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WINEJOURNAL

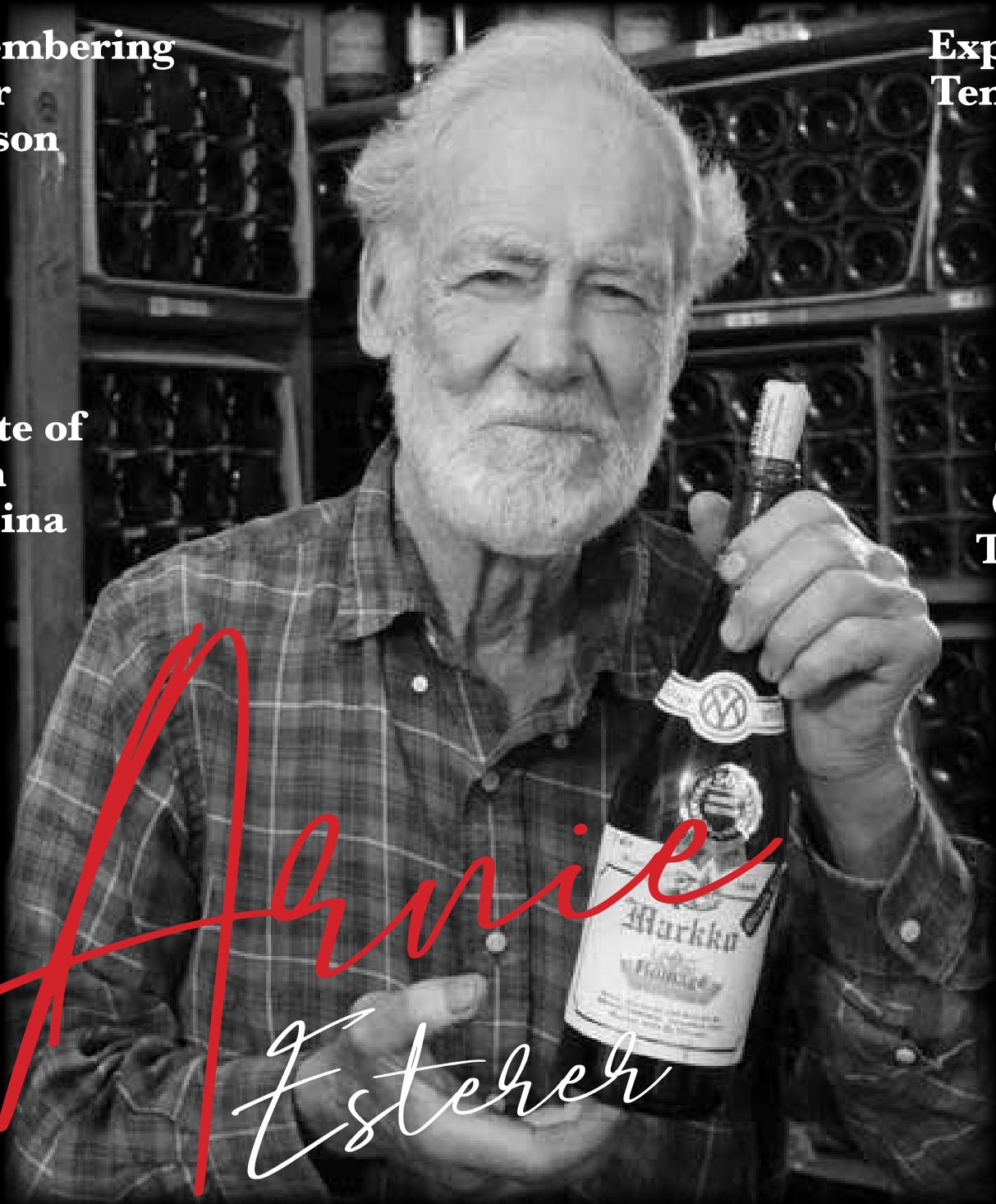
WINTER 2020

Remembering
Elmer
Swenson

Exploring
Temecula
Valley

A Taste of
North
Carolina

To Age
Or Not
To Age?



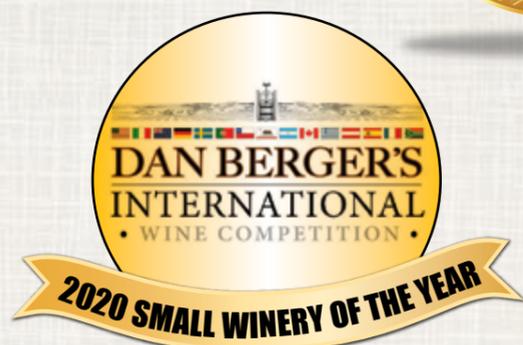
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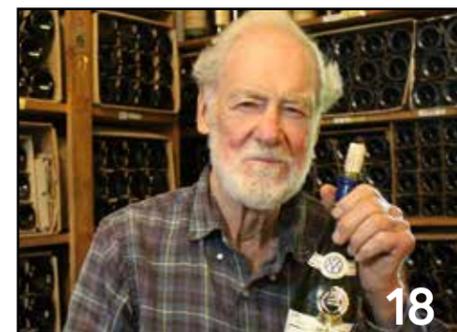
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Front Cover: Arnie Esterer. Photo courtesy of Markko Vineyards and businessjournaldaily.com

Back Cover: Arnie Esterer. Photo courtesy of Markko Vineyards.





Elmer Swenson

Pioneer Cool Climate Grape Breeder (1913-2004)

By J. Stephen Casscles, Esq.

Much has been written about the grapes of Elmer Swenson and the work ultimately led to his creation of many valuable cool climate University of Minnesota and private breeders Tom Plocher, David methodology, or the reasons behind his labor of love.

renaissance that he helped to initiate in American cool and cold climate grape breeding. Swenson's grape varieties. He also invigorated a new generation of grape breeders, Peter Hemstad at the Macgregor, and Mark Hart. However, little has been written about Swenson's personal life, breeding

What most people observed about Elmer Swenson was his enthusiasm, warmth, and good humor. He encouraged the work of novices, experienced hobbyists, and expert grape breeders alike. While a good talker, he was also a good listener who absorbed the knowledge and observations of his colleagues and visitors. When he retired from the University of Minnesota in 1979, hundreds of friends, co-workers, and admirers came to celebrate his accomplishments and the spirit of his generosity.

Swenson bred all of his grapes on a 120-acre farm in Star Prairie, Wisconsin, near the Minnesota border, which he inherited from his maternal grandfather. Swenson acquired his interest in grape and fruit culture from his Grandpa Larson who died when Elmer was only five years old. What the young Elmer remembered was the fun and camaraderie experienced by friends and neighbors who came to the house in the fall to pick grapes and to make juice, jams, and occasionally wine. On the Larson farm, there were two acres of grapes, apples, plums, and cherries. And while fruit was an unusual crop for the Upper Midwest, which lost its importance to other members of the Swenson family once Grandpa Larson died, it persisted in Elmer's imagination as a Shangri-la moment in his life.

Among Larson's books was Thomas Munson's *The Foundations of American Grape Culture* (1909). Swenson read Munson's book as a teenager and was inspired by it for the rest of his life. While Swenson's grandfather, his books, and the fond memories of the fall harvest may have sparked Elmer's interest in fruit culture and breeding, it

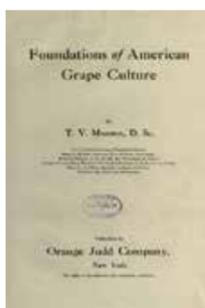


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was his intellectual curiosity about breeding, and secondarily, a desire to pursue agricultural pursuits other than dairy farming that drove Swenson. Swenson was enthralled with the idea of creating grape varieties of higher quality, better winter hardiness, later bud break times, and lower acids that would allow grape culture to expand throughout the northern climates of North America, Europe and Northeast Asia. Like his hero, Munson, he was a horticultural visionary. Swenson was consumed by the breeding process as an intellectual endeavor.

Although Elmer never traveled abroad, he loved to host visitors from other countries who were interested in his work. Elmer was known for generously sharing his time with all who were interested in cool and cold climate grapes. Enthusiastic visitors would follow a path from the house that lead them up a steep hill to his four-acre vineyard. This vineyard contained tightly spaced vines of which he knew the number, parentage, and history of each one, though complaining about his failing memory. Elmer had an encyclopedic memory not only for his beloved seedlings, but for the names of everyone he met. He conducted extensive correspondence with many grape breeders and growers from across North America, and the northern parts of Europe and East Asia. Further, he often attended the meetings of the Minnesota Grape Growers Association.

Swenson grew up speaking and reading Norwegian, as well as English. Even later in life, he could fluently read Norwegian and Danish. Tom Plocher remembers bringing him issues of *Danske Vinavlere*, a quarterly magazine of the Danish Wine Growers Association, and Swenson would read the captions under the photos like he was reading his local newspaper. To this day, Swenson and his grapes are widely known in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries of Europe. In fact, Meeri Saario of Finland named one of Swenson's grapes, E.S. 6-16-30 "Adalmiina", which is now growing in popularity. Arild Syversen of Norway named Swenson's early ripening seedless grape, 'Somerset', and Jaan Kivistik of Estonia named E.S. 9-7-48 'Pine Lake'.

Swenson began breeding grapes in earnest around 1943. During most of his grape-breeding career – until he was hired by the University of Minnesota in 1969 as a gardener, at the age of 56, Swenson was a private breeder. He conducted his breeding work in addition to performing his routine dairy farm chores and raising a large family. When Swenson began his breeding program, he used an old University of Minnesota hybrid Minnesota 78 (MN 78). He used MN 78 because it contributed winter hardiness, vigor, and early maturity of fruit and wood. MN 78 is a hybrid of Beta (Concord x riparia 'Carver') x Jessica/Witt (labrusca x vinifera).

THE PLANT SHAMAN

Some say that Swenson had the powers of a 'plant shaman.' While he was personally unaware of these botanical powers, he would probably have modestly disagreed with such an assessment since he

was a practicing Lutheran. However, his powers of observation and the innate connection that he had to his vines was nothing short of spiritual. He believed that breeding was not about creating progeny based on propagating large numbers of new seedlings. To him, grape breeding was not a statistical exercise. It was about taking the time to observe each vine, knowing the material you were working with, and having the intuition about what each variety could bring to its future progeny. He absolutely loved being in the vineyard and observing his vines. Even at the age of 85, he knew every seedling and second test vine by memory. He could tell you a vine's parentage, its features, flaws, and what he thought it could be used for. Early in Swenson's breeding program, he cross-bred French-American hybrids and labrusca-based varieties developed at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station prior to World War II with the hardy MN 78. His goal was to produce high-quality table grapes and quality wine grapes that could survive the harsh climate and short growing season of the Upper Midwest.

Swenson relied on quality French-American varieties such as Villard Blanc, Humbert # 3, Landot 4511, Couderc 299-35, J. S. 23-416, S. V. 23-657, Seyval Blanc, Baco Noir, and Rudilande (Seibel 11803); vinifera such as Muscat Hamburg and Chasselas Dor; older labrusca-based Geneva hybrids such as Dunkirk, Ontario, Buffalo, and Golden Muscat; and Carman, that was developed by Munson; to impart superior table or wine grape qualities to his hybrids. For cold and fungus disease resistance, and sufficient early ripening capability for Swenson's short growing season, he relied on local wild riparia varieties and hybrids. Swenson tended to use locally obtained cold-hardy and disease-



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resistance hybrids as the seed parent and “quality” French-American hybrids or vinifera as the pollen parent to impart quality. Chronologically, later on in his breeding program, he used as his “quality” pollen parent those varieties that he bred, which genetically possessed within them the “quality” characteristics of varieties such as Seyval Blanc, Landot 4511, Rudilande, and Couderc 299-35, but which also had in their heritage MN 78 or other riparia hybrids that imparted hardiness. He then bred these quality hybrids that had such cold-hardiness heritage back into his hybrids as the pollen parent to impart quality and resistance. By the end of Swenson’s 50 years of breeding, he had created five generations of seedlings, the most advanced of which were seven generations removed from the wild riparia. Swenson’s grape breeding program lasted for over fifty years and consisted of more than 700 catalogued grape hybrids. Few other grape breeders, except for Albert Seibel of France and Munson of Texas had such a long-term breeding program.

In 1967, to concentrate more on fruit culture and because he was a small dairy farmer who lacked a pension, Swenson sought work at the University of Minnesota. He attended the annual university fruit field day to have some of his new vines recognized. By 1969, Swenson took a job caring for the university’s fruit crops, specializing in apples and grapes. He worked long enough to secure a small pension. Because the college was about 75 miles from his home and travel was difficult, especially during the winter, he lived in a guest cabin at the experiment station during the work week and went home on the weekends. At this time, he planted some of his hybrids at the college, in an effort to highlight their merits. Swenson’s advocacy paid off as the university slowly began to revitalize its grape-breeding program after 1975. This interest in breeding cool climate grapes was encouraged by the enactment of farm winery license laws in many parts of the United States, including the Midwest and Plains states after 1980. Under these laws, a small winery could obtain an inexpensive license to produce and directly sell to the public wine as long as a vast majority of the grapes used to produce such wines were grown in-state.

A NOVELTY CROP

Stagnant or declining prices for local agricultural commodity crops increased the interest of political leaders and growers to promote grape culture and the cultivation of other novelty crops to replace such crops. The enactment of farm winery laws increased interest in breeding new cool climate grapes by the growing number of small wineries located in the Upper Midwest and Plains states. This is because existing and proposed future wineries were required to use only local grapes, but had no viable varieties available to them for wine production. Without the creation of new cool climate grape varieties, there could be no viable wine industry in the Upper Midwest. In addition, after 1982, the State of Minnesota allocated research funds to the university to support research to develop new grape varieties for the Upper Midwest.

“Swenson’s grape breeding program lasted for over 50 years and consisted of more than 700 cataloged grape hybrids. Few other grape breeders, except for Albert Seibel of France and Munson of Texas had such a long-term breeding program.”

From the 1950s to the early 1990s, Swenson developed numerous numbered and named varieties such as Adalmiina, Alpenglow, Esprit, St. Pepin, La Crosse, Kay Gray, Sabrevois, St. Croix, Petite Jewel, Prairie Star, Louise Swenson, Swenson White,

Kandiyohi, Summersweet, Shannon, Trollhaugen, Somerset, Lorelei, Brianna, Pine Lake, and Flandreu. In 1978, the University of Minnesota released, jointly with Swenson, Edelweiss and Swenson Red, that were bred by Swenson in the 1950s. In 1979, Swenson retired from the university, but was provided with a small grant to continue his work.

Swenson had a very generous policy of sharing his new hybrids and sent them to anyone who requested them. Hence, some of his more significant hybrids were utilized by others, and after obtaining permission from Swenson, were able to name, use, and promote them. By sharing his material widely, he benefited from the experience of growers from across the country and was able to accelerate his own breeding program by relying on the field work of others.

One of Swenson’s many achievements was to breed-in lower acid level traits into his grapes. Since he was initially breeding table grapes, he needed to reduce the high acid levels of the riparia varieties that he

used to impart winter hardiness and early ripening times. In addition, he incorporated labrusca varieties to add floral flavors and later bud break times to help avoid late spring frost damage. These lower acid levels, fruity flavor profiles, and later bud-break times were beneficial to the wine grapes that he created later on.

Throughout his career, Swenson did not think of his grape breeding hobby as a profit-making commercial venture. However, by 1981, he formed a company called Swenson-Smith Vines with Bill Smith, David Macgregor, and Robin Partch. The goal of this company was to conduct research, propagate Swenson hybrids, grow and market these quality winter hardy vines, and to encourage their wide distribution. The company would name, propagate, and introduce five Swenson hybrids that he developed -- St. Croix (1981), Kay Gray (1980), St. Pepin (1983), La Crosse (1983), and Esprit (1984) and provide patent protection. The company ensured that Swenson would receive royalties from those nurseries that sold his hybrids so that his research could continue.

Swenson continued his breeding work until about 2000, after that, it became difficult for him to maintain his four-acre experimental vineyard. While his breeding work came to an end, there were still many promising seedlings that had not been fully evaluated. With the cooperation of the Minnesota Grape Growers Association, the Quebec Winegrowers Association, and the Seaway Wine and Viticultural Association of New York, a group of volunteers helped to maintain his experimental plot and conduct what would become known as the Swenson Preservation Project for three years so that his new selections could be evaluated and cuttings taken to preserve Swenson’s later developed hybrids. As a result of the project, 45 of Swenson’s hybrids were included in the grape collection at the National Clonal Germplasm Repository in Geneva, New York which can still be obtained as cuttings or pollen. Another 44 of his numbered selections were planted in the heritage vineyard at the Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, where cuttings are still available to the public.

NEXT GENERATION

Elmer Swenson died on Christmas Eve in 2004. His experimental vineyard was ultimately abandoned as the Swenson family had little desire to maintain it, however, the original vineyard established by Grandpa Larson is still there. Swenson’s legacy is that he lives on through the work of a new generation of inspired private and university-based breeders. Swenson’s ground-breaking work helped to revive the long dormant grape-breeding program at the University of Minnesota and interested others in his pioneering work. The University gradually began to establish its program by the late 1970s to the early 1980s with the assistance of state research funds appropriated after 1982. Over the years, under the initial leadership and teamwork of Cecil Stushnoff, Patrick Pierquet, and Elmer Swenson; and later on, after 1980, by James Luby, Peter Hemstad, and Matthew Clark, and their talented support staff; this program evaluated the viticultural and enological potential of some older Swenson hybrids and the newer varieties that were being developed by the university.

Today, the Program has approximately twelve acres of research vineyards that contains approximately 12,000 experimental vines, with thousands of new seedlings being produced and evaluated each year. Before this Program was formalized around 1982, it jointly released, with Swenson, the Swenson developed varieties Edelweiss and Swenson Red (1978); and later on, after Swenson left the university, the then formalized Program released Frontenac (1996), La Crescent (2002), Frontenac Gris (2003), Marquette (2006), and Itasca (2017).

The positive cultivation attributes, winemaking capabilities, and seeded table grape potential of Swenson’s grapes is relevant today due to the advent of our rapidly changing climate. Today, systemic climatic changes are inflicting increasingly more damage to our crops due to the higher frequency of violent weather events, excessive or reduced precipitation, and wider swings in both our high and low temperatures. For our industry to overcome these challenges, the Swenson hybrids will continue to play a vital role in consistently producing, in an economically and ecological friendly manner, a reliable supply of quality grapes. Further, they are being used as genetic material for future generations of productive grape cultivars.

We end this article with the words of Elmer :

“Plant improvement thru [sic] breeding is a slow process requiring dedication and perseverance. Never the less it [has] been for me a fascinating venture...in another decade[,] I will no longer be an effective force in viticulture. In time a body wears out. I hope mine wears out growing grape seedlings and that my efforts will have been of some value to society.”



About the Author

Stephen Casscles, is author of “Grapes of the Hudson Valley” (2015), a winemaker at Sabba Vineyards in Old Chatham, NY, and a frequent guest lecturer in the Hudson Valley at colleges, historical societies, and botanical gardens in New York City, Boston, and the Hudson Valley. He writes for wine/agricultural/local history journals on grapes, winemaking, and on horticultural subjects and local history, and is associated with with the SUNY at Cobleskill Fermentation Sciences Program. He can be reached at cassclesjs@yahoo.com



To Age or Not to Age Wine?

By: Allison Bettin

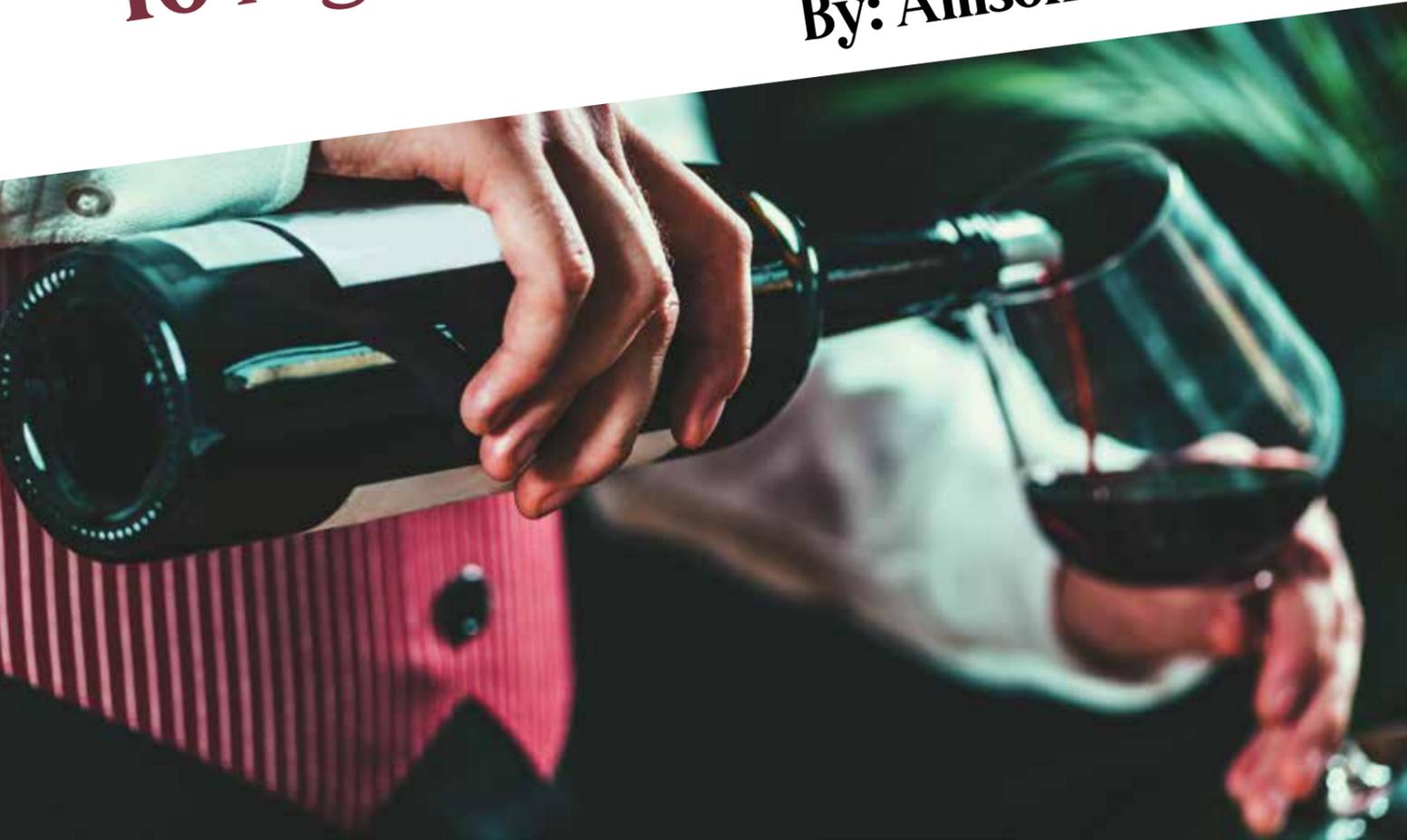


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Much like humans, a bottle of wine endures a fascinating and complex life journey. There is the nature of things - the vines, the grapes, the sunshine and rain. And there is the nurture of things - the winemaking, the oak aging, the cork used and the particular position a bottle is stored in. All these nuances will acquiesce into a wine of unique distinction and character, with its own unique terroir. And much like us, a bottle struggles its way to that golden hour when time offers clarity, complexity, and wholeness.

Yes, wine really does get better with age... at least some do. And while it's easy to be seduced by the magic and romanticism of it all, it's really a science. In each bottle you'll find a solution of alcohol, acids, phenolic compounds, and flavor compounds, all of which are constantly reacting to each other. Their complex interactions are why a wine changes over time, for better or worse.

Let's use an Old World, high-end Bordeaux as our test subject. The Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc grapes used to make this wine were picked at their peak, when ripeness and acidity levels were in balance. The winemaker aged this blend in a combination of new and used oak barrels, to complement the wine's natural complexity. Real corks, made from cork trees, were used to allow for a very, very small amount of oxygen to seep in as it lays aging in its cellar.

After years, or perhaps, a couple of decades in the cellar, our Bordeaux has reached its peak. With much anticipation, we pour. Immediately we notice it has lost its vibrant ruby hue, and pours with a brown tinge. Yes, this is normal - red wine loses color as it ages. As oxygen slowly interacts with an aging wine, its phenolic compounds begin to bind together, like little magnets. These are the compounds responsible for tannin, the mouth-drying component that makes our young

Bordeaux taste so astringent. They are also responsible for a wine's color. The phenolics will continue to bind until they become so large, and so heavy, that they fall to the bottom of the bottle as sediment. And so, we see our wine has lost its vibrant color, and we can expect its tannins to be less punchy.

Back to our glass. We smell and taste. Our wine is softer than it was in its youth, with noticeably silkier tannins. Now we know why! It's also a little less fruity. This is because esters, which once made our wine taste fresh and vibrant, were destroyed in the aging process. Ripe current and black cherry have yielded to dried fruits, leather and spice. But somehow, it's better. What was once tightly wound, tannin packed and fruit forward is now open, elegant, and balanced, with layers upon layers of complex flavors. Our wine is in its golden hour, a delight to behold... and to drink.

After such an experience, one could surmise that all wines should be laid to rest for years! Unfortunately, that's not the case. Our Bordeaux was crafted for the cellar, but most wines on the market, an estimated 99%, are in fact made to be drunk immediately. Let's take an inexpensive California Cabernet Sauvignon as our example. The grapes for this wine were most likely picked when over-ripe, leading to super jammy fruit flavors and low acidity. The winemaker would have allowed little time for the wine to age in oak, and the bottle was most likely sealed with a screw cap or a faux cork, allowing the wine nearly no oxygen contact.

When the wine is young, it's a crowd pleaser... jammy and fruity. But if we were to let this wine sit for years in the cellar, it too would lose its fruit flavors, just like our Bordeaux. The problem is, there's really not much complexity to make up for this loss, and there wasn't much acidity in the first place to keep the wine vibrant. Now it tastes flat, lifeless. So are the woes of a wine aging experimentalist. The good news is there are some hard and fast rules when it comes to knowing which wines should age and which should not.



Photo courtesy of: aglassandabottle.blogspot.com and Winefolly.com

The most important, by and far, is that a wine needs excellent structure to age, as we saw when comparing our two wines. High tannin, high acidity, and even high sugar content all act as natural preservatives, affording the wine greater longevity. This is why wines like red Bordeaux (high tannin), German Riesling (high acidity), and Port (high sugar content) are classically known to age well.

White wines are often overlooked in the cellar, but can offer incredible wine tasting experiences when aged. Oak-aged Chardonnays, for example, age exceptionally well due to higher tannins imparted by oak. And cool-climate Rieslings, like those from Germany and America's northern states, have such high acidity levels they can last for decades.

Another simple rule? Corks. Wines that are sealed with screw caps or faux corks offer almost zero oxygen exposure, and are almost exclusively meant to be drunk young. There have been studies that show that some wines can in fact age with a screw cap, but they're very, very rare. Real corks, made from cork trees, allow wine the opportunity to breathe, offering a chance for those wonderful chemical reactions to happen in the bottle.

But not every wine with a cork is meant to be aged. In fact, corks are often used as a sneaky marketing tactic. Wines with corks often look more expensive, and can fetch higher prices than those sealed with a screw cap. So the best way to ensure your bottle was crafted to be laid to rest is to chat with the winemaker, or to consult a rating site. If you're buying directly from the vineyard, ask the winemaker when you should open the bottle. No one knows better than the craftsman him/herself. Many are now including this information on the label,

"In fact, corks are often used as a sneaky marketing tactic. Wines with corks often look more expensive, and can fetch higher prices than those sealed with a screw cap."

too. Bonafide wine scorers also offer keen insight as to aging potential, and often include a time frame for peak drinkability at the end of a review.

If you're eager to start your own wine cellar, it is best to invest in proper equipment to keep your wine safe. There are many wine refrigerators with temperature control on the market, at all different price points and sizes. They keep your wine at the proper

temperature (55 is the magic number) without the massive investment of converting your basement into a cellar. Always keep wines laid on their side to allow the liquid to keep the cork moist - corks can, and do, shrivel up and fall into the bottle if they dry out.

But most importantly, choose wines that are ageable, and that you want to drink. In general, the more expensive, the more likely to have aging success. Yes, aging wine is an investment, both in time and money. But for those who can see beauty in craftsmanship, and the poetic passage of time, it is well worth the expense.



About the Author

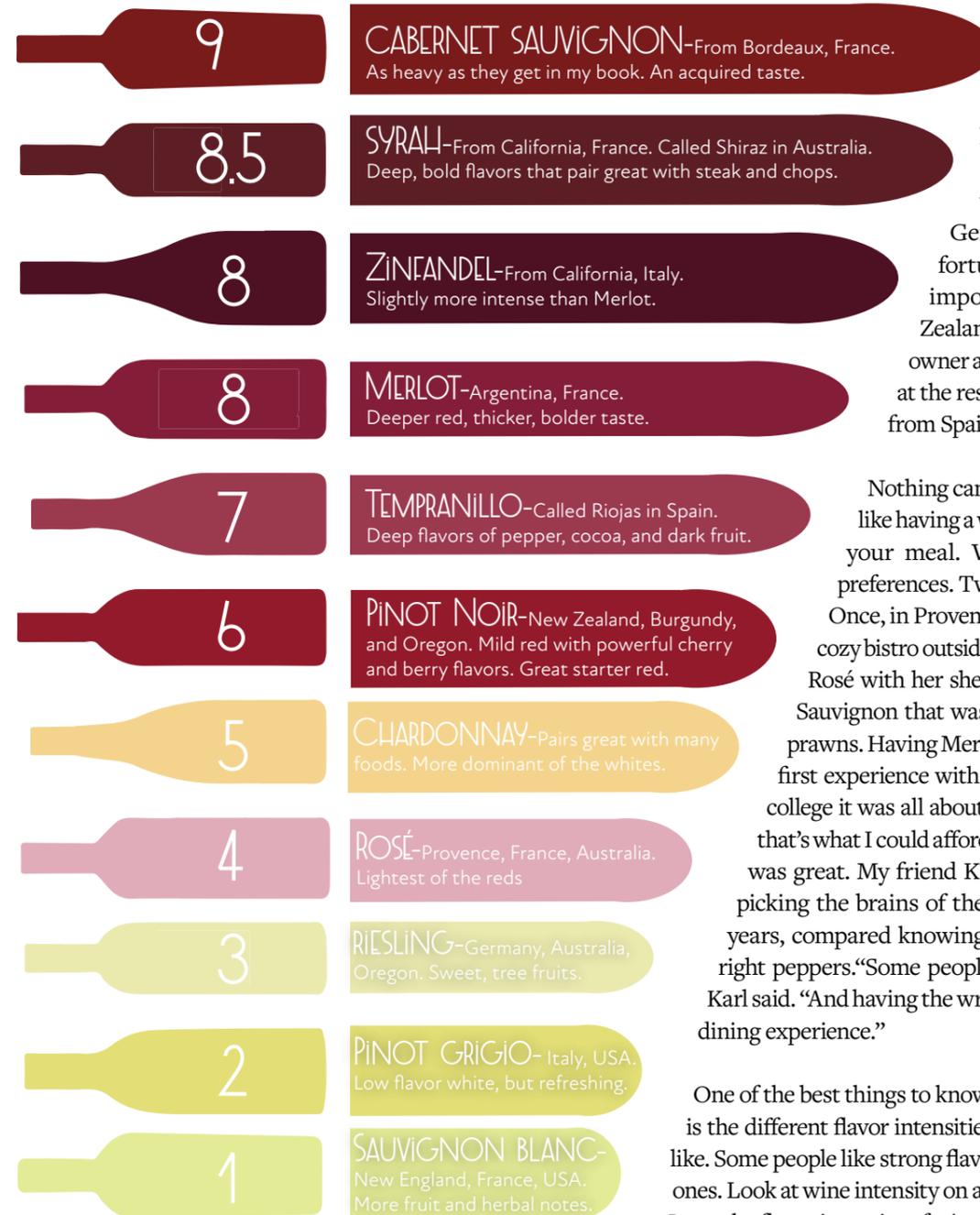
Allison Bettin is a wine columnist and industry professional, with a Level III Award in Wine and Spirits from the Wine and Spirit Education Trust. She has been a passionate student of wine for the last decade.

UNDERSTANDING A WINE'S FLAVOR INTENSITY

BY KEVIN HARMON

1-10 Scale of Flavor Intensity

Wine Varietal



When I first started drinking in college in the 1980s, I figured out stronger, more intense flavor profiles didn't work for me. I got a little more open-minded when visiting Europe after college, exposing myself to more reds and whites in France, Germany, Spain and Portugal. I was fortunate enough to have a client who imported/exported wines from New Zealand, a neighbor who was a wine shop owner and a good friend who was a sommelier at the restaurant in a riverboat casino. He was from Spain and taught me a lot.

Nothing can ruin a great meal/wine combination like having a wine that overpowers or underpowers your meal. We all have different palates and preferences. Two examples of this stand out for me. Once, in Provence with my wife, we were in this little cozy bistro outside enjoying seafood. My wife had a mild Rosé with her shellfish dish—I decided on a Cabernet Sauvignon that was a bit too much for my mussels and prawns. Having Merlot with steak was a winner. It was my first experience with a heavy, room temperature wine. In college it was all about Rosé and Chardonnay, at university that's what I could afford. The Argentinian steakhouse Merlot was great. My friend Karl who owes his wine expertise to picking the brains of the wine reps he's dealt with over the years, compared knowing the wine's intensity to picking the right peppers. "Some people like hot, some sweet, some mild," Karl said. "And having the wrong pepper, like wine, can affect your dining experience."

One of the best things to know as you gain your knowledge of wine is the different flavor intensities and comparing that with what you like. Some people like strong flavors, others like me prefer more subtle ones. Look at wine intensity on a scale from 1-10. The following is how I rate the flavor intensity of wines.

WINE INSPIRED RECIPES

PAN-SEARED SALMON AND PINOT NOIR BUERRE BLANC SAUCE

Ingredients:

- Salmon Fillets, four
- Two tablespoons olive oil
- Juice from one lemon
- One kiwi
- Half an orange
- Grapefruit
- Salt and pepper
- Several berries
- Half a shallot
- One stick of butter
- Two tablespoons of honey
- One half cup of Pinot Noir



Directions: Cook salmon in skillet with oil and lemon juice. In saucepan, add sliced shallot, kiwi, citrus, berries, honey and wine. Cook on low heat, whisking in butter a little at a time until sauce thickens, serve with asparagus. The hint of berries and cola in the Pinot Noir goes well with this dish.

PINOT GRIGIO BLUEBERRY WINE SAUCE

Ingredients:

- Two cups of blueberries
- One and one half cups of sugar
- One-half cup of Pinot Grigio
- One-fourth a cup of veggie broth
- One-half cup of lemon juice

Directions: Boil ingredients for twenty minutes and serve over baked whitefish. Or trout. Coat fish with olive oil, salt and pepper and bake for twenty minutes. Pear and spice flavors of Pinot Grigio give sauce a punch.

ZINFANDEL STRAWBERRY SALSA

Ingredients:

- One cup of Zinfandel
- One container of strawberries, cut
- One-half a cup of orange juice
- One sliced onion
- One chopped tomato
- One tablespoon mustard and red wine vinegar

Directions: Mix all ingredients and let sit overnight for flavors to marry before servings. Big berry flavors of Zinfandel adds to this salsa.

WINE IN
A SNACK,
YES PLEASE!



CHARDONNAY CHINESE CHICKEN

Ingredients:

- Three pounds of chicken breasts
- One half a cup of soy sauce
- One onion
- One cup Chardonnay
- Four sliced garlic cloves
- Two tablespoons sugar
- One half a cup of sliced ginger
- One half a cup of olive oil

Directions: Cook chicken in skillet with oil then add onion, garlic, soy sauce, wine, sugar and ginger, simmer, until wine mixture reduces. Serve with rice. Good acidity and a big body. Chardonnay complements this dish.

EASY
DINNER
IDEA

MUSSELS WITH GARLIC AND SAUVIGNON BLANC

Ingredients:

- One tablespoon butter
- One small red onion, thinly sliced
- Four garlic cloves, minced
- One large chopped tomato
- Salt and pepper to taste
- One cup Sauvignon Blanc

Directions: Score steaks across top. In baking dish-sliced onions and smashed garlic go on bottom, place steaks over, put thyme and more garlic on top, drizzle it with oil and pour Pinot Noir over steaks. Marinate at least four hours. Sear in skillet. To make sauce take marinate, add one stick of butter, several pieces of sliced, cooked bacon, add garlic, more onion, salt and pepper and slowly cook sauce until it reduces.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Harmon is a Chicago-based writer, who has worked as a personal fitness trainer and personal chef. He has a degree in health education and attended culinary school in Chicago.

TRAVEL

A Taste of North Carolina

By Sharon Flesher



In the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains, an area best known as the setting for Andy Griffith's fictional town of Mayberry, a diverse band of upstart vintners is redefining North Carolina's wine industry.

Just northwest of Winston-Salem, home to the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, is the Yadkin Valley, where grapes are replacing tobacco as a cash crop and small wineries are honing their craft with European and hybrid varietals, occasionally mixed with native grapes. The Yadkin Valley became North Carolina's first federally-approved AVA in 2003.

More than three dozen wineries are putting this region on the map, winning accolades in competitions and from visitors. With its clay-loam soil, and hillsides allowing trellised vines to bask in the sun and capture cooling night breezes from the Blue Ridge, the Yadkin terroir mimics some of the best European wine regions, and decades of viticulture research have enabled growers to adapt European vitis vinifera grapes and hybrids to the climate.

North Carolina now has five AVAs, all in the Piedmont and western half of the state. But these are the new kids on the block. Visit almost any tasting room in the area and the server is likely to somewhat apprehensively introduce the wines with this caveat: "Our wines aren't sweet." To understand the context of this warning, it's necessary to travel east and to the past.

For those who believe a bottle of wine tells a story, one from North Carolina may offer a saga almost as rich as any in North America. It began in the 16th century with a legendary name. Sir Walter Raleigh – poet, soldier and courtier of England's Elizabeth I – sent an expedition to the New World in 1584. His explorers landed on Roanoke Island in coastal North Carolina and wrote of a land "so full of grapes as the very beating and surge of the seas overflowed them." The vines they encountered were muscadines, or *Vitis rotundifolia*.

Three years later, Raleigh sent a group of settlers to this land under the governance of John White, who soon returned to England for supplies. When White finally made it back to Roanoke Island in 1590, he found no trace of the settlers, only the word "Croatan" carved into a wooden post. The mystery of the "lost colony" has enthralled North Carolinians and others for more than four centuries. Indeed, Andy Griffith, Yadkin Valley's most famous son, started his acting career as a cast member of the outdoor drama, "The Lost Colony," which has been performed on Roanoke Island since 1937.

Other settlers quickly followed and began making wine with Muscadine and its varietal, Scuppernong. Roanoke Island is home to the Mother Vine, a Scuppernong shrub that some historians say could be more than 400 years old. With a two-foot thick trunk, it is tended on private land, whose owners graciously welcome photo-seeking visitors. The vine returned to wine production, in some manner, early this century when Duplin Winery transplanted clippings to its vineyards and produced a Mother Vine wine. Duplin, in southeastern North Carolina, is the state's largest winery and synonymous with the sweet wines that winery staff in Yadkin Valley seem to worry that many visitors may be expecting.

Growing prolifically in the warm, humid southeastern climate, Muscadine or Scuppernong grapes have bountiful yields that have long induced small farmers and backyard gardeners to make their own wines. Commercial production eventually followed, and North Carolina was a leading wine-making state prior to Prohibition. But Prohibition's deep roots were slower to wither in the Bible Belt, where some Southern Baptist preachers still hold that the wine of Jesus was unfermented grape juice. North Carolina's return to the national wine stage has lagged that of neighboring Virginia, now one of the top 10 wine-producing states and winning accolades that would delight Thomas Jefferson, who dreamed of a thriving American wine industry when he unsuccessfully planted European vines at Monticello. It would be on the grounds of another famous estate that North Carolina wine began to reinvent itself in the 1970s.



Sir Walter Raleigh and the Queen Elizabeth II attraction.



An aerial view of Roanoke Island.



The Mother Vine.



Shelton Vineyard on a foggy morning.

All photos on this page courtesy of: visitNC.com



Photos on this page courtesy of: The Biltmore Company



Biltmore House and tanks inside their wine production area.

At Biltmore House, the Gilded Age castle built by George Vanderbilt, his grandson William Cecil planted a few French-American hybrids to see what would happen. He made some wine in the basement, and encouraged by the results, traveled to France to hire a winemaker. The Biltmore Winery opened to the public in 1985 and now claims to be the most visited winery in the United States. There's an explanation for that: complementary wine tastings are included with the ticket for visiting the castle, which is North Carolina's top tourist attraction. The estate produces 150,000 bottles of wine annually, with a diverse portfolio, distributed throughout the Southeast. However, only a small percentage of the wines are made from grapes grown on the estate; most of the juice comes from West Coast grapes. The wet mountain climate around Asheville is not friendly to the varietals, such as Pinot Noir and Pinot Grigio, that winemakers wanted in scaling up production and diversity. But Biltmore's example planted a seed that was ready to thrive in the more hospitable climate to the northeast, just as tobacco farming was falling on hard times. Yadkin Valley vintners of diverse background and experience have taken advantage of their small scale and flexibility to craft tasty wines made with grapes grown in North Carolina.

"Yadkin Valley vintners of diverse background and experience have taken advantage of their small scale and flexibility to craft tasty wines made with grapes grown in North Carolina."

About the time William Cecil was planting his vineyard at Biltmore, Jack and Lillian Kroustalis were trying out a handful of European varietals on their land near the west bend of the Yadkin River. Persistence and experimentation eventually paid off, and the couple opened Westbend Winery in 1988. It would be more than a decade before commercial construction magnate brothers Ed and Charlie Shelton planted grapevines on land near their hometown of Dobson and began the application process for the Yadkin Valley AVA, the success of which resulted in an explosive growth of wineries in the region. Among the early pioneers was NASCAR team owner Richard Childress, who opened his namesake winery in 2004.

In addition to the home-grown winemakers, the valley has attracted wine-loving entrepreneurs from afar seeking to get in on the ground

level of the next big thing. One of the most successful is Jay Raffaldini, a hedge fund manager who relocated from New York to plant a Tuscan-style villa and Italian grapes in valley. The tasting room boasts spectacular views of the Blue Ridge mountains, and the wines, which range from \$16 to \$52, are mostly blends of Sangiovese, Montepulciano and Petit Verdot. The most distinctive taste may be the 2019 Paradiso, a naturally effervescent wine made from Sangiovese using the technique Italians call Cal Fondo, which leaves yeast sediment on the bottom of the bottle.

Shelton Vineyards, the largest winery in the area, has one of the most diverse portfolios, including a Riesling and its Two Five Nine, made from Tannat, a grape popular in the Madiran region of southwest France. Heading west from Shelton towards the Blue Ridge, a turn on Possum Trot Road, dodging chickens, leads to Jones von Drehle Vineyards & Winery and neighboring McRitchie Winery & Ciderworks. Petit Manseng grows well there, and both wineries produce a single varietal of it. As in the rest of the valley, cabernet franc is popular for single varietals and blends. McRitchie also makes extensive use of Traminette.

Because this is an area of small producers with limited distribution, traveling to the region is the best way to sample the wines. The estates are well aware of that, and some welcome visitors with on-site restaurants and even lodging. Most also offer wine clubs for those in states that allow shipping. And for North Carolina residents, the state's restaurants and wine shops are increasingly featuring Yadkin Valley wines.



About the Author

Previously a journalist for United Press International, the News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.) and Congressional Quarterly, Sharon Flesher is an enthusiastic student of wine and she reads too much. Find her on the web at <http://twofemmes.com/>



Arnie Esterer

Ohio Wine Pioneer

1932-2020

By Jim Rink



“ Arnie has always said the grapes tell you what they want you to do in the vineyard and the wines tell you what they want to be in the cellar. Don’t fight it. ”

I had the privilege of meeting Arnie Esterer in 1997, while I was doing research on an article for the *AWS Journal* about the Lake Erie Quality Wine Alliance. The Alliance is defunct, but Arnie will never be, at least not in spirit.

Arnie is a 1997 AWS Award of Merit recipient. He was also inducted into the Ohio Wine Producers Hall of Fame in 2005. The key word about Arnie’s pioneer work is quality. He was the first to introduce vinifera to the state and did not make sweet wines just to appease customers. Clifford G. Annis Jr., who authored *Magic in a Bottle*, interviewed Greg Johns, former director of the Ohio State University Grape Research Center. According to Johns, “Arnie has always said the grapes tell you what they want you to do in the vineyard and the wines tell you what they want to be in the cellar. Don’t fight it.”

Born in Bochum, Germany in 1932, Arnie graduated from the University of Michigan in 1954 with a B.A. in economics and an MBA

in 1955. He was also a retired Navy captain who served for 25 years. His interest in growing grapes began in 1967 when he read about Dr. Konstantin Frank, (a founder of the AWS) who was growing vinifera grapes in New York’s Finger Lakes region. Esterer and Frank were close collaborators and remained friends for half a century.

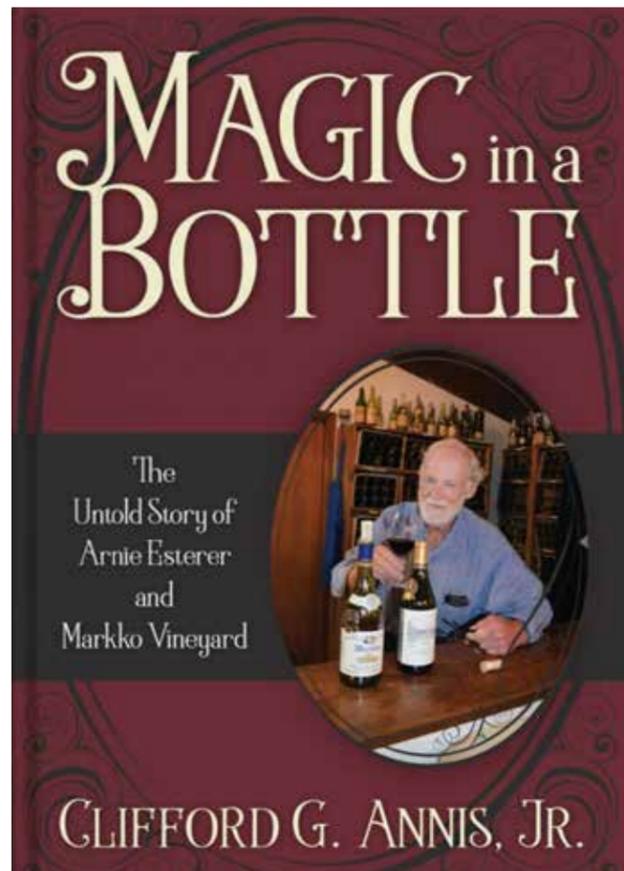
Arnie planted his first vines in the spring of 1968, after buying 130 acres in Conneaut, where the vineyard and winery — Markko Vineyard — are now located. (Esterer only wanted to buy 30 or 40 acres but Frank insisted he must buy at least 100). At this time, he also began his partnership with Tim Hubbard, who was also interested in wine and shared Arnie’s vision. In 1972 the first grapes planted were mostly Chardonnay and Riesling and the vintage that year produced the first commercial vinifera wines in Ohio.

Arnie’s ongoing influence as a pioneer cannot be overstated. According to Annis, “Arnie’s influence on Ohio winemaking is out there, you just

have to look for it. Arnie was a first generation cooperator of Dr. Frank and the only one in Ohio. We lost Dr. Frank back in 1985 so he wasn't around for the second and third generation cooperators in Ohio. Arnie was there and mentored the next generation, such as Wes Gerlosky at Harpersfield, Art and Doreen Pietrzyk at St. Joseph Vineyard and Larry Laurello at Laurello Vineyards.

"You even have the third generation with Matt and Tara Meineke at M Cellars. As Greg Johns told me a number of different times, 'It's through Arnie we have a second and third generation because they never would have met Dr. Frank.'"

One of the things I love about Markko Vineyard is that it started out as a family enterprise and really remained that way even after the kids left and pursued other interests. Arnie always treated his employees like family. And family has certain, well, perks. In Magic in a Bottle, Arnie talks about bottling: "My kids and a couple others would run the bottling line and one day at noon the state inspector for wine shows up and wants to see my permit right away. He goes in the door and sees all the kids working the line and asked if they are all my family. And I said, 'yes, six kids between the ages of 12 to 14.' He says good, good to see a family working. Then he turns around and high tails it out of there."



Gene Spaziani (right), then president of the American Wine Society, presents the organization's annual award of merit to Arnulf Esterer (left) at the American Wine Society's national conference held in Pittsburgh, PA.

“ As noted in the Fall 1997 of Markko Vineyard's Gadding Vine: This award is gratefully accepted as recognition of the next generation of Dr. Frank cooperators in vinifera winegrowing. He gave the leadership and inspiration we all needed. . . . Now the next generation picks up the challenge to Dr. Frank's mission to develop, and perfect the eastern appellations to that 'Americans. . . drink the best' ”



John Stavisky (right) pictured next to Arnulf Esterer (left) at an industry event. John Stavisky was very active in the New York chapter of the American Wine Society and held the position of wine logistics. John and his wife Anne Stavisky received the Outstanding Member Award from the society in 1997.



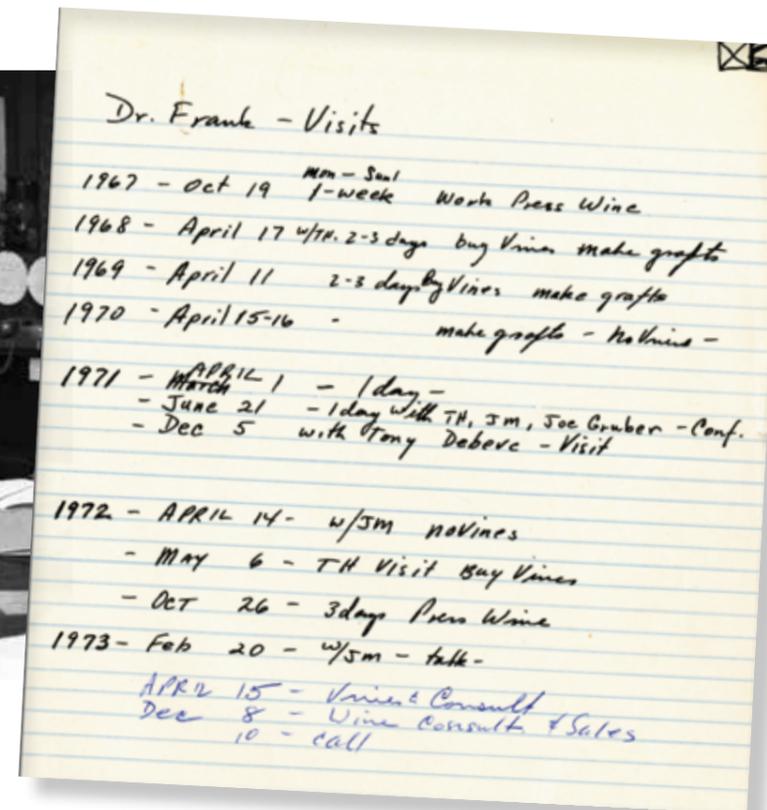
Tim Hubbard, co-founder of Markko Vineyard, testing a sample of wine from a barrel in the winery's cellar. The device shown on top of the barrel is a fermentation lock attached to a bung. Still used in wine production, the lock allows carbon dioxide to escape during fermentation without letting air in and the bung, a stopper, provides an airtight seal. Air exposure for any significant period of time will cause wine spoilage.



The first planting of grape vines at Markko Vineyard in 1968.



In early years of the vineyard, Arnulf Esterer traveled frequently to Dr. Frank's vineyard to learn how to graft vines and grow vinifera successfully. A list of his visits to the vineyard (1967-1973) and the tasks accomplished is provided on the right. Pictured above is Dr. Konstantin Frank.



Photos in this article courtesy of: oaks.kent.edu, Markko Vineyard, and Clifford G. Annis.



Côte Chalonnaise:

Affordable Burgundy that comes with great curb appeal.

By Roger Morris

There is an old bit of advice you still hear in discussions of value real estate – “Buy the least expensive house in the best neighborhood.” The same might hold true for wine as well. If a winery is just across the street from Château Lafite Rothschild and the vines look well-cared-for, you might want to knock on the winery door. Or if Michel Roland started consulting a few years ago with a new winegrower in Sonoma, consider getting on the mailing list while you still can. And if a region is located next door to Burgundy’s Côte d’Or, you might want to go shopping for wines made there – great neighborhood, well-credentialed winegrowers, affordable prices and produces Bourgogne wines made primarily from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes.

In short, the Côte Chalonnaise has serious curb appeal, and both producers and wine consumers are taking note. “Investment in Côte Chalonnaise by growers started at least 30-40 years ago and has accelerated these past 10-15 years,” says Xavier Badinand, general manager of the winegrower Chanzy, which owns 80 hectares (almost 200 acres) of vines spread over eight villages and is the largest and most-varied producer in the Côte Chalonnaise. “The potential of great wines is there, with the diversity of terroirs and top premier crus vineyards in Montagny, Givry, Rully and Mercurey,” Badinand says.

Photo courtesy of: BIVB / LAGNEAU Pascal and bourgogne-wines.com

Although grapes have been grown in the Côte Chalonnaise for almost two thousand years, first by the Roman legions and later by the various orders of monks, it wasn’t until 1936 that the villages of Côte Chalonnaise were first given the official French AOC appellations with the attendant production and labeling requirements. Physically, the region consists of low, rolling hills that to the north butt up against the Côte de Beaune, which is the southern section of the Côte d’Or, and then runs about 16 miles south until it reaches the all-white-Burgundy territory, the Mâcon or Mâconnaise region. The Chalonnaise at its widest is about 4 to 5 miles, east to west.

The soils here are primarily limestone-based, as they are on the Côte d’Or, but there is more variation in the Chalonnaise, as the escarpment, that is, continuous slope of Côte d’Or, stops just south of Santenay where the Dheune River flows in from the west to join the Saône. As along the escarpment, most of the better vineyards face east to southeast.

Going from south to north, the primary appellations, all named after a central village, are Montagny, Givry, Mercurey, Rully and the evocatively named Bouzeron. Montagny produces all white wines. Givry, the smallest of the five, makes almost all red wines and is the region where considerable investment is currently being made.



Photo courtesy of: BIVB / LAGNEAU Pascal and bourgogne-wines.com

Mercurey is the flagship for the region and has the reputation for making the best and longest-living reds. Rully, like Montagny, produces almost all white wines. So does Bouzeron, the fifth and final major village, but its reputation is that its best wines are made from the ancient white variety, Aligoté. Historically, Aligoté has been less-well-regarded generally than Chardonnay, yet here it has been elevated to premier cru status.

In fact, the Côte Chalonnaise has many premier cru wines, Burgundy’s second-highest classification, but no grand crus, which in Burgundy have been awarded only to the Côte d’Or and to Burgundy’s western outlier, Chablis. Until this year, neighboring Maconnaise had no cru designations at all, not because it had no terroirs that deserved them, but rather because it was not a part of the Nazi-led Vichy regime under whose reign the cru designations were awarded in 1942. For a variety of reasons, the Mâconnais opted out of the process and didn’t try to correct history until the past dozen or so years when a campaign was started to have those vineyards of its best-known sub-region, Pouilly Fuissé, recognized.

But why doesn’t the Chalonnais have any grand cru vineyards? The simple answer is that the region has historically not had vineyards that French experts consider worthy, and French regulators don’t like to revisit historical decisions. But again, why? Is it a matter of its terroir, its history of playing second violin or the region’s vineyard

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practices, as the Chalonnaise permits higher yields than the Côtes d’Or, as over-production is usually considered a factor in weakening the quality of a wine? Philippe Drouhin of the famous Maison Joseph Drouhin family, which produces both estate and négociant wines in all appellations of Burgundy as well as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, is in charge of all the vineyards on both sides of the ocean.

In an email interview, I asked him to comment on a quote from Hugh Johnson’s and Jancis Robinson’s wine atlas that reads, “So close is the north of the Côte Chalonnaise to the southern tip of the Côte d’Or that it is surprising that most of its wines taste so perceptively different, like slightly undernourished country cousins.” Then, I asked Drouhin if a Chalonnaise producer had very good terroir and put enough money into the effort, whether they could produce a wine – red or white – that would equal in quality a grand cru from the Côte d’Or? (Of course, since Chalonnaise wines can command only a fraction of the price that a grand cru wine can fetch, few would likely ever make the gamble, but still...)

Drouhin wouldn’t take the bait. “I don’t mean to have tasted enough climats [designated vineyards] in the Côte Chalonnaise,” Drouhin ventures, “but so far I have encountered none that has the potential to be rated ‘grand cru,’ white and red included. I think this is solely terroir-related, unfortunately.”



Photo courtesy of: BBIVB / Michel JOLY Pascal and bourgogne-wines.com

That said, Drouhin does see a particular promise as the result of a world-wide dilemma. “I think global warming has helped all cooler areas,” he notes, “and our own Rully vineyard is an example. For average or lower altitudes, I believe it’s similar to the south Côte d’Or. We have not seen more heat or drought damage to the grapes there than in Côte d’Or south.”

As a merchant as well as a winegrower, Chanzy’s Badinand notes that, in addition to its terroir, the Côte d’Or historically had a head start in marketing to the world, “exporting their wines way before those of Côte Chalonnaise,” and thus burnishing its reputation. But now, he says, the export market for the Chalonnaise villages is looking up. “Villages from Côte Chalonnaise are selling quite well in U.S., especially Rully white and red and Mercurey red, as their price points make them attractive for by-the-glass pours and also on retail side.” Badinand also notes that, “Côte Chalonnaise is the heart of production of Crémant de Bourgogne, which has a very dynamic sales trend for these past 10 years.” Indeed, the region’s sparkling wines are quite good, using the same primary grapes as does Champagne.

Like Drouhin, most of the major négociants headquartered in Beaune have properties there or buy grapes to make Chalonnaise wines, with Faiveley, along with Joseph Drouhin, having one of the best reputations. And one of Burgundies best known estate directors,



Photo courtesy of: BIVB / LAGNEAU Pascal and bourgogne-wines.com

Aubert de Villaine, co-owns with his American wife a property in Bouzeron producing Aligoté wine under the A&P de Villaine label. At its best, Aligoté is known for its lightly floral aromas, its citrus fruitiness, flinty minerality and its mouth-watery acidity that make it go so well with food. Like Chardonnay, well-made Aligoté can also age for several years.

But even if they are no grand cru wines, new owners and younger family scions are extending the reputation of Chalonnaise wines. One particular producer to take note of is the Domaine du Cellier aux Moines, founded in the early 12th Century by the Cistercian monks. It was acquired in 2004 by Philippe and Catherine Pascal, who immediately went to work to transform the vineyards, buildings and to add a new, modern gravity-flow winery.

The project took a combination of vision, perseverance and cash, which the Pascals are well-suited to provide, as Philippe is the former CEO of Moët Hennessy and other Champagnes and of the LVMH Watch & Jewelry Division before taking early retirement. In addition to the estate’s 12-acre premier cru red, the Pascals also carved out a monopole – a designated vineyard or climat with only one owner – called Clos Pascal, which also produces a red.

From purchased grapes, the domain produces wines from the Côte d’Or as well as from Mercurey and Montagny in the Chalonnaise. The house style of Cellier aux Moines, both red and white, is one of highly-structured wines that have intense fruitiness and which are assertive without being aggressive. Although they can be drunk young, they will age very well. “A given producer in the Chalonnaise can change its strategy, working up in quality and eventually in price,” Pascal said in a recent interview, and that is clearly the path he has taken. “But will there ever be a grand cru vineyard in the Chalonnaise? I don’t think so. The system is not going to change, at least not within a generation.” He laughs. “In Bordeaux, you are the prisoner of the castle [château]. Here, you are prisoner of the vineyard classification.”

As with many vintners seeking improvement, Pascal says, “We took the volume of grapes down to get the quality up.” As far as the profiles of his Burgundies are concerned, Pascal says he “seeks a balance between structure and seduction.” He also says he is impressed with other producers in the region, many of whom are a generation younger than he is. “Those in their 30s have a different vision than their parents,” he says. “They are into organic and bio growing.” So while the Côte Chalonnaise might not be in the high-rent neighborhood, its gentrification is certainly **underway**.



About the Author

In addition to the Journal, Roger Morris writes about wine, food and travel for numerous publications including World of Fine Wine, Wine Enthusiast, Drinks Business and Beverage Media. During the first two decades of this century, the Delaware-based Morris has made more than 100 reporting trips to wine regions on five continents.

TEMECULA VALLEY

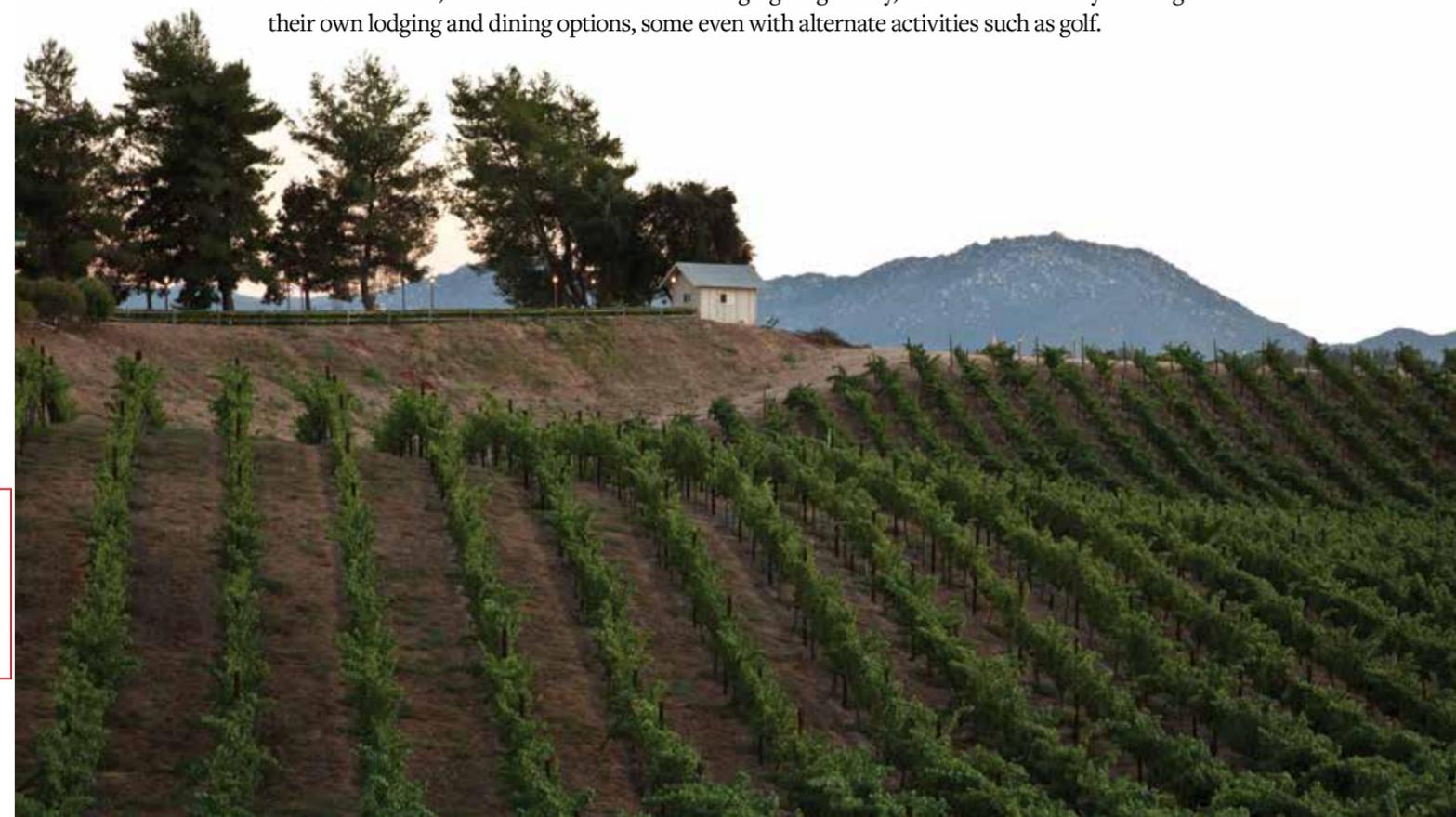
Temecula Valley is different from other California wine regions— which makes it very much worthy of exploration.

By Roger Morris

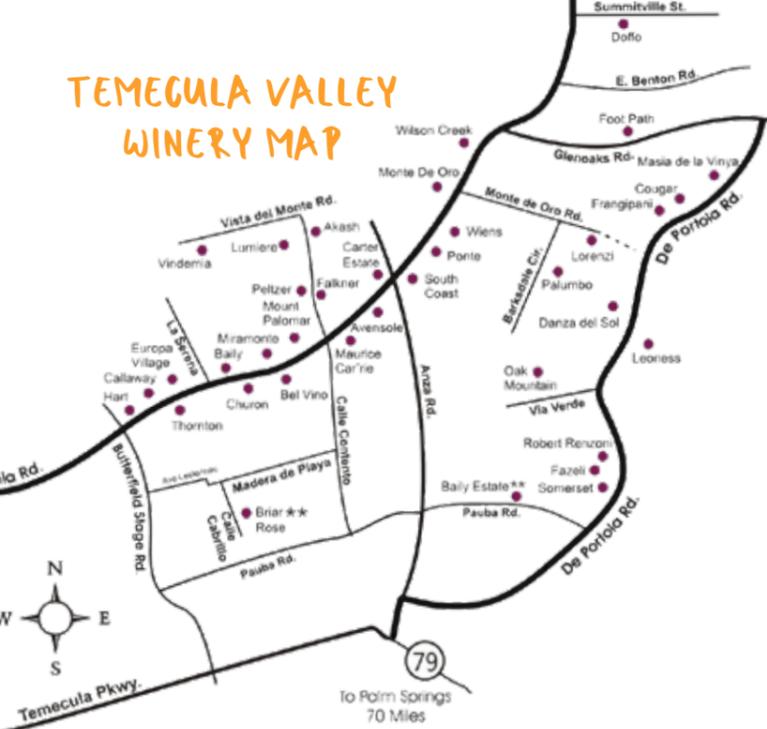
Temecula Valley is quite unlike other West Coast wine-producing regions in what it produces or how it does business – yet it shares some attributes with many different regions on both coasts of the United States. For example, in climate, it is similar to many desert upland regions along the California coast, with Paso Robles often cited as being the most like it in terms of climate. But like Lodi in the Central Valley, Temecula Valley makes wines from many different varieties of grapes and is still trying to decide what makes the best wine as well as what sells best.

But like the Mid-Atlantic wineries of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, very few Temecula Valley wineries have major national or often even regional wholesale distribution. Most of their wines are sold on-premise in tasting rooms or through wine clubs – a full-out DTC model. And, like many Midwestern regions, several Temecula Valley wineries unapologetically produce sweet table wines, a let’s-make-something-for-everyone approach that few highly rated wine regions embrace.

One the other hand, like Napa Valley and Sonoma County, Temecula engages in highly sophisticated tourism activities, with several wineries encouraging longer-stay, destination travel by offering their own lodging and dining options, some even with alternate activities such as golf.



TEMECULA VALLEY WINERY MAP



And, finally, like most California regions of a half-century ago, the quality of production varies considerably from winery to winery. Not everyone is yet ready for prime time. In other words, Temecula Valley is still in many ways a work-in-progress, full of surprises, mostly pleasant ones, and thus very much worth exploring for any wine lover.

A look at Google maps shows you that Temecula Valley lies 75 miles due north of Tijuana on the border with Mexico yet is only 22 miles inland from the Pacific, as the ocean's coastline gradually curves north and west as it enters the U.S. An upland valley, Temecula is located on the eastern side of the South Coast Mountains at the 1,400 to 1,600 level and is cooled by morning fogs that seep through Rainbow Gap from the always-cold ocean. The valley itself is drained by the sometimes-dry Temecula River, a very short stream (one of the few in the state that has remained free of dams) which terminates in the Pacific at Camp Pendleton.

Today, Temecula has around 40 wineries and produces a total of about a half-million cases of wine annually. And, again unlike other California wine regions, it was somewhat late in coming into post-Prohibition commercial wine production. The region received its first major recognition when textile tycoon Ely Callaway launched his eponymous winery in 1974 and immediately began distributing on a national level. Although the Callaway winery is still in operation, it has changed hands over the years and is considerably scaled-down from its early days.

The Temecula AVA was not officially created until 1984, and it changed its name to Temecula Valley in 2004, at which time it also collectively hit the reset button to re-orient its business model – a very unusual happening for any region.



“There are fewer acres planted in Temecula than there was 20 years ago, when Temecula reset from a distribution to direct-to-consumer model,” explains Joe Wiens, whose family moved south from the Lodi area to start Wiens Family Cellars in 1996. “[The reset] was a natural evolution brought on partially by the vine loss due to Pierce’s disease. With less vines, and high land prices,” he says, “it became less attractive to pursue the production volume required to compete in the three-tier system. With our proximity to highly populated areas, the DTC model became more popular. Making just enough wine to sell directly to our guests allows us to focus on quality over quantity.” About 25 million people live in the Los Angeles-San Diego region.



GUS VIZGIRDA

“That’s the funny thing about Temecula – almost all of our wines are sold directly to consumers,” agrees Gus Vizgirda, winemaker for Wilson Creek. Although there are exceptions, most wine producers rate tasting rooms sales as their most-important marketing avenue followed by wine clubs and other online sales. Sales to local retailers and restaurants come in third, and sales through a wholesaler or distributor are rated least-important. Robert Renzoni’s ancestors made wine in Italy, and his family continued in the wine business in distribution after immigrating to the United States. When he moved to Temecula in 2004, Renzoni purchased vineyards and started his eponymous winery. “I chose Temecula because of its similarities to Tuscany, where my family began making wine back in 1886,” he says. “It amazed me how similar Temecula Valley and Tuscany’s’ soil composition, elevation and climate are.”

Renzoni’s winemaker, Olivia Bue, says, “Temecula Valley wine region is an incredibly diverse wine growing region due to many reasons – the

“TODAY, TEMECULA HAS AROUND 40 WINERIES AND PRODUCES A TOTAL OF ABOUT A HALF-MILLION CASES OF WINE ANNUALLY.”

drastic temperature fluctuations which can be 40-50F difference in a 24 hours period and the rolling hills and mountainous topography throughout the region add a diverse complexity to soil composition.” “Because we are DTC, we know we’ll sell the wine,” Wilson Creek’s Vizgirda says, “so there’s no drive to find something unique that will define Temecula. We’ve had good success with Rhone varieties. But as time goes by, the region will have to be looking at varieties that just don’t fit.” “Only in extreme situations, such as weeks straight of 105-plus temperatures, do we really have any difficulties growing grapes,” says longtime winery management owner and Leoness Cellar winemaker Tim Kramer. “But every region has their issues they contend with. In Napa it might be early rains. You just roll with it. It’s a part of farming. “On the winemaking side, pH can be an issue with certain varietals,” he continues “It gets to a point where there has to be a tradeoff between manageable chemistry and optimal ripeness.” (Kramer also notes that, as with many areas of California, there are labor shortages in farming vineyards.)

In addition to Rhone varieties, because of heat and dry weather, Portuguese and Italian varieties are being grown by a number of estates, as well as Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, partly because that’s what everyone grows in California. Although neither appears to be an ideal fit with Temecula, they are two brands customers always look for in tasting rooms. Many of the wineries have invested heavily in hospitality and agritourism features, with most having cafes, restaurants or some type of food service. Some, like Wilson Creek, also offer overnight accommodations. South Coast Winery even features a resort and spa. “Being a resort, we need to have a wine for everybody,” says South Coast winemaker Jon McPherson. That means making sweet table wines, he says, and also a sparkling Pinot Grigio using the Charmat method.



All photos in this article courtesy of: temeculawines.org



The business advantages of the hospitality investments are obvious. Book a wedding party at your hotel, providing multiple guest rooms, multiple meals, the use of spa facilities, wedding dinners, and don’t forget the wine – it all adds up. And, unlike selling to regional or national distributors, there are no middlemen to pay, except, perhaps, the minister.

Looking to the future, everyone expects gradual growth to continue as it has since replanting after the sharpshooter infestation. “We need more vineyards planted for the growth of the region.” Bue says, “My personal opinion is that Temecula Valley will cap out at 60-70 wineries,” Kramer says, which would be an addition of 20 to 30 to the current number, “and I think that’s a good number to get the valley really on the map as a premier wine growing region, especially with the quality of some of the wine being produced.” That sounds quite logical, but one never knows. Temecula Valley seems to have a mind of its own.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NEW OR NOTEWORTHY

BY JIM RINK

WILLAMETTE VALLEY VINEYARDS POSTS PROFIT



Willamette Valley Vineyards, Inc., a leading Oregon producer of Pinot Noir, generated income applicable to common shareholders of \$640,347, or \$0.13 cents per share, for the third quarter of 2020, up from \$595,748 or \$0.12 cents per share, for the third quarter in the prior year, representing a \$44,599, or 7.5%, increase in income applicable to common shareholders in the third quarter of 2020 compared to the third quarter of 2019.

The increase in revenue from direct sales to consumers was primarily the result of increased retail sales revenues from its

brand ambassador program and increased wine sales made over the internet, which more than offset lower revenues from hospitality and kitchen sales mostly due to the restrictions on the operation tasting rooms resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Jim Bernau, Founder and CEO of the winery, said, "The winery has continued to demonstrate brand strength, in the face of COVID-19 regulatory restrictions, benefiting from strong stockholder support in retail stores and direct shipments from the winery. It is inspiring to witness our employees' resourcefulness in protecting their fellow employees and guests while driving sales and making excellent wines."

INDIANA WINE CONTRIBUTES \$2.4 BILLION TO STATE ECONOMY



The Indiana wine industry is on the move, contributing \$2.4 billion to the state's economy, according to an economic impact study completed in 2018. The Indiana General Assembly established the Indiana Wine Grape Council in 1989. The Council's goal is to enhance economic development in the state by establishing a successful wine grape industry through research and marketing development.

Every gallon of wine sold in Indiana provides 5 cents in excise taxes to fund the Council and to support the salaries of members of the Purdue Wine Grape team. The team, which was founded in 1991, includes Purdue Extension specialists in enology (winemaking), viticulture (grape growing), and marketing who assist commercial and amateur grape growers and winemakers. Team members serve in the Purdue University departments of Food Science and Horticulture and Landscape Architecture. That investment has paid off.

Indiana wine sales have grown by more than 15 percent each year. Since 1989, the number of Indiana wineries has increased from nine to nearly 100. Those wineries grow grapes on more than 600 acres, a 300 percent since 1991. Today, Indiana wine production exceeds 1 million gallons a year (5 million bottles) — up from 40,000 gallons a year when the team began its efforts in 1991.

NEW YORK STATE OF WINE

December 16 | 12:00 PM - 1:15 PM Webinar with Jamie Goode. Diverse and bold, with a long history stretching back hundreds of years, New York is reinventing itself as an epicenter of dynamic winemaking. The state is home to the first winery in the United States, and producers are drawing on that background to produce some of the most exciting wines in the country. Wine has been made since the 17th century and since the 1950s a successful focus on quality has taken hold to the point that New York is gaining a well-deserved reputation as one of the world's most transformative regions. There is an incredible amount of diversity in climate and growing conditions: from Long Island, exposed to the Atlantic Ocean, to Hudson Valley, the historic heartland of New York wine, to Niagara and the Champlain Valley on the border with Canada, to Finger Lakes, which has established itself as a region that can compete with Germany, Austria, and the Loire Valley. Think cool climate, expect the unexpected.



This episode focuses on the unique wine regions across New York state: identifying commonalities and differences between the regional profiles, illustrating the distinguishing features of the AVAs as well as what it is that, collectively, this region can bring to the rest of the world.

Panelists include Morten Halgren, Ravines Wine Cellars, Gabriella Macari, Macari Vineyards, Kelby James Russell, Red Newt Cellars, and Mark Snyder, Red Hook Winery

Register for this free webinar at: <https://tinyurl.com/y68vyjad>

MICHAEL DAVID WINERY IS "WINERY OF THE YEAR"



Wine Enthusiast magazine announced in mid-November that Michael David Winery was named 2020 American Winery of the Year. Each year, Wine Enthusiast magazine honors the individuals and companies that have made outstanding achievements in the wine and beverage world with the annual Wine Star Awards. Brothers Michael and David Phillips are 5th generation grape growers whose family has cultivated wine grapes in the Lodi region for nearly a century. Michael founded the winery in 1984 with little more than an old barn, a used press and a few barrels on a dirt floor. Today the Phillips family pride themselves on farming with future generations in mind, having adopted some of the most progressive sustainable farming practices in the state of California.

"We are thrilled and honored to have been selected as Wine Enthusiast's 2020 American Winery of the Year," said Michael Phillips, Founder and Co-Owner. "Our family's mission has been to put Lodi on the map as a producer of quality wines at fair prices. Thanks to the efforts of our team and now this special recognition by Wine Enthusiast, we have reached that goal." Dave Phillips, President and Co-Owner, says "We are so humbled to be recognized for our dedication to this craft. Special thanks to Wine Enthusiast, our wonderful employees, growers and to our distributor partners in all 50 states and more than 30 countries."



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PERSPECTIVE

HOW MUCH IS AN AVA WORTH?

How About a
25% Price Increase
on Every Bottle of Wine

by Andrew Chalk



That is what Harry Peterson-Nedry, estimates. He is the founder of Ribbon Ridge Winery and Ridgecrest Vineyards in the Ribbon Ridge AVA (American Viticultural Area) in Oregon. Ribbon Ridge AVA is a sub-AVA of the Willamette Valley AVA. Wines from Ribbon Ridge are entitled to use either appellation on the bottle label. At a presentation at The Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association (TWGGA) annual conference I posed him the following question: If he bottled one of his wines and prepared two labels. One specifying ‘Willamette Valley AVA’ and the other ‘Ribbon Ridge AVA’, what would be the difference in the price that each could command in the market?

I was stunned by the response. He said 25%. That is due to nothing but the value of the AVA. Consumers consider Ribbon Ridge AVA wines to be sufficiently superior to Willamette Valley AVA wines that they are willing to pay, in his estimation, 25% more. Harry was the original petitioner for the Ribbon Ridge AVA so he should know what he is talking about. The AVA was approved by the U.S. government in 2005, so it has had 15 years to establish its reputation. The price differential of otherwise identical wine is crucial, as it is the definitive measure of AVA value: the measure of how much consumers value the wine from the area, versus wine from outside the area.

I had expected Harry to report a price premium between zero and five percent, not 25 percent. This was based on what I had found in the past. I once did some research on the Castelli di Jesi Verdicchio Riserva DOCG (in the Marche region of Italy), and tried to estimate the price premium versus Verdicchio dei Castelli de Jesi DOC. The two AOP areas exactly overlap and the DOCG was created in 2010 to promote the best of the Verdicchio wines in the DOC, which had existed since 1968. The difference in requirements of the DOCG versus the DOC were a lower yield, more ageing, higher alcohol, and more oak options. All of the DOC producers were eligible to make wine to the DOCG standards but, with skimpy data, I found two things. First, only some 2% of the DOC area had been transitioned

to DOCG and, second, DOCG wines commanded little if any price premium. The DOCG had only been in existence for five years, so time may change these numbers. However, as of that time, the DOCG had been a failure. The extra cost of compliance had led only a 2% conversion rate from DOC to DOCG and it had not raised product prices.

Does this mean that producers should just declare an AVA to raise wine prices? Not so, Harry points out. The wine quality must vindicate the AVA decision or consumers will not continue to pay the higher price. The immediate effect of the creation of an AVA is to reveal, not create, the quality of the wine. And that revelation requires years of marketing by the producers in the AVA to inform the consumer. There is a more subtle, longer-term effect of the increase in the price of AVA wine. Producers find it viable to invest more in making it. For example, better clones in the vineyards, and more ageing or better oak in the winery.

The Ribbon Ridge and Castelli di Jesi Verdicchio Riserva experiences are just two data points. Broader, systematic research is required before we can consider that we have solid results. However, these data points should be considered suggestive that the gains from creating an AVA could be considerable but have a wide variance. This AVA effect is not confined to wine. It is actually a well understood economic phenomenon called “The Market for Lemons” discovered by an economist named George Akerlof, who received the Nobel Prize for his work. The details are too complicated to explain here but are well covered on the web.



About the Author

Andrew Chalk is a Dallas, Texas based author who writes about wine, spirits, beer, food, restaurants, wineries and destinations all over the world. Andrew has contributed to such publications as, Wine Business, Wine Industry Advisor, Meininger's Wine Business International, John Mariani's Virtual Gourmet, and his own blog TheChalkReport. He is the author of the book Top Texas Wineries.

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and safe New Year!

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