



## FROG'S LEAP

### ORGANICS "101"

The first question almost everyone asks when they find out that Frog's Leap grows all its grapes organically is: "What does that mean you can't do?" It's not really their fault—many of us have been conditioned to accept that "organically grown" means compromise. In return for healthy fruit we give up appearance, cost and convenience. But at Frog's Leap, we emphatically believe that premise needs to be re-examined. Indeed, we believe that organic growing is all about what you can do and that when it comes to the taste and affordability of our wines anything less than organically grown is a compromise.

I am fond of using the example of my own health as a metaphor for healthy wine growing. I believe that growing a healthy vine organically is much like taking care of your personal health.

Experience has taught me that having a balanced and nutritious diet, getting regular exercise and burning the candle at one end instead of two contributes to good personal health in a way that modern medicine could not even begin to duplicate. The same holds true with the grapevine. Organic growers say, "a healthy soil produces a healthy vine" that resists disease and pests. By returning cover crops and compost to the soil the soil remains alive and through its incredibly complex microbial world produces nutrients for the plant and soil structure.

Modern grape growing on the other hand minimizes the use of soil. With the use of herbicides the farmer eliminates the "weeds" from his rows inadvertently killing the microbial world of the soil. With the soil thus unable to provide nutrient and the structure necessary to retain moisture the farmer is required to compensate with fertilizer and irrigation. But dripping fertilizer and water to your vines is a little like feeding your kids on cokes and candy bars—the initial energy response may be impressive but the long-term results are less than encouraging. A poorly nourished vine is almost always the one with health problems.

In our own lives, we know that just being physically fit does not in itself guarantee overall health. You

can work out day and night but if you're homeless, jobless, and your air and water are polluted your prospects for health is dismal. Thus with the vine. Do your farm workers have housing and healthcare? Are you using too much diesel fuel in your tractors? Are you contaminating the ground water? In short, if the environment of farming around the vine is not healthy, it will be difficult to maintain a healthy productive vineyard. This is the concept of sustainable farming. Reduce, reuse, recycle, renew, retain, and revere—mantras at Frog's Leap.

I sometimes think of my own health and the health of a vineyard as a three-legged pot. If personal health or organic growing is one leg and environmental health or sustainable farming is the second—what is the third? In our lives we know that to be truly healthy and happy we must eventually consider our spiritual health. Believe it or not this is also true of plants and indeed all-living organisms. Grapevines exist in a natural living stream that reflects from deep in their soil to the cosmos above. Biodynamic farming, based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, is one of the ways we are studying at Frog's Leap to learn more about the natural spiritual world of the living systems around us. Drawing on elements of homeopathy, using the natural cycles of the moon and planetary alignments and immersing ourselves in the deeper understanding of the farm as a living system can all lead to healthier vineyards. A pot that stands firmly on three legs.

There are many reasons to incorporate the farming methods we collectively call "traditional farming" into the way we do business at Frog's Leap. But by far the most important and most exciting to us is reflected in one word: quality.

In the Tao it says "what is rooted is easy to nourish". We know what is well nourished is also more flavorful, better balanced, and longer lived. Wine made from fruit that is more flavorful, better balanced and longer lived is exactly the same —wines that are deeply reflective of the soil and climate from where they come. Something to think about with your next glass. J.W.