

For Immediate Release:
Contact Info: Sao Anash, Muse Management
805 686-0911
805 325-1647
sao.muse@gmail.com

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Island Terroir:

Wines Emerge From Catalina Island

Santa Barbara County's Rusack Family Launches Santa Catalina Island Vineyards

Santa Barbara, CA – Geoffrey Claflin Rusack and Alison Wrigley Rusack (owners, **Rusack Vineyards**) have announced the launch of their **Santa Catalina Island Vineyards** project. According to the Rusacks, “These wines represent the culmination of a 27-year-old dream, and more than a few sleepless nights, for us.” They also reflect three years of careful tending by famed winemakers, **John and Helen Falcone**, and assistant winemaker, **Steven Gerbac**.

The Santa Catalina Island Vineyards portfolio includes a **Chardonnay** and **Pinot Noir**. It also features a **Zinfandel** that originated from a few hardy vines still alive on Catalina's sister island of Santa Cruz. While doing research, the Rusacks were fascinated to learn that in the late 1800's one of the owners of Santa Cruz (the largest of the Channel Islands) must have had a dream similar to theirs. They planted grapevines on the island and made wines for about 40 years, up through Prohibition, when the vineyards were demolished. A few hardy vines survived in the hills, and with the help of **The Nature Conservancy**, one of the island's current owners, with which the Wrigley and Rusack families have had a longstanding relationship, the Rusacks harvested some of the wood, had it analyzed and found that it was Zinfandel.

The Santa Catalina Island vineyard was established in 2007, under the guidance of vineyard consultants, **Jeff Newton and Larry Finkle, of Coastal Vineyard Care**. According to Finkle, “Creating a vineyard on Catalina presented a host of challenges. However, the reward of growing grapes in what proved to be a world-class Burgundian climate and an absolutely unique terroir made the effort more than worth it.”

Gary Fishman, wine buyer for the acclaimed “**Wally's**” wine store in West Los Angeles, was intrigued about the project, but had his doubts. But after a trip to Catalina and subsequent visit to Rusack Vineyards winery in Santa Ynez to try the island wines, his skepticism evaporated. “Straight out of the starting gate these wines are superb! They offer up positive varietal nuances which truly set them apart from the ordinary. I believe it is not too much of a stretch to say these wines have captured, in liquid form, the mystery and beauty of the island,” says Fishman.

El Rancho Escondido, Catalina’s vineyard site, was founded by Alison’s family in 1931, and for decades was a working Arabian horse ranch. Planted in unique soils with a constant maritime influence un-matched in California, the vines overlook the ocean in the pastures where horses once grazed. **The Catalina Island Conservancy** – owner of 88% of the island – has been impressed with the little outpost it surrounds. Notes **Ann Muscat**, the Conservancy’s President, “The Rusacks have put a lot of thought into how to work with the native environment. They have ordered native grasses from us for erosion control and cover crops, native trees and plants for landscaping, and are exploring different conservation techniques and green energy sources.”

Catalina Island is located approximately 25 miles off the coast of Los Angeles. For over a century it has been a unique getaway for millions of visitors. With some of the clearest waters in the world, a small city reminiscent of Capri, a nine--hole golf course, the iconic “casino” building, stores, restaurants, hotels, hiking and more, Catalina has something for just about anyone. The addition of vineyards, local wines and a hopefully soon-to-be winery, will help ensure that its reputation as a “must-visit” destination will continue for a long time to come.

To learn more about the Santa Catalina Island Vineyard Project, please visit www.catalinaislandvineyards.com.

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