



# HUNT CELLARS

by Dave Wilcox

“Who wants to be second place?” David Hunt once told a visitor who noticed he didn’t display any silver medals awarded to his Hunt Cellars wines.

Spoken like a man used to bringing home gold.

Indeed, Hunt Cellars in Paso Robles has made a habit of grabbing top honors at wine contests and earning 90-plus scores from wine publications, such as Wine Enthusiast. Hunt, the owner and winemaker, proudly pointed out that virtually every wine sold at Hunt Cellars has won multiple golds, best of class, or scored 90 points or better.

“Not too many wineries can say that.” Equally impressive is that Hunt Cellars produced its first wine a scant 10 years ago, in 1997. The first estate bottling from Hunt’s vineyard didn’t occur until two years later. Hunt tirelessly promotes his wines – turning the concept of retirement on its head – and it’s paid off with the rave notices.

Promotion alone, however, means little without the goods to back it up.

Hunt Cellars produces approximately 7,000 to 10,000 cases annually. Much of the fruit used in the wines come from the approximately 550 acres that make up Destiny Vineyards – named for Hunt’s daughter. The mountaintop site near Creston is an ideal location to produce



the kind of high-end wines sold by Hunt Cellars. About 80 percent of the winery’s sales are through its wine club ([www.huntcellars.com](http://www.huntcellars.com)). They are also served in some of the country’s most prestigious restaurants, including Ruth’s Chris Steakhouses, Roy’s, The Four Seasons and the Ritz-Carlton.

Hunt notes he will source fruit from other vineyards if that’s what it takes to make the best possible wine.

Quality grapes, combined with patience, enable Hunt Cellars to produce wines that consistently impress.

“We’re not in a rush to produce a product,” said Hunt, “until it’s ready.”

That could mean leaving wine in the barrel for up to 32 months, if that’s what he believes it needs.

Massive reds are Hunt Cellars’ calling card, wines “with real muscle and backbone,” said Hunt, “and a long velvet finish.”

The finish, believes Hunt, is vital for any wine as it lingers on the palate. Hunt,

who is blind, said perhaps his own palate has become more sensitive and is able to taste a variety of a wine’s characteristics.

Hunt’s refined palate will be featured this month at the 8th Annual Washington, D.C. International Food and Wine Festival, where he’ll lead a seminar titled, “An Exploration of Port, Chocolate and Cheese.”

Talk about a foodie’s dream gig.

Ports produced by Hunt Cellars – bottled under names such as Zinful Delight, Sweet Serenade, Naked Passion, and Good Vibrations – have garnered their own share of attention. The winery was featured in a Business Week article titled “Move Over, Portugal,” noting that Hunt Cellars produces varietal ports using Cabernet, Syrah, Merlot and Zinfandel grapes. The single-grape Ports are much less sweet than the syrupy Portuguese versions, allowing the fruit to emerge and making them more versatile.

What’s more, Wine Enthusiast magazine awarded 93 points in its April issue to Hunt Cellars’ tawny port, released under the label Oldie But Goodie. It’s believed to be among the highest marks ever earned by a California Port.

Hunt Cellars’ tasting room is open daily in the winter from 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the rest of the year. The tasting room is located three miles west of Highway 101 on Highway 46 at Oakdale Road. For more information, call (805) 237-1600 or visit the website at [www.huntcellars.com](http://www.huntcellars.com).