

On Books

Napa Wine: from Mission Days to Present; 2nd edition, by Charles L. Sullivan; published by the Wine Appreciation Guild in cooperation with the Napa Valley Wine Library Association

In celebration of the publication of the second edition of *Napa Wine*, Larkmead Vineyards in Calistoga hosted a book signing with author Charles L. Sullivan on Tuesday, May 13 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. In attendance were members of the Napa Valley Wine Library Association, Wine Appreciation Guild, Sonoma Wine Library, and friends of Larkmead. Elliott Mackey, president of the Wine Appreciation Guild, Kate and Cam Baker, owners of Larkmead, Dale Brown, Bob Long, and Bob Pecota, old and new members of the NVWLA board were all part of the reception for Charles.

NVWLA initiated the writing of *Napa Wine* almost twenty years ago. A first edition of

Napa Wine was published in 1994. So many changes have come to the Napa Valley wine community since then, that the author saw the need to bring his book up to date. Charles has added a fifteenth chapter, “When Cabernet Was King” and ends his history with the sale of Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars in July of 2007. All his notes, indices, tables and maps have been revised for this new edition as well.

In April the Wine Literary Foundation honored Charles with its 18th Wine Literary Award for his work as a wine historian. Charles was particularly interested to visit the winery at Larkmead, since it is one of the newest in the Valley, serving vineyards that are among the Valley’s oldest. He was also able to visit Oak Knoll Ranch and Lamoreaux Vineyards before the reception. If you missed the chance to meet and talk with Charles, he will be at the Annual Tasting, Sunday, August 24, to sign copies of his new edition of *Napa Wine*. ■

In Memoriam

Bernard L. Rhodes 1920-2008

Barney Rhodes was the first president of the Napa Valley Wine Library Association. Fellow officers on its initial slate of 1963 were Nancy Haven, Helen Niemi and Grace Van Deusen elected by trustees Jim Beard, Helen Clark, Mary Frances Friede, Paco Gould, Louis Martini, Tim Meadows, and Marietta Voorhees. Over the next few years, Eulalie Ahern, Maynard Amerine, Nathan Fay, Horace Griswold, Ina Hart, Tom May, and André Tchelistcheff also found themselves involved in guiding the association.

Barney and his wife Belle started coming to Napa Valley on weekends shortly after World War II. Barney was a physician with and later chief of operations for Kaiser Permanente. Laurie Wood remembers Barney and a group of other investors buying land from his brother Bob on Hunt Street, St. Helena in 1954. They sold that property to buy vineyard on Zinfandel Lane. By this time, the tasting room for Heitz Wine



Booksigning event photos, from left to right:

Author Charles L. Sullivan with Cam and Kate Baker;

Chris Howell, Cain Vineyards and Dawnine Dyer, Dyer Vineyards;

Andy Beckstoffer, Beckstoffer Vineyards, and Elliott Mackey, Wine Appreciation Guild;

Cellars had opened on Highway 29, Joe Heitz had become a friend, and was one of the group that bought on Zinfandel Lane. Kathleen Heitz says they all got to know one another from Belle and Barney stopping in to taste and buy wine. The Rhodes would invite Joe and Alice Heitz to the Berkeley Wine and Food Society and to their house in the Oakland hills for dinner.

Laurie Wood, of Frank Wood and Sons, says he first met Barney forty or fifty years ago when Barney hunted him up and they were both starting out. Over the years, Laurie planted and managed several vineyard properties for Barney, his friends and associates. Laurie planted the vineyard on Zinfandel Lane to Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay—a Wente clone Barney had recommended. Laurie also planted it on his own ranch in Rutherford and still speaks admiringly of it. When the Zinfandel Lane vineyard sold, Flora Springs bought the Cabernet vineyard and Heitz its Chardonnay.

In 1964 Belle and Barney were judges at a tasting at the State Fair in Sacramento. Joe Heitz took them to see a new store Corti Brothers had just opened and to meet Darrell Corti. Darrell says wine engenders very great friendships. He, Barney and Belle tasted many wines, for many years here and abroad. Darrell says it was most unusual to have both a husband and wife as judges at such tastings as the State Fair or Los Angeles County Fair. When the Rhodes said something nice about the wine it was, in general,

a good sign and when they bought the wine it was even a better sign. However, according to Darrell, Belle and Barney were sought after for their teaching as much as their opinion.

Barney, Joe and Laurie were all born in 1920. Each year Belle and Barney would have a



Belle and Barney Rhodes

birthday party with the Woods and Heitzes. And, throughout the year Barney would taste wines, including French ones from his cellar, with Joe and Laurie. They'd sit and analyze various wines and discuss how they could improve the quality of the grapes out in the vineyard. Laurie says he puts Barney and

Joe Heitz on a plateau by themselves as far as friendship, kindness, and just all around everything goes.

In 1957 Barney bought a prune orchard in Oakville. He had Laurie plant twelve acres of it to Cabernet. Laurie says he selected the budwood from vines in the experimental Federal Vineyard on Oakville Crossroads managed by UC Davis. However a job change for Barney necessitated the Rhodes' having to sell the property. Martha and Tom May bought their place and met the Rhodes. Soon after the Mays moved in, Barney invited Tom to a black tie dinner at Narsai David's restaurant in Kensington. Tom says the first course was the very first time he had ever met a squid. And when Belle asked the Mays to help with hors d'oeuvres for the Napa Valley Wine Library Association's first Annual Tasting at Spottswoode, it was Tom's maiden encounter with acidulated mushrooms. Laurie Wood planted about eighteen more acres in Cabernet for the Mays before Tom, with the assistance of Keith Bowers expanded the vineyard to 35 acres of bearing vines and named it "Martha's Vineyard." Since 1966, Martha's Vineyard has produced a vineyard designated Cabernet for Heitz.

Barney next bought sixteen acres on Oakville Crossroad and had Laurie plant it to Cabernet and, Laurie thinks, because of its heavier soils, possibly Merlot. Barney sold this vineyard to Narsai David. Finally, Barney bought a prune orchard on Bella Oaks Lane when Laurie says prune prices

were going to pot. After consulting with Joe Heitz and Barney, Laurie planted 17 acres to Cabernet Sauvignon clone 7. He managed the vineyard and Heitz bought its fruit until about 15 years ago, when Frank Wood & Sons had to cut back on the 900 acres it managed and Carneros Vineyard Management took over. However, since 1976 Bella Oaks Vineyard has produced a vineyard designated Cabernet for Heitz.

Joe Criscione first met Barney in 1968 when he was a lobbyist for Kaiser Permanente. Barney found Joe his first piece of property in Napa Valley. He said if Joe didn't want it, Barney would buy it. Joe and his wife Ashley were just back from Italy where Joe had really enjoyed the pioneer Tuscan red, Sassicaia. Joe bought the property and after conferring with Barney and hiring Laurie as vineyard manager he had the land on Inglewood Avenue planted to ninety percent Cabernet Sauvignon and ten percent Cabernet Franc. Joe and Ashley have since sold that vineyard and had Laurie consult on another for them on Crystal Springs Road.

Joe used to have lunch with Barney at Kaiser almost every day (often being joined by Gene Trefethen). He says Barney was notorious for travel. Once he and Belle had gotten back from London the day before and were on their way to Hong Kong the next—this was when the Rhodes were in their sixties. Yet, Barney called to invite Joe

and his wife out to dinner that night. Joe calls Barney and Belle adventurous eaters. And he says it is impossible to say Barney without Belle or to say Belle without Barney. He says they had a wonderful affection for the good life, food, wine, art and travel. They were very open, very liberal—broad thinkers.

Kathleen Heitz says the Rhodes would take Bella Oaks wine along and share it around the world. They promoted Napa Valley as well as Bella Oaks and acquainted countless people with the wines of California and Napa Valley. They would invite chefs back to dinner. Darrell Corti mentions Michael Broadbent, Harry Waugh and Ron Avery among their introductions. Bob Long adds Richard Olney and Julia Child.

Bob and his former wife, Zelma, were often guests at the Rhodes' when Zelma was at Robert Mondavi Winery and Long Vineyards was just getting started. Bob says the Rhodes created a salon, introducing new people in Napa Valley associated with vineyards and wine to old Valley hands. The McCreas, Martinis, Mondavis, Kornells, Schochs and Holmes sat alongside Michael Chiarello and Cindy Pawlcyn. There were hundreds of these parties. Belle was an avid cook and collector of cookbooks and maker of recipes (she helped Kate Trefethen start a cooking school for nascent Napa Valley cooks). Joe Criscione calls her the ultimate planner and organizer. Belle kept two sets

of notes, one by the date of each dinner, the other by who came and what was served. Kathleen says when she was twenty and going to London for the first time she asked Belle for some ideas and got back twenty Xeroxed pages.

Barney planned all the wines to complement Belle's dinners. He kept an extensive wine cellar and also had formal and informal blind tastings of his own. Bob says he was famous for sneaking in one's own wine among the paper bags. Eventually the Rhodes entertained less often, and Belle gave her collection of 3,500 cookbooks to Napa Valley College. Barney's family plans to give his collection of wine books to the Napa Valley Wine Library Association.

We are indebted to Belle and Barney—Barney and Belle for their exemplary support of the Wine Library since its inception, and for Barney's knowledgeable, appreciative and steadying presence on its board for forty-five years. In 2000, NVWLA honored its first president by designating 91 grapevines it planted behind St. Helena Public Library as "Barney's Backyard". Turley Wine Cellars farms these vines and an adjacent city-owned vineyard to produce Petite Syrah Library Vineyard. NVWLA, in turn, donates its share of 18 magnums from each vintage, its "Library Cuvée," to organizations that support education in Napa Valley. Long may we be able to honor and remember Barney Rhodes in this way. ■