



Andy Quady

The Muscat King of California

Andy Quady is America's foremost maker of dessert wines.

RICHARD PAUL HINKLE

In superficial vinous conversations, Muscat gains little respect. You can understand that. Most Muscats are simple, sweet and floral and lack the sort of virtuosity that leads to extensive writings, books, even compendiums.

Let me propose to you that it is that very simplicity, that easy and elegant charm that brings us back to, even compels our attention to this artless, "what you see is what you get" grape variety. That's certainly been the approach at the 40,000-case Quady Winery (Madera, California), where Muscat is King and each variant on the theme brings forth the grape itself, in all its *essence*. In fact, that word provided the proprietary name for Andy Quady's first popular offering, the Orange Muscat delight *Essensia*, which does offer the very essence of the grape.

Understand, one does not ordinarily set out to become the "Muscat King of California." Most young boys dream of becoming a fireman, a policeman, a ballplayer. Maybe a pilot or president. But not "Muscat King of California."

But that was Andrew Quady's dream. Not at first. No, at first he took his degree in chemical engineering from Cal Poly and spent a few years working with fireworks and explosives. Not your ordinary entry level pathway to "winemaker." But the boyish-looking Quady's essential nature is kindly and sensitive, and he quickly saw the error of his ways and returned to school at U.C. Davis, where he took his Master's in



oenology, looking to assay the kinder, gentler art of transforming grape juice into wine.

In 1977 he started his own brand on a shoestring and released his first Orange Muscat dessert wine, *Essensia*, in 1981. "We chose *Essensia* — which is Latin for 'essence' — because governmental officials, in all their inherent wisdom, would not allow the use of the word 'essence' on a wine label," Quady told me at the time. "Produced from Orange Muscat grapes, which have a pronounced fragrance, the wine is made in a manner

similar to that used for the famous Muscat Beaumes-de-Venise. The must is fortified after a brief fermentation, then aged in French oak for four months. Our first *Essensia* had 15 percent alcohol and 15 percent residual sugar!" Still does.

I am working at my office tasting table, tasting the current release of *Essensia*. It is the 2005 vintage, the appellation is California, and the suggested retail price is \$17 the bottle. The wine is exactly what the name suggests, refulgent with orange blossom aromatics that fill room and head. In the mouth, one senses pure grape juice, with that orange blossom overlay, though it is clear that there is sufficient alcohol to act as a preservative. It doesn't take a whole lot of imagination — indeed, it's kind of fun — to think up appropriate dessert matchups to complement this wine: apple pie, New York cheesecake, Crane melon, any sort of fluffy, almond-based pastry. And the list goes on.