

Wine of the week: Arrowood chardonnay

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Monday, October 26, 2009 at 1:52 p.m.

Last Modified: Monday, October 26, 2009 at 1:52 p.m.

Richard Arrowood says he's no magician.

The winemaker is behind our wine of the week winner — the Arrowood 2007 Sonoma County Chardonnay — and he gives plenty of credit to the growers and smart vineyard practices.

“So often, people think winemakers are the magicians,” Arrowood said. “They think no matter what (fruit) you bring in, you can make great wine. ... My response to that is, ‘truly, you’ve got to be kidding,’ ... It’s the growers who are growing our wine for us.”

Arrowood made a name for himself in the 1970s at Chateau St. Jean in Kenwood by turning heads with his striking chardonnay. How did he do it? By following Burgundy’s lead.

“I didn’t want to put together a science experiment, but as in Burgundy, different vineyard sites show much different flavor profiles in the wine,” he said.

Arrowood told the winery owners if they cultivated vineyard sites and focused on the right clones, it was possible to make chardonnay that rivaled white burgundy. The owners listened and then invested in the vineyards.

Arrowood’s house style is a wine that is food-friendly but still has some richness to it.

“We can still produce firm wines that have a layered underpinning, a middle fleshiness,” he said. “It’s a cross-over. It’s not country music, not western music, and then roll over a little rock ’n’ roll.”

But Arrowood said the recipe for the house style depends on pristine grapes. He said the most challenging part of producing great wine is communicating with viticulturists “what you want, the right clone and crop levels that make sense.”

The most rewarding part of winemaking?

“Making sure we can sell the wine in this tough, tough market so we can make more,” Arrowood said.

