

Bob Steinhauer

Senior Vice President, Vineyards
Beringer Brothers
St. Helena

Bob Steinhauer has been with Beringer for 25 vintages. 2004 marks his 26th there and his 39th overall. He came to the Napa Valley in 1971 to Beaulieu where he reported to André Tchelistcheff as vineyard manager under Ron Harris. Bob says he didn't know anything about anything. He had been raised on a raisin vineyard in Fresno, gone to Fresno State and gotten a BS in viticulture. He first went to work on a 5,000 acre farm in Delano owned by Schenley which made Roma Wine, Dubonnet and Brandy. He was vineyard manager there for two years, quit and went back to school to get a Masters in Plant Science. In those days at Fresno, production agriculture was good. It was more ag science at UC Davis. Bob then went back to Schenley as superintendent.

When Schenley was sold to a cooperative. Bob went to work at Beaulieu, under André, who was taken aback; he felt he was the manager and now his vineyards had been taken away from him. But, Bob and André became good friends along with Laurie Wood, Jim Lider, Charlie Wilson and other young lions. Joe Heitz had even been Bob's enology professor.

Bob was a Central Valley boy and he had much to learn about the Napa Valley. Like frost protection. Bob didn't know what to do

when André told him to 'move the heaters to BV5'. Bob didn't know what BV5 was (Beaulieu Vineyard # 5), what a heater was (smudge pot), or what to do when he got them there. Frank Villanueva, a vineyard manager, got him squared away in BV5.

From André came the philosophy, and about the soils and conditions most suitable. Jim Lider, the then farm advisor helped a lot. And the winery staff. Andy Beckstoffer told him about running a business. You could literally name the Cabs on two hands produced in those days: Georges de Latour; Krug, with a red-striped reserve Cab; Inglenook; Robert Mondavi. Beaulieu had lot of Cabernet in Carneros. André was not enamored of Cab there, or in Calistoga. There was a lot of leaf roll virus in those days and it was hard for Cab to reach maturity in Carneros. Bob worked eight years with Andy Beckstoffer to develop where Cab should be grown. Prunes, pastures, walnuts all got converted to vineyard. It was mostly pastures in Carneros. Then they got the Kegg Ranch and redeveloped BV3 in the 70's. Drip irrigation came in 1972 along with reservoirs and water rights. And they changed from vines planted 8x8, cross cultivated, head-pruned to trellis systems, from 12' to 10' rows, California sprawl on AxR. André had advised using S04 rootstock, which was actually 5C and St. George, but Bob didn't like the vigor of St. George. Still feels St. George is too vigorous for Cab.

Bob likes Rutherford and St. Helena for growing Cab. Everyone was enamored of Stags Leap then the way they are with Howell



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Mountain now. With the moderate climate of Napa Valley, soils are critical for Cabernet. Alluvial fans in St. Helena are low in nutrition and very well drained. Bob thinks the whole town of St. Helena would make great Cab. In 1979 he came to Beringer to work on concepts of where Cab does well, the correct soil--not the fluvians by the Napa River. These are too deep, too fertile, and water retaining. There is some advantage of going into the mountains, but not always. There may be deep, fertile pockets of soil, too rich for Cab.

The great Cabs back then were Heitz--Martha's Vineyard; Nate Fay; Milt Eisele; RMW; Inglenook and Beaulieu; Stewart; Martini. The 1974 is a wine Bob'll remember. Freemark Abbey--Bosché Vineyard. There

were 25 or 30 Cabs in the 1970's. Now it's in the 300's. Bob recalled the drought of 1976, 1977. "Only 12 inches of rain fell in 1976. And 1972 was a cold winter; lost a lot of fruit trees. Then, in the summer it was 117° for two or three days. Rained nine days in a row in September. We all asked ourselves 'what the hell are we doing here?' They made a late Harvest Riesling at Beaulieu. That year it was so rotted it was horrible. Cab was great in 1974, great in 1978. 1979 not real good for Cab. Rain and a heat spell. It got so hot at Chabot we had to irrigate from the spring so they couldn't shower or wash clothes at the house. So hot the grapes stalled. 1980 was a nice year. We've had a long string of pretty nice years. 2001 was really special."

Beringer's St. Helena Vineyard, up behind

the winery and off Pratt Avenue, is planted on alluvial soils from York Creek. Sand and gravel from that creek make for a fast-draining, low in nutrition soil, so it's easier to regulate vine growth. Bob thinks AxR was beautiful until it failed, when everyone was trying to match rootstock, soil, improve wine quality so the real phylloxera issue took a while to accept. Charlie Williams, RMW; Jerry Luper, Freemark Abbey; Tucker Catlin, Sterling; and Bob Steinhauer, Beringer jointly hired Lucy Morton to research and give detailed European root stock descriptives. She produced a thick book on seven or eight root stocks. Three then shared the information and replanted. It was a huge project.

There are now five vineyards in Beringer's Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve Program:

Chabot, Steinhauer Ranch, Bancroft, Marston Family and Quarry Vineyards. Chabot, leased to Beringer by Suzanne Bocqueraz, is off Glass Mountain Road. It has three soil types and in the 1980's was completely redone with terraces. Steinhauer Ranch off White Cottage Road in Angwin, bought in 1989, is 36 acres of former pastureland of PUC. Its Aiken red soils are planted to Cab and Cab Franc on five different rootstocks. Bancroft, also in Angwin, was planted by Jim Bancroft in 1982 to Merlot and Cab. He first leased and then sold it to Beringer. It's since been redeveloped from AxR. Its soils are an unusual volcanic tuff, Aiken, Boomer and Kidd, all drip irrigated. Beringer leases Marston Family Vineyard, on Spring Mountain, from Michael Marston who modernized the vineyards formerly on the site. It's now planted to Cab and Merlot, which Bob deems beautiful, with Syrah on the shale. There's also Boomer, Bressa, and Bale Loam along the creek, on 33-09. Quarry Vineyards, on the Silverado Trail, once in the Werli Family, is coming along in Cabernet, the sixth and newest vineyard in Beringer's reserve program.

Because winemakers are demanding much higher fruit concentration, delaying harvest to get intensity, growers want vines to be stressed but not shut down entirely. They're using less amounts of water, later, what's called deficit irrigation technology. There are lots of variations within soil types. For instance, Beringer now picks six to eight different times at Chabot, because of slope, soil variation. They have just had to learn.

Part of the development as a wine growing community, historically, is to constantly improve, to learn. When flavors best develop, where the breaks are in a given field—it doesn't change dramatically, so in ten years you can really know patterns. Irrigation techniques change. Bob feels the wines in the Napa Valley are just so good, you start out with what God gave you, then add lots of implementation of technological aids and historical knowledge. Put it all together. Trellis, vertical shoot position is from Australia; rootstocks are European; drip irrigation came from Israel. Heck, Bob remembers burning tires in the 1960's, and straw bales for frost protection. In 1968 they went to overhead sprinklers, which are now on hundreds of acres. Quite a few fans were in the vineyards when Bob first got to the Valley. The new generation of fans are much quieter, more efficient. And return stack heaters have done away with the smudge pot, reducing soil contaminants and poor air.

Now, there's a change in trellising to get just some cluster exposure. The phenolics and flavors have improved. Long-term sun exposure isn't good. Just sun flecks on the clusters throughout the day is what's wanted, with a one or two leaf cover. Leaf removal is by hand or machine, everything being equal. Row orientation of NW-SE is ideal. It reduces sun burn. In the heat of the day, when the sun is overhead, the fruit is in the shade. The lay of the land, slope, influences canopy management to improve or augment orientation. Even within rows you can get different management according to sun exposure. It takes

skilled management and labor for this new moderate production. There are more vines per acre and less fruit per vine. There's more thinning, allowing only one shoot per bud, two shoots per spur. 'We're actually taking out clusters,' Bob says, still surprised by such action. 'At 90 percent veraison anything not coloring up goes out. More uniformity in maturation. The net sum game isn't yields. The net sum game is quality.'

When you're selecting a site for vineyard, Bob counsels, you must pay attention to its history and your own intuitiveness. What the soil maps say. The climatic conditions. You dig back holes because soil changes throughout a property. You select rootstocks to match the soils and irrigation to match those changes. And, different clones! In the 1970's there were clean stock programs, we got away from leaf roll. Now it's about maturity, flavors. The 1990's were about clonal selection.

How much do you test? Bob wonders. A combination of clones may give the best taste. And you get clonal change in different vintages. Different profiles contribute. Beringer has a research facility for making clonal trials to test wine quality, rootstocks. They have been able to make small lot wines out of all the trials and then put them together. Their 1998 vintage experiment got beat up by the wine writers, Bob shrugs. Now there's a four-year clonal trial going on in Angwin. And Bob's own twenty--fifth year going on at Beringer.