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WINE ENTHUSIAST

MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 2010

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Q&A WITH NIGEL LYTHGOE

REALITY SHOW JUDGE AND WINERY OWNER

The international TV producer and winery owner takes a break from taping the hit show "So You Think You Can Dance" to talk about communing with nature, New World love and why Simon Cowell is overripe.

Professional dancer-turned-TV producer Nigel Lythgoe is well known to American viewers as a judge on the popular show "So You Think You Can Dance." Lythgoe and boyhood friend Ken Warwick—both producers of "American Idol"—recently realized one of their childhood dreams when they founded Villa San Juliette Winery in Paso Robles, California. Alongside Adam LaZarre, an award-winning winemaker who shares their passion, they produce Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Sirah, Syrah, Zinfandel, and Sauvignon Blanc.

Wine Enthusiast: Tell us a little about your background, and how that led you and Ken to get involved with a winery.

Nigel Lythgoe: We both grew up in a pretty poor area of England, near Liverpool, and grew up with "concrete gardens." So it was basically a dream to go from a concrete backyard to a vineyard. It's very special for me. You know, a vineyard is a romantic idea.

WE: What experiences in your life led to your love of wine?

NL: Just drinking it, but with very little knowledge. On purchasing the vineyard, we realized just how little knowledge we did have. We were both told in the process, "You know how to become a millionaire in the wine business? Start off as a billionaire." We always knew it was going to cost money—we didn't realize the vineyard was going to create black holes for money.

WE: What is the most exciting thing about Villa San Juliette?

NL: The farming aspect means just as much to me as having a bottle in my hand and being able to say, 'This is my wine.' The nature part of it is so calming, so beautiful. Being in touch, I guess, with nature—it's disarming, to a degree.

WE: Who is on your team at the winery?

NL: It's a small team for 168 acres, but



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Adam LaZarre is the mastermind. When we interviewed him, he brought all his wines. We loved them, and we loved him, we loved his bohemian nature. He heard about the varietals we were putting in, and he got excited and felt inspired by what we were doing, and then he became our inspiration.

WE: Which wines do you drink at home?

NL: I collect Harlan Estates "The Maiden." I have nearly all reds, and would you believe, I also own some Villa San Juliette Sauvignon Blanc? I'm also a lover of Wolf Blass Black Label, the Cabernet-Shiraz blend. I love it. You could say I am much more "New World" than I am "French."

WE: You were a producer of the UK version of "Survivor." Which wine would you not be able to survive without on a desert island?

NL: I would have to say Caymus Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon. It has many memories for me.

WE: If you had to describe current "American Idol" judges Randy Jackson, Simon Cowell, and Ellen Degeneres in "wine terms," what words would you use?

NL: Randy: 'Full-bodied and mellow.'

Simon: 'A little overripe, full of tannins, and slightly bitter to the taste.'

Ellen: 'Sweet flavor, and soft on the palate.'

WE: If you were to stay in tonight to watch TV and drink a bottle of wine, what show would you watch, and which wine would you drink?

NL: The show, of course, would be "American Idol" and the wine would be a blush—a French blush, a Tavel, from Provence.

WE: If your wines were to appear on a program called "So You Think You Can Make Wine," what would you hope the judges would say about them?

NL: (laughing) I would hope they would be too drunk to say anything bad.

—M.D AND J.J.