

GRGICH HILLS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Phil Bilodeau
phil@grgich.com / 707.963.2784

GRGICH HILLS EXPANDS USE OF INNOVATIVE BARREL-STACKING SYSTEM

Patented OXOline® Modules Improve Wine Quality, Increase Worker Safety, and Reduce Labor

RUTHERFORD, CA – Grgich Hills Cellar, in its continual quest to produce the finest possible wines, has adopted the cutting-edge OXOline® barrel-stacking system for its *sur lie*-aged white wines. The winery began using OXOline in 2002, and has been so pleased with the results that it recently purchased 420 barrels worth of the modules, more than doubling its total to 744 barrels in the OXOline system. With this total, Grgich Hills has the largest single-winery OXOline installation in the United States.

OXOline, first introduced in Europe in 1999, uses a system of steel tubes and rollers to store the barrels, replacing traditional wood support blocks or steel racks. The barrels rest on rollers, and can easily and quickly be rotated to stir up the lees (spent yeast cells) in the barrel, which gives the wine additional complexity and body. This rotating takes the place of traditional *bâtonnage*, where a cellar worker must open up the barrel's bung and manually stir up the lees. With the OXOline system, not only are the lees dispersed more thoroughly into solution, which extracts more of its beneficial properties, but the bung is never opened and no oxygen is introduced into the barrel – the wine remains much fresher, with greater purity of fruit, than with traditional *sur lie* aging.

Additionally, the modular OXOline system allows a cellar worker to fill, top up, extract, clean, and empty a barrel without moving it or disturbing any other barrels. The labor saved by this and the ease of lees stirring is significant, allowing the winery to operate more efficiently and cost-effectively. Safety is also improved – the OXOline's design and the catwalk for access to the upper barrels prevent a worker from having to climb over stacks of barrels.

Ivo Jeramaz, Grgich Hills' Vice President of Vineyards and Production, notices the appreciable difference in the wine's quality. "We first began using OXOline in 2002, and our 2002 Chardonnay definitely tastes both fresher and richer because of this; it's a beautiful wine. And, as we move completely to this system, the wines are only getting better." Grgich Hills currently stores 50% of its *sur lie*-aged whites – mostly Chardonnay, with a small amount of Fumé Blanc – in OXOline modules. Within 2 years the winery will double its OXOline total again, and store all of its *sur lie*-aged whites in this system.

OXOline is increasingly common in Europe, especially France and Spain, but is only just now catching on in the United States. One obstacle is the cost – a barrel's worth of OXOline costs slightly under \$150, compared to less than \$1 for the wood supports often used to stack barrels. Grgich Hills feels, however, that the increase in the wine's quality and other benefits more than offset this.

Grgich Hills Cellar was founded in 1977 by Mike Grgich and Austin Hills of the Hills Bros. Coffee family. The winery, located on Highway 29 in Rutherford, biodynamically and organically farms its 367 acres of Napa Valley vineyards in American Canyon, Yountville, Rutherford, Carneros, and Calistoga. Grgich Hills produces internationally renowned and sought-after Chardonnay, Fumé Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Merlot, and the late-harvest *Violetta*. For more information, visit the winery's Web site at www.grgich.com. High-resolution photos of Grgich Hills' OXOline installation are available on request – please contact Phil Bilodeau at phil@grgich.com.

###