

Toasting Tempranillo

INTERVIEW BY KATE PARHAM ■ PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSSELL GRAVES

Grape growers in the Texas High Plains couldn't have laid out a more apropos welcome mat for Spain's tempranillo grape. The summer climate in this region mimics that of the Spanish Riviera: high 60s at night, mid-90s during the day, and 16 inches of annual rain. Thanks to innovative winemakers like **Kim McPherson**, owner of McPherson Cellars in Lubbock, this noble Spanish grape has found a second home in the Lone Star State.

What is a tempranillo? It's one of Spain's native grapes, a black variety. It comes from the Spanish word *temprano*, meaning early, because it ripens earlier than most Spanish red grapes. It's best when drunk young, rather than aged.

At a recent wine seminar, you called tempranillo "the new grape of Texas." Why are Texas winemakers starting to experiment with it? It's a change in mindset. There are three main varieties produced in the United States: cabernet, merlot, and chardonnay. But those don't do as well here as they do in the California wine regions they're known for, so we're going to grow something that works better with our climate. The vineyards are still young, but we know that tempranillo loves the heat.

What is your label producing? It's called La Herencia, meaning "the inheritance." The name reflects my family's four decades in the wine business. This wine is going to be different each year depending on what we have to work with, but it's always going to be 70–80 percent tempranillo. The 2011 batch was a blend of tempranillo for notes of tobacco, cedar, and jam; mourvedre for spiciness; granache added dried cherry; carignan had a fresh berry character; and syrah gave it body and color.

How can a grape taste like anything other than a grape? Each grape variety has its own inherent flavor. Additional flavors come from the land in which the grape is grown. The fermentation process also affects taste, like from the kind of yeast used or the type of barrels the wine is aged in.

You recently opened a tasting room in Fredericksburg. I formed a new winery operation called 4.0 Cellars in collaboration with Lost Oak Winery, which is near Fort Worth, and Brennan Vineyards, which is in Comanche. The tasting room offers wines from our three areas of Texas.

It sounds like a great place. It is. And we're keeping it in the family. My daughter, Cassandra, will be the tasting room manager. It's all coming full circle. ✪

Try *La Herencia* at the 2012 Fredericksburg Food and Wine Fest (830-997-8515; fbgfoodandwinefest.com), October 27 in downtown Fredericksburg, or at McPherson Cellars (806-687-9463; mcpersoncellars.com). Designate a driver if you plan to attend events that serve alcohol.

