

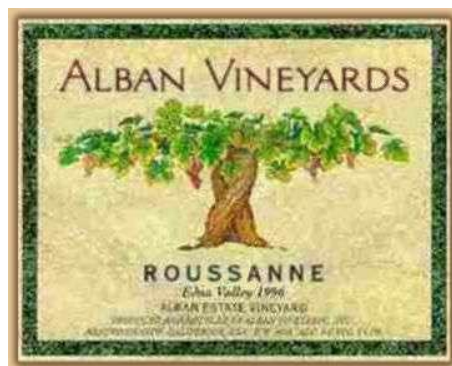
# ALBAN VINEYARDS

Edna Valley

John Alban has already left a lasting mark on the landscape of California viticulture, even though few people have chance to taste the little bit of wine that comes from this vineyards. That's because, as a nurseryman, he has been the source for an overwhelmingly high percentage of all the plants of Rhone varieties that have been enthusiastically stuck in the ground up and down the length of the Golden State over the past decade. Without John's fervent belief in the possibility of great California wine from Rhone varieties, today's explosion of interest is unthinkable.

After training in the Rhône and graduating from Davis in 1986, Alban set to work clearing land in the Central California's cool, coastal Edna Valley. "They thought I was a freak for planting Rhone varieties, especially Syrah, where everyone else had Chardonnay" says John. "And you know what?" he adds, after pausing for dramatic effect, "they were right! But my mission was never to show consumers what they already know and want. I wanted to introduce them to something new." This region routinely provides the long, warm growing season that, as Alban enthusiastically pointed out to his compatriots, only characterize the Northern Rhône in exceptional, and then great vintages. Today, nobody is questioning that reasoning.

Although he vinifies miniscule quantities of Syrah and Grenache and his long term plan calls for expanded red wine acreage, Alban's early work in the Edna Valley was largely focussed on the aromatic Rhone white variety Viognier. This grape, associated with Condrieu and Château Grillet in the Rhone, has become an improbable success and a darling of California growers. For a grape that the French used to say had a "death wish", so finicky was the plant itself, the past



decade has represented quite a turn around, due largely to the pioneering efforts and stylistic ideals of John Alban.

Alban has named his reds for family members. "Lorraine" and "Reva" designate two sites and wines devoted to Syrah (as well as his mother and wife). "Seymour" designates a Grenache-Syrah blend (and Alban's father). Characteristic for the Syrah in Alban's micro-climate and hands is intense blue fruit and great elegance to go along with their richness. "Still," he opines, with Syrah you don't want to completely buff out the scruffy element," and there is more than enough whiff of exotic spice and animal about these terrific wines.

"To be honest with you," says Alban, contemplating his first fifteen years of experience, "I seldom use what I learned during my time studying winemaking in France. My methods in the cellar are more reminiscent of Piedmont, and my viticulture is uniquely American."

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*"Without him there would never have been the Central Coast Rhône Miracle. John Alban [bottles] the essence of Viognier and sheer class."*

*Vinum [Switzerland 3/98]*

Varieties: *Viognier, Grenache, Syrah, Roussanne.*  
Total acreage: *60 acres (plus some additional Viognier under contract)*

Average production: *3,400 cs.*

**Viognier Central Coast**

**Viognier Edna Valley Estate**

**Syrah Edna Valley Estate "Reva"**

**Syrah Edna Valley Estate "Lorraine"**

*Note: Other Alban Vineyards releases are available from time to time in truly minute quantities.*

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"Artisan Winery of the Year 2000: Alban Vineyards. John Alban is California's ambassador for viognier, a risk-taker who understood before anyone else where the variety needed to be grown and how it should be made. His wines are as universally well-liked and respected as he is; they are an indication of what Rhône varieties in California can be ..."

Taylor Antrim, **Wine & Spirits** [1/01]

"Winery of the Year [2001]: ... for Central Coast syrah or viognier (or roussanne, for that matter), Alban is one of the premier names. This year we were particularly knocked out by one of his reds, the '98 Reva Syrah. ... Alban's whites are compelling, too. ... Alban's wines are a sensual pleasure, but also an intellectual revelation."

Ray Isle, **Wine & Spirits** [1/02]

"Wine Personalities of the Year (an Homage to Quality): The quintessential Rhône Range [h]is finest achievements are the extraordinary wines he makes ... California is awash in interesting wines made from Rhône Valley varieties, but John Alban is the spiritual and qualitative leader of the movement, turning out sumptuous, majestic, potentially long-lived offerings."

**Robert Parker,**

*The Wine Advocate* [#138; 12/01]