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with wine – “Its extended use will carry health and comfort to a much enlarged circle,” he wrote in 1818 – and his pioneering experiments in grape growing at Monticello have earned him the reputation as America’s “first distinguished viticulturist.” The first grapes were planted at Monticello in 1774, and by 1778 Jefferson had established a 90-by-100-foot vineyard in the middle of the South Orchard below the Vegetable Garden. The 1807 planting of 287 rooted vines and cuttings of 24 European wine and table grape varieties in two vineyards – the Southwest and the adjacent Northeast – was the most ambitious of Jefferson’s grape-growing efforts.

Although Jefferson aspired to make Monticello-grown wine, his continual replanting of the vineyards with both European and native varieties suggests a perennial losing battle against destructive pests, freezes, improper planting, and poor yields. There is no record of any quantity of drinkable wine being produced at Monticello during Jefferson’s lifetime.

When Monticello’s vineyards were restored according to Jefferson’s 1807 plan, beginning with the Northeast Vineyard in 1985, the European varieties were grafted onto native rootstock that is more resistant to phylloxera, an aphid that feeds on roots. The vines grow on four-tiered wooden trellises that are based on an 18th-century design.

The 1999 Monticello Sangiovese went on sale Monday, Jan. 8, priced at \$34 per bottle. Though it was available only at the two Monticello Museum Shops with a purchase limit of 12 bottles per individual, the entire supply was sold out by the afternoon of Friday,



Stephanie Gross

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Blockbuster Wine

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Jan. 12. That made the wine “the fastest selling limited-edition product we have ever had,” said Director of Retail Sales Sharon McElroy.

More Monticello wine is on the way: The 2000 Sangiovese is being aged at Rausse’s winery and will be available for sale late this year or early in 2002. However, a small harvest will limit the vintage to about 800 bottles.

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org