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## **WINE**

# **Heeding the call to Napa pays off**

## **A meager beginning for Renteria evolves into successful winemaking**

**By MICHAEL LONSFORD**

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In the early 1960s, Salvador Renteria got in on the ground floor of the incipient Napa Valley wine boom.

Literally the ground floor. He started out doing shovel and stave work in the vineyards.

Renteria was an illegal Mexican laborer, traveling to Northern California in search of work. Along the way he spent a winter in Chicago, hustling pool. But the winter was too harsh, so he traveled back west to Napa and the vineyards.

But Renteria was not the typical farm laborer.

"He had a knack for working hard," said Renteria Wines representative Joan Salyer in Houston a few weeks ago. "He eventually ran the vineyard."

That vineyard was Sterling's home vineyard in northern Napa. Eventually he would also have a hand in developing the famed Three Palms Vineyard.

In the late 1980s, Renteria went out on his own, working with some impressive vineyards, including Dalla Valle, Trefethen, Caymus and Duckhorn. Renteria Vineyard Management was one of the first Hispanic businesses to be so successful. Of course it didn't hurt that Renteria knew how to communicate with the Hispanic field workers.

In the early 1990s, Renteria's son Oscar, a college graduate, took over the vineyard business and kept building it up.

"So they decided to start making wine," Salyer said, "and while they're custom-crushing now, they're building a winery on their property on Mt. Veeder" on the eastern side of the Napa Valley.

Since they live and work in Napa, you'd expect the Renterias to specialize in cabernet sauvignon. And to an extent, they do. But Salvador Renteria had a lot of experience working with pinot noir — Williams Selyem comes to mind — so they make a pair of pinots, too. And they're good.

Today Renteria Vineyard Management handles more than 1,300 acres of grapes, including some of Northern California's most acclaimed appellations, such as Stag's Leap, Carneros, Russian River Valley and Mt. Veeder.

Salvador Renteria is in his late 60s now, but his eyes look as sharp as they must've been when he was hustling pool. He lost a few games back in Chicago — you can't win them all — but in the Napa Valley? Looks like he ran the table.

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# The wines of Renteria

By MICHAEL LONSFORD

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These are some of the wines from Renteria in California's Napa Valley, handled in Houston by BevCo International. Prices are approximate retail.

- **2002 Renteria "Russian River Valley" Pinot Noir** — \* \* \* \* 1/2 — very nice wine, with good aromatics and strawberry-cranberry fruit as well as good acidity; high \$30s.
- **2003 Renteria "Knittel Vineyard" Pinot Noir, Carneros** — \* \* \* \* 1/2 — very different from the Russian River Valley pinot, denser, heavier, with the trademark Carneros region cranberry-cherry nuances, but also some cinnamon and smoky bacon complexity; high \$30s.
- **2003 Salva Tierra (Renteria second label) Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley** — \* \* \* \* — well-made blend of four vineyards, with Stag's Leap's Brenda's Vineyard being the backbone; good fruit, quite smooth; a terrific value for such a well-made Napa Valley cabernet; \$25.
- **2001 Renteria "Brenda's Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley** — \* \* \* \* 1/2 — in the Bordeaux style, but a bit riper, with chocolate, licorice, currants, tobacco and leather complexity; expensive at low \$40s but worth the tariff.
- **2001 Renteria "Q Hill Vineyard" Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley** — \* \* \* \* 1/2 — from an extremely low-yielding vineyard in the Wooden Valley "outpost" of Napa. A little brighter fruit than the Brenda's cabernet with more currants and less chocolate influences; even at five years old, still a little tannic; but even at \$50 or so, it's undervalued