



Napa Valley Register

Tuesday, September 09, 2008

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Napa company finds a new use for valley grapes — VinJus

Food & Vine, the Napa-based creators of Salute Santé!® grapeseed oil, have a new product showing up in restaurants around the valley — and across the country.

Napa VinJus takes grape juice to a whole new level, according to Valentin Humer, co-owner of Food & Vine with his wife Nanette, who are using wine-making techniques to create an aperitif beverage that's not alcoholic, but has many of the traits that captivate wine-drinkers.

"It's just one ingredient," he said, "virgin vineyard grape juice, nothing else."

VinJus, Humer explained, is created from early harvested varietal grapes with low sugar and high acid levels. The resulting juice is crisp, refreshing and definitely not too sweet. "It has half the sugar of grape juice and half the calories of wine."

They are just now releasing the first bottling of their product, and according to Humer, the reaction across the country has been "phenomenal."

"People love it," he said, noting that Macy's in New York is stocking it.

VinJus is bottled in 375 and 750 ml bottles with screw cap closings. It looks enough like a bottle of wine to have given me pause when I got home from work one day and saw my teenage son in his usual afternoon position, sprawled on the sofa, perusing his laptop and swigging VinJus from the bottle." It's pretty good," he noted, high praise from his set.

"Considering the whole 'beverage frenzy,' we have actually succeeded in creating a whole new beverage category," Humer said. "It's one more amazing thing we can squeeze out of Napa Valley grapes."

Right now the Humers are sourcing their VinJus from grapes here in the valley, but Nanette Humer said they plan to expand production to other wine regions of the world, including Australia, Italy and France. "As the world's wine industry is growing, the vineyards are growing even faster," she said. "Working in concert with the wine industry, we create an opportunity to extend their season by harvesting early and utilizing their equipment and expertise."

In the valley, several restaurants have put VinJus on their beverage lists — among them Julia's Kitchen at Copia, Zuzu's Tapas Bar, Folio Entoteca and Wine Bar and Silverado Resort in Napa; Go Fish and the Wine Spectator restaurant in St. Helena and Castello di Amorosa in Calistoga.

What does it taste like? It hardly bears comparison to standard, sugary grape juice. It has a crisp, green apple aroma, and is tart and refreshing, served chilled on a hot day. "Honeysuckle, lavender and wildflower," are Humer's descriptors. It's slightly sweet, but not so much that it overpowers foods, and proved to be nicely compatible on an experimental foray, with seafood, fish and salads at Go Fish, on a warm summer evening. Humer said its gaining fans who like it as an alternative cocktail or mixed with sparkling water as a spritzer.

It can also be found at Vallerga's and JV Wine and Spirits in Napa. The suggested retail price is \$8.50 for 375 ml and \$14.50 for 750 ml.

And for those business lunches, when one wouldn't mind being able to go back to the office and be reasonably functional, it's something to consider.

Food & Vine is at 68 Coombs St., Napa. For more information, visit www.napavinjus.com or call 251-3900.