



Vino Mex

CASA MADERO: REBIRTH OF THE NEW WORLD'S FIRST WINERY

As it begins its fifth century, the **oldest winery** in the Western hemisphere, Casa Madero of **Parras**, Mexico, is producing up-to-date, premium wines that are now available in the United States through Maryland-based A.V. Imports, Inc.

Vine-Friendly Valley

The San Lorenzo Winery was founded in **1597**, several decades after Cortez conquered the Aztecs. (The original land grant still exists, affixed with the royal seal of Spanish King Phillip II.) When a group of Spanish priests and soldiers discovered native vines flourishing in a valley in northeastern Mexico, west of present-day Monterrey, they produced a wine from the grapes and founded the Mission of **Santa Maria de Las Parras** (Holy Mary of the Vines).

Present owner José Milmo's great-grandfather, Don Evaristo Madero, purchased San Lorenzo in **1893** and hired skilled enologists from **Italy, Spain and France** to help upgrade the vineyards with European varieties and the winery with the best **equipment** of the day.

Milmo is carrying forth the vision of his ancestor and "living a dream that I have had since the early 1970s, when we started to change our vineyard from the common grapes used for brandy production to **premium grape varieties**."

" Casa Madero's terroir, which for millennia has provided a suitable environment for native grapes, is superb for **Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon**. In the Parras Valley, 5,000 feet above sea level, warm days and cool nights help capture the grapes' bright fruit flavors and retain the acidity to make premium wines.

Natural springs and deep wells provide an adequate supply of water for vine irrigation, and a diversity of soils and aspects allow the different grape varieties to ripen to perfection.

Replanting and Rebirth

Like many California producers, Casa Madero is completing the expensive and disruptive process of **replanting** its phylloxera-infected vineyards.

Milmo has worked closely with experts from the University of California at Davis and elsewhere to select the best disease-resistant and virus-free clones and rootstocks to propagate in the winery's nursery.

The estate is now using vertical trellis systems, high-density plantings, crop-thinning techniques, water-saving underground drip irrigation and night harvesting to enhance the grape quality. The winery's graceful old buildings house advanced winemaking equipment.

All of Casa Madero's wines, three-quarters of which are red, come from estate-grown grapes. Current production levels are at **250,000 cases**, but the winery's output will rise as the replanting process increases the present 960 acres to 1,028 and the young vines mature. The goal is to produce **320,000 cases** by vintage 2003.

Premium Products

Milmo sees Casa Madero's introduction into the United States as an opportunity to compete on grounds of quality. He explains, "We want to **target restaurants** with international wine lists.

We want to find our place among the quality wines of the **world**. We don't want to be associated exclusively with Mexican cuisine."

A.V. Imports, Inc., currently imports estate bottlings of **Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon**. As the young vines mature, the owner of the New World's first winery envisions a bright future for Casa Madero.

Next spring, **Casa Grande reserve wines**, made of select grape lots from estate-grown mature vines, will be available in the **United States** and sometime down the road, a superpremium Bordeaux-type red from a new 187-acre, high-altitude (7,500 feet) vineyard in Zacatecas will join the Casa Madero offerings.

For Casa Madero and Jose´ Milmo, the grandest chapter in the winery's illustrious history is just beginning