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## MARTINELLI 2010 FALL RELEASES



### 100 year old Jackass Hill Zinfandel Tanks for Work & Play

Laugh, scramble, crawl, squeal, scream, all sounds of fun. The freedom and delight that we three girl cousins shared in our great-grandparent's old abandoned winery was immeasurable. As children, the three little Martinelli's, aged 9, 9, and 7, Juliet, Julie, and Misty, spent hours exploring inside the dark old barn with the tassel topped horse drawn surrey, wine press and giant oval, oak wine tanks.

The tree house-sized tanks that we discovered inside the old winery were our best hideaways. The Hobbit door in the giant tank was just big enough for us to squeeze through. We would set aside our Eskimo Pie wrappers, well supplied by our Aunt Eva, and converse on who was going in first. Usually it was me, as I could not resist a dare. I remember crawling inside the tank on my hands and knees and looking back through the tiny entrance and worrying about getting back out.

Where were our parents? Each being the granddaughter of one of the Martinelli Brothers: Fred, Bing & Leno, this was a common playground for this 4th generation. The brothers worked on family vineyards and in the winery from the time they were young children until they were old men. Newer generations of Martinelli's used the old winery building as our playhouse and never dreamed that one day it would be a family museum.

My cousin, Dean Martinelli (grandson of Fred), inherited this extraordinary old building and all of its ancient inner parts. He very generously gave to my father, Lee Sr., the beautiful old 1,180 gallon, zinfandel oak tanks that had sat inside for over 100 years, the very one in which myself and my cousins used to play.

During the recent process this summer of remodeling our tasting room, we decided to display this wonderful relic. The tank was imported from France sometime in the late 1800's. The staves are 2 3/4 inches thick of the hardest oak wood, with a watertight seal made from flax seed paste. Old, yet incredibly strong, a number of saw blades broke during the cutting of these staves to remove the heads of the tank. As my family gathered to admire the historic tank heads displayed in the tasting room, my father began telling stories. He told us that when his father, Leno (born 1905), was a child his job was cleaning the 1,180 gallon tank. Leno would crawl through the little arched door with a long handled brush to scrub the staves and clean out the six inches of collected sediment. The tank was then sulfured to prevent microbial development. The Martinelli's made "sulfur sticks" from burlap sacks. The burlap was cut into strips and soaked in a thick paste of dusting sulfur

and water, then left in the sun to dry. Once dried, the strips were attached to the end of the bung with a nail, lit on fire and plugged into the bung hole. The top of the hole was sealed with soap; inside the tank the sulfur strips smoldered without air. Just before the next harvest season, the oak tanks were filled with hot water to expand the dried staves making it watertight preventing any leakage of wine.

The two Zinfandel vineyards on the Martinelli Ranch, "Jackass Hill" and "Jackass Vineyard," both are over one-hundred-years old. Both planted in the late 1880's, and produced the wines once held in this great oak tank. Originally Giuseppe planted 12 acres of vineyards, but in the 1930's the family divided the property between the three brothers: Fred, Bing, and Leno. In the 1950's Fred let his 9 acres of vineyard be taken over by timber and die off. Leno continued to farm his three acres of vines, which are the last remaining acres of this vineyard, now known as Jackass Hill. Leno was teasingly referred to by the family as a jackass, because the hill he inherited is a 60 degree slope, and it was thought that only a jackass would farm a hill that steep.

The picture below is of this centurion oak tank that so many Martinelli generations have crawled through for work and play; it now resides in our historic hop barn tasting room.

*Julianna Martinelli ~ Fall 2010*