

NAPA VALLEY WINE LIBRARY **REPORT**



SUMMER 2014

Calendar of Events

Saturday, August 9, 2014

NVWLA 23rd Annual Seminar

“From Vineyard to Label – In Celebration of *Terroir*,”

a panel discussion

CIA-Greystone, Saint Helena

Sunday, August 10, 2014

NVWLA 52nd Annual Tasting

“From Vineyard to Label-In Celebration of *Terroir*,”

a Vintner’s Choice winetasting

Silverado Resort & Spa, Napa

Also of interest:

Music in the Vineyards

20th Annual Concert Series

July 31 to August 24, 2014

musicinthevineyards.org

4th Annual Mexican-American Harvest Festival

Mexican-American Vintners Association

August 16, 2014

brownpapertickets.com

nsmava.org

Napa Valley Grapegrowers

Harvest STOMP!

Saturday, August 23, 2014

napagrowers.org

FRONT COVER

JULY 2014 AT LAGIER MEREDITH; SYRAH ABOVE, MONDEUSE BELOW

COVER PHOTOGRAPH PRISCILLA UPTON

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Napa Valley Wine Library REPORT

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President's Letter

Dear Friends,

It is summer! and a beautiful one. A suite of very late Spring rains allayed our fears of desert conditions, although it is still a dry year. Despite a lack of total rain inches, these late rainfalls set off a different growing pattern in the vineyards. Vines are particularly lush and the crop looks exceptional, knock on wood.

As the season rolls on, and we get caught up in the energy of selling wine and participating in various wine auctions, tastings, and fundraisers...it is easy to forget that wine growing and winemaking are agricultural enterprises, that we are all dependent on Mother Nature. Her sense of time and seasons are in charge. In spite of our frenetic human activities, when She weighs in, we get what She delivers and seldom do we understand what She intends, try as we may.

It will be interesting to see what this Harvest brings, then: its tonnages, sugar levels, whether there are good flavor balances or not. Then it is up to our winemakers to take what Mother Nature delivers and make the very best wines they can.

This is what the Napa Valley Wine Library's Annual Tasting is all about. Come see, taste and savor what our winemakers have created from what Mother Nature has delivered to them and our vineyard managers have done their best to enhance. This is the challenge, delight and reward of Agriculture: showing off Her bounty and our skills.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Martini
President



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY E & J GALLO WINERY

Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

For the 52nd Annual Tasting, a vintner's choice, we chose "From Vineyard to Label—A Celebration of *Terroir*" for the emphasis of both the tasting and our wine seminar the day before. For the tasting, we invited wineries to pour wines they felt really spoke to the places they were from. We are most appreciative of the care with which the wines have been chosen. Many were made in small production lots of less than 500 cases.

For the seminar, we chose practitioners of vineyard management and winemaking who have had years of experience in their respective fields, who truly appreciate *terroir* and understand what is meant by the term "designated vineyard" and what these can mean in a wineglass.

It seemed logical, then, to select vineyards, wineries and their proprietors from disparate Napa Valley *terroir* for the interviews in this issue of the REPORT. We have arranged the

interviews in the REPORT geographically from north to south, from Spring Mountain southeast to Howell Mountain then southwest to Mount Veeder, down to the most southerly Los Carneros.

Priscilla Upton, our portrait photographer, has said that although she has lived in the Valley for more than thirty years, we send her on location to places she never dreamed existed. Fortunately for us all, she says she enjoys going to every assignment.

Another valued volunteer is Janis Gay, who continues to trenchantly edit every interview. She reads each draft, suggests amendments and offers encouraging words. And like the Uptons, Janis is a life member of NVWLA. We are very glad of their support.

Now we are looking forward to the fast-approaching weekend of the seminar and tasting, and hope you will find this issue a lively companion to those events.

Diana H. Stockton,
Editor



PHOTOGRAPH: CAROL TROY

Michael Keenan

President

Robert Keenan Winery

3660 Spring Mountain Road, Saint Helena

14,000 case production

www.keenanwinery.com

When Michael Keenan's father, Robert, married in 1952, his bride came with a cellarful of French wines. Robert hadn't grown up with wine on the table. Although his grandfather had been a successful contractor in San Francisco, and his father a builder there until the Depression, good French wine wasn't on the Keenan table at dinner. Robert majored in European History and Political Science at Stanford and was a naval aviator in World War II. After the War, he went into insurance and then commercial real estate. As he and his wife Marianna settled into family life in Menlo Park, Robert began a study of French wine. He was later invited to join *La Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin*.

Robert found the world of wine in France quite stratified with its five chateaux at the top and everything else second to those five, and began to dream of somehow becoming as good as those top five. By the 1970's, Robert was ready to have a wine of his own from age-worthy vines, the kind he had found that delivered intensity, complexity, and power. This meant a hillside property. (Michael says his father thought *terroir* was essentially the real



estate business.) In 1974, Robert looked at just two sites in Napa Valley, one on Howell Mountain and the other on Spring. He chose Spring Mountain for its water and exposure and bought the derelict Conradi property that had been idle for years, its vineyards abandoned and its 1904 stone winery a shambles. Robert Keenan Winery was underway.

After high school, Michael travelled around the world for a year. He had planned to go on

to college but after his time abroad, decided to go to work instead. He tried to find a paying job in ornithology--a special interest of his. Having absolutely no luck, Michael went to work in 1977 for his father who badly needed a hand with Keenan's first harvest. This was of purchased fruit: Chardonnay and Cabernet. After harvest, Michael continued working with the contractor then renovating the winery, while occasionally helping to clear vineyard or work with the contractor at other sites, such

as Cakebread Cellars and Sea Ranch. In fact, Michael ended up living and working at Sea Ranch for the next four years, with time out spending six months on an ashram in India.

Michael next went into the contracting business on his own, ultimately settling in Oakland with his wife Jennifer and their two children. And after 20 years with a successful, established residential remodeling business, Michael's dad essentially said, 'You are my only heir. Take over or I'll sell.' He meant the selling of several apartment complexes as well as Keenan! After mulling it over, Michael decided to accept his dad's ultimatum and undertook running both the apartment complex business and the winery. Since 1998, he has been president of Keenan.

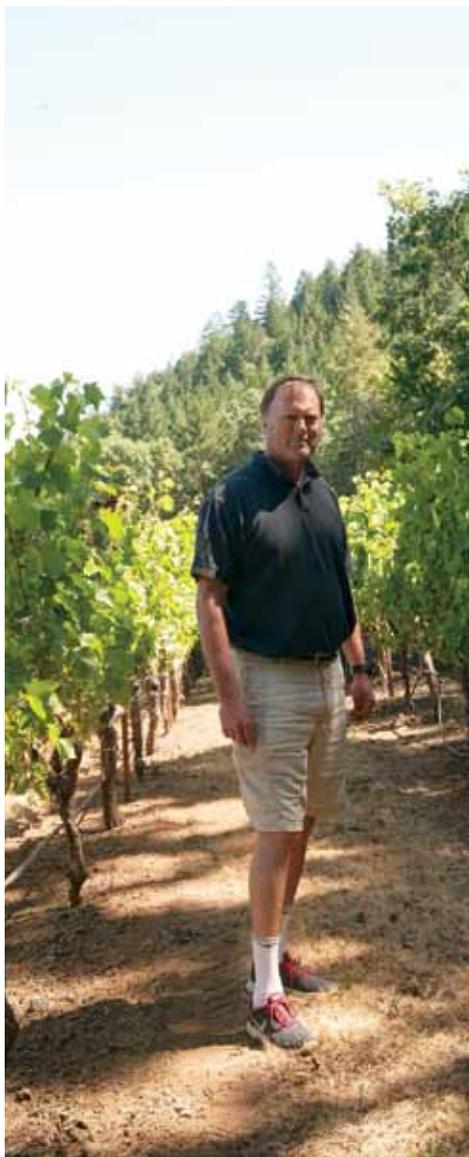
Just 48 of its 180 acres are in production. When Michael took over he insisted the vineyards be farmed sustainably and engaged Peter Nissen of Nissen Vineyard Services, Inc. to manage the vineyard blocks accordingly. As a result of the outbreaks of grape phylloxera in the late 1980's and early 1990's and Pierce's disease in the 1990's, 80% of Keenan's vineyards had been replanted between 1995 and 1998. Michael now ordered all the wild blackberry cleared out along with any other potential harbinger of sharpshooters—insects that carry bacteria that cause Pierce's disease. He also had half an acre of Zinfandel added—a nod to the



early history of the property,' he says with a grin. Further changes came in 2004, 2009 and 2011, including the planting of more Zinfandel along with companion Carignane and Alicante. Michael chose the budwood, Peter the rootstocks. Robert had believed in making grapevines struggle, so Keenan had been dry farmed from the outset. For Michael, however, there are no hard and fast rules. His is a flexible approach. "Stress is natural," he observes, "and Chardonnay doesn't even need water," but the reds are watered as needed.

At the outset Michael reasoned that with the reputation Napa Cab has, "A winery can't be good; it has to be outstanding." He says his father was "'pretty much hands-off" with the

winemaking. When founding winemaker Joe Cafaro left in 1983, Michael said several new winemakers followed, as new vineyards were established. When Michael came to Keenan, Nils Venge was its winemaker. Nils still consults, but after their first vintage together, Michael realized he had the time to direct the wine program. He certainly hadn't planned to change the winemaking when he took over from his father, but thanks to him Michael has a European wine-schooled palate. He was already familiar with the tastes of various *terroir*, knew he didn't want much wood, was used to making quick decisions in business, and had absolutely no idea winemaking would become so rewarding.



In 1995 Randy Kewell joined Keenan as an assistant winemaker, and is now its cellarmaster. Laura Marsh is in charge of the tasting room. Matt Gardner, General Manager, also came on board in 1995 to oversee vineyard, winery and wine sales operations. The Marsh and Gardner families live on the property. Michael continues to live in Oakland, although he and his wife have a house (a converted hen coop) at Keenan. Robert spends every Tuesday and Friday at the winery, but Keenan occupies him full-time, wherever he is. His wife is in charge of design—of the newly renovated tasting room in the winery, an adjacent dining room with offices, and the Keenan wine labels.

At the moment, Keenan offers ten wines: estate Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Zinfandel; an estate Merlot and Merlot from Napa Valley and Los Carneros; three proprietary blends—one white and two red; and a Syrah from Atlas Peak and Coombsville. Michael has also planted Viognier and Albariño to add to Chardonnay for the Keenan Summer Blend. The proprietary red “Mernet” is half Merlot and half Cabernet—either all Cabernet Sauvignon, or Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Michael also likes to blend Merlot into the Keenan Zinfandel with Alicante and Carignane. This year, for Premier Napa Valley, he offered Zinfandel in a super-Tuscan style, with Cabernet Franc added. There is also a

reserve program that began in 2001 with the first crop off a new Cabernet Sauvignon block that wasn’t even a ton an acre, but was so good Michael deemed it worthy of Keenan’s first-ever Reserve. One has been made every year since. Keenan wines generally spend two years in barrel and then two years in bottle (slightly less for the white wines) before release. All are aged in mostly French neutral oak, with 30% new oak for the reds and 25% for the whites, except for the Summer Blend. This wine is aged in stainless steel and in 2006 was the first Keenan wine to carry the words, “Solar Powered and Sustainably Farmed,” on its label.

Michael describes Keenan as a “sustainable solar estate.” The property actually gets more sunshine than the Valley floor although its air temperature averages ten degrees cooler. Its soils are incredibly rocky, part of the Aiken series. When trenches were dug to lay conduit for solar panels, Michael was delighted to see how dark and rich in nutrients the top layers of the soil were. They revealed the success of Keenan’s sustainable farming program. Both of Michael’s children have worked at Keenan. Although his daughter will be at medical school in the fall, she worked in the tasting room last summer. His son is now at Eno Wine Bar in San Francisco and Robert Keenan Winery wines are on its roster. The sustainable future of Keenan looks very good. ■

Susan and Ron Krausz

Principals

Jake Krausz

Estate Director

Arkenstone Vineyards

335 West Lane, Angwin

1,800 case production

www.arkenstone.com

When Susan Krausz met her husband, Ron, a San Francisco native, she was also introduced to her first really good wine. There hadn't been much of it in Minnesota, where she grew up, and Ron's father had a truly great wine cellar with fine German whites as well as Bordeaux reds. Susan soon developed a true appreciation for wine and has taken many wine-related classes. She continues to taste wine among a wide circle of winemaker friends in Napa Valley. Ron and Susan's son Jake, along with his three brothers, grew up with wine on the Krausz table in Napa Valley. When Jake began studying wine seriously, he realized he already knew the Bordeaux he was given to taste in class—it brought him back to his grandparents.

In 1988, Susan and Ron discovered a piece of property off West Lane on Howell Mountain with which they immediately fell in love. Both agreed its proper name during their tenancy would be Arkenstone—"the diamond at the heart of the mountain," if you know your Hobbit as well as they. Initially, the Krausz



family treasured their 42-acre parcel of former pastureland for what it was, a wild patch of grassy scrub and woodland full of native creatures.

Although Susan has been a marriage and family therapist, she majored in forestry and botany in

college and embraces a huge interest in growing things. Ron is in real estate and he, too, believes in nurturing what is inherently best in all things. The Krausz family eventually gave way to the undaunted insistence of a neighboring friend and agreed to have Arkenstone's soils tested for vineyard. They joined the client list of a well-

known vineyard expert, and on a wet winter afternoon he declared that theirs was the only one of the Napa properties he had evaluated that “really had to become a vineyard.” Its well-drained, rocky, volcanic soils, range of exposures, and Mediterranean climate had called out to him as they had to the friend.

Taking a deep breath, the Krauszes asked Philippe Melka to analyze the site. Philippe had trained in geology as well as viticulture and enology in France, and set about making exhaustive studies of Arkenstone’s varied terrain. The finished plan called for a wide array of rootstocks and clones to suit a wide range of conditions while adhering to the family’s adamant directive that mature woods not be disturbed. Just 13 acres of formerly grazed land are now in vineyard, its 22 blocks planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Sauvignon Blanc, and Semillon—plus one block of Syrah. Ron loves the Rhône variety and insisted at the outset that it be included in the plan that chiefly encompassed producing blends of Bordeaux varieties, both red and white.

When the Krausz family began to develop its vineyard, Jake was just the right age to pull rocks and plant vines. He devoted weekends and summers to pruning alongside whatever family member was available. Although Jake started college in Boston at Berklee College

of Music, he graduated with a degree in audio engineering from Ex’pression College in Emeryville, and went to work in music production in Los Angeles. His brother Dan is an attorney with Ron at The Krausz Companies, brother Eric (another alumnus of summers in the vineyard) is in film and TV in Los Angeles, and brother Tim was finishing his freshman year of college at the time of this interview. Tim spent time as a cellar rat in high school, washing bins, scrubbing tanks and drains along with Jake, who is very familiar with the interior of the bladder press—having shoveled it clean many times.

The first in what became a series of experiments in vintages began in 2001. The first commercial vintage was Sauvignon Blanc of 2006, released in 2009; Sam Kaplan was winemaker. The next year, the proprietary red blend, “Obsidian,” made its debut. Today, winemaker Sam, who is also the vineyard manager, is assisted by cellar master Robert Alfaro and vineyard foreman Alberto Vargas, and a long-tenured crew.

The family had actually broken ground for a winery in 2005. When Susan and Ron first thought about the project, they knew straight off their limited small case production wouldn’t make economic sense on its own. So, they took all they had learned as a custom crush client and all they knew about the wineries on

Howell Mountain, which because of its terrain varied considerably, and built the best custom crush operation they possibly could.

Lail Design Group consulted on the architecture, as did many engineers. Susan says with a sigh that a great many people worked together during three years of cave construction. To preserve Arkenstone’s woods and vineyards, most of the winery is underground. The rock for its dressed stone portals came from the vineyard. Susan enjoys passing by the new stonework on one side of the drive, with its old dry stack from cow pasture days, a long low sentinel, on the other.

The first harvest at the winery was 2008. All the family helped and Susan says it was really fun, even if, Ron adds, “The crush pad slab was still curing when the first Sauvignon Blanc came in!” By 2011, construction was done and a full complement of wild animals has now returned to the woods, even the owls. Yes, it has been a lot of work, but the family is proud of the results. Jake felt compelled to return after a Howell Mountain District tasting in Los Angeles when he helped Susan pour for Arkenstone. Since he was certified as a sommelier in 2011 Jake has worked there full-time and is now estate director. He also manages distribution and wholesaling, and makes sure presentation of Krausz wines is just as it should be. In the fall and winter he

helps with blending the red wines and with the whites in the spring.

Jake and his mother agree the winery operation is pretty cool in its Old World style with ultra-New World technology. All the fruit moves by gravity. Clusters in picking bins arrive at ground level. White wine grapes are pressed whole cluster and must guided to barrels or concrete egg fermenters. Red wine grapes are destemmed and sorted on a big shaking berry table built by Burgstahler Machine Works (see

the NVWL Summer 2013 REPORT), then gently directed to stainless steel fermentation tanks in the cave below. Each tank has its own pump programmed for pump-overs scheduled by each winemaker thanks to software from New Zealand. Significant labor and water are saved since there are no hoses or pumps to swap out and clean. Two different fermentation caves, warmer for reds and cooler for whites, control malolactic fermentation. Barrel ageing is at a constant 56 naturally cooled degrees in the cave. Jake and Susan say, thanks to

the custom crush program, they have a great community of winemakers at Arkenstone, united in working the varied harvests from grape to bottle. The collegiality is especially prized whenever challenges at harvest arise.

The Sauvignon Blanc Merry Edwards made at Liparita Cellars inspired that of Arkenstone. Susan and Ron also admire how this grape is treated in Bordeaux: as a truly *noble* grape. Soils at Arkenstone are similar to Sancerre (that same white volcanic soil Jake avers he hopes to see soon) and its vines crop tiny berries with an excellent concentration of flavors. After fermentation, the white wine is aged sur lies for almost a year in new and old French oak and concrete egg. Jake is a fan of the egg—its shape provides natural convection for mixing (“with zero chance of over-oaking,” he drily observes). After blending, which includes adding in some Semillon, the wine is bottled and aged for another year—a bottling line was due at the time of the interview.

In 2011, conditions were just right for making a rosé—another wine close to Ron’s heart. With some trepidation, but in the spirit of trying something new and fun, Arkenstone made 100 cases from a quick saignée of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot chosen from the most aromatic of the lots. Susan says



everyone really liked it. The winery continues to produce a rosé under its Loupe (as in examining a gemstone) label.

The Krauszses have also started a non-estate program, NVD (Native Vista Domain). This portfolio is from carefully selected and meticulously farmed sites in the eastern mountains of the Valley similar in elevation to Arkenstone—above the fog and with earth as much like its as possible: soil that makes a grapevine struggle. Such sites inspired the name Native Vista Domain, Susan explains, “Because there have been so many generations over thousands of years looking out over this Valley.” The first NVD vintage was a 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon. Sauvignon Blanc was added in 2012.

The tasting room and gardens surrounding the winery are Susan’s design. She has sought plants requiring little water for cover—native and introduced—or providing sustenance—Gala and Fuji apples from espaliered trees that everyone at the winery enjoys and next season, pomegranates. Susan regards all of Arkenstone as “just part of the continuum” and wine a natural part of having dinner. She and Ron and their children love to cook. She says with a smile, “Eating with the family—that’s the best!” ■



Carole Meredith

Proprietor

Lagier Meredith

4967 Dry Creek Road, Napa

900 case production

lagiermeredith.com

Carole Meredith was born in Wales. When she was five her father was transferred by his company, and the family moved to Canada. Five years and another transfer later, Carole

and her family came to Orinda. Carole says she grew up drinking lots of tea in their typically English household—water, milk and lots of tea. She came to wine through science.

When Carole was ready for college, her father persuaded her to attend University of California at Davis (UC Davis) rather than a seemingly teeming with unrest at the time UC Berkeley. “There was just as much political

activism at Davis, but less in the press,” she laughs. Although tempted by studio art in her junior year, Carole graduated with a degree in biology. After three years of working in the Bay Area, she decided to study for a PhD in plant genetics. At that time, UC Davis was among the handful of top universities for such a course of study, so Carole returned to her alma mater.

After a PhD in tomato genetics, Carole took a post-doctoral year at Michigan State, funded by a National Science Foundation grant. She says it came at a watershed time. The field of biotechnology was just getting started. It was the burgeoning era of molecular biology and genetic engineering: “Electrophoresis is so ‘70’s.” Carole missed California, however, so she came back and devoted two years to biotechnology research on corn, cotton and soybeans for a private company, only to find she did not enjoy work in the private sector. Coincidentally, at UC Davis, a number of professors in the agricultural sciences hired after World War II at UC Davis after World War II were on the verge of retirement. In 1980, Carole was hired by UC Davis to take the place of Professor Harold Olmo, and bring her expertise from the blossoming world of biotechnology to, as she says, “The Grape.”

And on this return to UC Davis, Carole met her future husband, Stephen Lagier, a graduate

student in enology with a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry who came from a family of almond-growers. Steve had already decided he did not want to pursue an academic career had been inspired by a friend who had chosen winemaking to do the same. After he and Carole married and Steve had finished his degree, he was hired by Robert Mondavi Winery (RMW) as part of its winemaking

team. This posed a challenge for the couple, he working in Oakville, she in Davis, but Carole ultimately volunteered to commute and they looked for property in Napa. Although Napa, unlike Davis, had no restaurants or live entertainment to speak of, it did have a beautiful temperate climate and topography similar to Orinda’s. Carole knew she could be happy in Napa, rather than on the flat in the



heat of nearer-by Vacaville and Fairfield. In December of 1985, looking at property, Carole and Steve maneuvered their vehicle up a steep dirt road to a Mount Veeder ridgetop. Stagecoaches and wagons had once wound along the same way from Napa Valley to Sonoma. The couple came out of tule fog blanketing Napa Valley into sunshine and air twenty degrees warmer. There, nestled among soaring peaks, sat a small wood frame house surrounded by clearings that were already growing back. A small number of ancient olive trees soldiered through nearby brush. All the rest was wild, or stumps, roots and saplings. Carole and Steve agreed they need look no further. For almost ten years, the two commuted to and from their jobs during the week and spent their spare time cleaning up the property. They began to contemplate planting a vineyard. Carole knew every speck of tree root would have to be removed from the clearings to rid their land of an opportunity for oak root fungus to flourish—a fungus fatal to grapevines. After all the stumps and roots, large and small, were removed by hand and tractor, a grass cover crop went in to protect the soil from erosion as they waited for every tiny root fragment in the soil to die off. In 1994, on just one half acre, Carole and Steve planted their first vines for a wine they intended to make and drink themselves. They had already decided on Syrah, having become familiar with Northern Rhône wines and beginning to enjoy

California Syrah. The budwood came from a nursery in the Central Valley. In 1996 Steve made their first homemade wine, at a friend's winery. In 1997 he made a little more that he and Carole thought was really good. And then came another watershed event in their lives: a friend who was a winemaker invited them to bring their wine to a blind tasting of California Syrah at her house. After 16 years Carole is still dumbfounded to report that their wine was the unanimous favorite of the group of ten—all of them winemakers!

Steve and Carole decided to make the leap to a commercial release, and make their wine in bond rather than, as Steve might suggest, in the carport. The 1998 vintage was just 74 cases. Released in 2000, it was already sold-out simply by word-of-mouth. Steve could see success ahead and resigned from RMW in 1999 as Lagier Meredith planted a little bit more vineyard in 1999, and again in 2000 and 2001. By 2001, Carole and Steve knew they could make a living from their wine so Carole took early retirement from UC Davis in 2003.

Lagier Meredith has 4.5 acres of vineyard planted to Syrah, Zinfandel, Malbec and Mondeuse. A wine is produced from each variety as well as a rosé and a Port-style wine from Syrah. The latter is made only as inventory dips, which is slowly, for as Carole points out, Ports are bought by the bottle rather

than case. Steve and Carole make their wines at a small winery on the Napa Valley floor. For the rosé, a Syrah block is designated each year for the main part of the rosé and pressed directly; saignées of Mondeuse and Zinfandel are then added. At the outset, when the couple was making just one wine, a wholly natural fermentation was too uncertain. It might not complete or might add something stinky, so the juice is inoculated with commercial yeast and then aged in neutral French oak. Barrels are acquired from Pinot producers after three uses. The Syrah, Malbec and Mondeuse spend about 21 months in barrel, Zinfandel less. All are bottle-aged only a few months. Carole handles the business side of things, including sales. She says they have had a winery permit for some time, and hope one day to build their own facility.

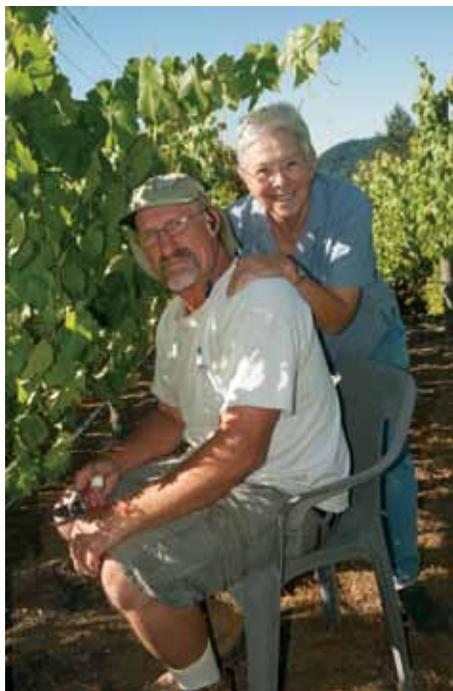
The initial decision to plant Syrah was purely one of personal preference, and came at the conclusion of a research project. Carole and her UC Davis research group had been able to determine the parentage of Syrah: a cross between two grape varieties common in today's Rhône-Alpes region of France: Mondeuse in Savoie and Dureza in Ardèche. She and Steve had also become acquainted with wines from Hermitage in the Rhône Valley. Hermitage and the Qupé Bien Nacido hillside select from Los Olivos, California were their inspiration. Moreover, one of Carole's students had been

Jean-Louis Chave. His family has made wine in Hermitage since 1481 and in 1991, Jean-Louis came out to Carole and Steve's. Admiring its mountainous vista he agreed the site was ideal for Syrah.

The Lagier Meredith planting of Mondeuse was also prompted by Carole's research. Her group had found that Mondeuse and Syrah are closely related genetically. However, Carole and Steve had observed that French wines from Syrah and Mondeuse were quite different from each other, despite the genetic similarity of the two varieties. They planted Mondeuse right next to their Syrah so they could compare the two wines made on the same site with the same farming and winemaking methods. Research inspired the planting of Zinfandel as well. Carole and her research collaborators were able to identify this variety as the Croatian *Crljenak Kastelanski* (which Carole pronounces effortlessly), called Primitivo in Italy. The Lagier Meredith Zinfandel budwood came from a neighboring vineyard. Malbec budwood came from another neighboring Mount Veeder vineyard. Steve and Carole had simply always really liked the Malbec made from those vines.

They do all the daily vineyard work and winemaking themselves, amplified by a picking crew at harvest. At the time of the interview

Steve was rebuilding the top to a water storage tank. The two are a disciplined team with a strong work ethic and an approach Carole defines as sensible, without dogma. She says they call their farming "sensibly sustainable." Their vineyards are no-till, with permanent cover crops and everything in balance. Because of their nearly 80 acres of surrounding woods, Carole says they do not have dense flocks of birds pressuring the vineyard. Rather, they have many birds of all kinds, and the birds come to eat insects, not the grapes! In 2002 the long



dirt road leading to the property was paved. Steve and Carole are also part of an additional venture—Chester's Anvil—recently established with Aaron and Claire Pott. Its current portfolio has five wines, four from Napa Valley and a fifth from Mendocino. These are "Wines...that aren't afraid to show you where they come from." Carole laughingly says Yogi Berra seems to sum up the Lagier Meredith philosophy, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

Carole traveled extensively, professionally, to all the wine countries of Europe. Now she prefers to travel as little as possible and only pour at tastings within an hour's drive. She finds farming, marketing and running the business, what with vendors and compliance, a full-time job. Their wines are in a few states besides California--where you'd expect the large wine markets to be. They even export a bit--to Japan, China and the UK.

Carole says she had imagined she'd live to be a hundred and three at the desk in her university office, and Steve still working at RMW. But the large organizations with their meetings and protocol, policies and procedures wore the two down. Running their own business to make their own wine suits the two perfectly. And as Jean-Louis said of Syrah, "The variety loves a view." So does Lagier Meredith. ■

Francis Mahoney

Founder

Mahoney Vineyards

1134 Dealy Lane, Napa

5,000 case production

www.carneroswinecompany.com

The 1960's found Francis Mahoney working at Connoisseur Wine Imports on Bryant Street in San Francisco after chasing Formula One racecars meet-to-meet through Europe, and becoming acquainted with wine along the way. At Connoisseur, Bob Mondavi would come by, often with importer and distributor Larry Romano from Larry's nearby A.L. Romano Wine Company. Connoisseur had a lot of French estates in its inventory--classified first growths from Bordeaux and Burgundy, as well as very good German estates wines. Francis says it was not looking for California wines to fill out the floor, but somehow Robert Mondavi Winery (RMW) wines joined the inventory. Whenever Bob came in, he would say to the staff, "Why don't you come up to the Valley?" Francis had been to Napa Valley, sure, but not ever at the invitation of a vintner.

His father had worked for Basalt Rock in Napa (now Syar Industries)—he helped build the California Veterans Home in Yountville--and after moving to San Francisco continued to bring his family out to picnic beside the Napa River, where he taught Francis to fish. In 1970, Francis made it a point to come to



Napa Valley and go winetasting at RMW. Less than a year later he and his wife Kathleen had moved to Napa. Francis began the commute to San Francisco but found that instead of wine sales, what he really wanted to get into was wine production. While living in Napa, just off Old Sonoma Road, Francis

found work with Bob Travers at Mayacamas and started looking for a patch of land. It seemed simplest to look in the area, and sure enough, he and Kathleen found a former horse ranch of 200 acres on Dealy Lane. Francis went partners with his boss at Connoisseur, Balfour Gibson, and the two bought the parcel

in 1972. Francis intended to be an Old World grower—idle two or three months of the year during vine dormancy—quite a doable pursuit, he thought, but he and Balfour joined the crush of 1972 at their Carneros Creek Winery.

There was plenty of cleaning up to do. Nevertheless, Francis and Kathleen embarked on developing Carneros Creek. This was the first fresh winery in Los Carneros since Prohibition and at a time, Francis muses, when “the George de la Tour Private Reserve price point was \$5.00 and only a handful of wineries in the Valley—Freemark Abbey, Mondavi, Chappellet [as well as Beaulieu].” Francis already knew he wanted to do Burgundy-type wine and André Tchelistcheff, a customer of Connoisseur, had advised Los Carneros. Francis visited the pioneering André and Louis P. Martini who counseled Up Valley as too hot. Los Carneros, with its cooler nights and fog, was the spot to plant Pinot Noir. Moreover, André felt ‘Cabernet was not as interesting as Pinot Noir could be; when you hit it with Pinot Noir, you knew it.’

One day after the 1973 harvest at Trefethen Family Vineyards, Francis sampled a few tank lots from Trefethen blocks he had liked the smell of, and now the taste. Their provocative

Pinot Noir qualities prompted him to ask his friend Tony Baldini [founding vineyard manager at Trefethen from 1968-2000] about them. Tony said the budwood had come from two different vineyards, but both had been grafted with Martini clones from the Martini Stanly Lane Ranch in Napa, planted by Louis P. Martini. That after World War II, young Louis had worked with Professor Harold Olmo at UC Davis on clonal selections of Pinot Noir. Francis says so many records documenting early budwood in the Valley

were simply lost, if, indeed, they had ever existed. “Who can say if Inglenook Pinot Noir budwood that came by ship really was from Romanée-Conti?”

During his time at Connoisseur, Francis had been introduced to the significance of wine grape clones in French Burgundian reds. In 1973, however, there still wasn’t much understanding of the Pinot Noir grape in Napa Valley, he says, let alone clones. The variety was such a lousy producer, neither farmers nor



vintners had wanted much to do with it. With so few technical or winetasting groups and relatively few wineries, everybody was learning through trial and error. It made sense to Francis to embark on looking at Pinot Noir clones with UC Davis. Professors Curtis Alley, Austin Goheen and Harold Olmo worked with him to set up a test station site at Carneros Creek Winery to grow budwood. For two years they visited, marked, sampled, and verified the origins of Pinot Noir selections from vineyards including those of Beaulieu, Chalone, Hanzell, Inglenook, Martini, and Swan as well as UC research stations in Oakville, Davis and the former Jackson station. Professors Goheen and Olmo also brought in brand-new Foundation Plant Services examples from UC Davis. Prior tests from young Louis's day with Professor Olmo were for production as well as resistance to viruses, and had had some success. Francis was looking for quality and set aside 1½ acres for the station.

It took twelve years of asking, "Why do you like this selection? Can it be defined?" Planting and production criteria were definite: so many buds per vine, vine rows planted so wide for gondolas, mitigation of soil differences by area of planting. Defining quality and conditions that affected it were subtle. Ultimately, Francis and UC Davis achieved 20 healthy Pinot Noir clonal selections. Both UC Davis and Carneros Creek made wine from every clone

for a dozen harvests, Carneros Creek vinting each in custom 15 gallon barrels of French oak. Each year the university and Francis agreed more than they disagreed on the best clones. As Francis tasted each wine he would ask, "What does your selection give you? What does the site give back?" Ultimately, seven were clearly the consistently top performers. It would be up to a winemaker to create the best blend.

Throughout this test station era, Francis was winemaker at Carneros Creek and while its Pinot Noir vineyards developed, Francis bought Cabernet and Merlot fruit from many vineyards, designating each on the label—Cabernet from Fay, Truchard, Turnbull and Napanook. Thanks to Beaulieu, Caymus, Heitz, Mayacamas, and RMW, Napa Valley's unrivaled king was Cabernet. It was a slow process of educating people on the merits of Pinot Noir, as the 5.5 planted Carneros Creek planted acreage became 149 acres of Pinot Noir and 33 in other varieties, with a dozen clients buying fruit and an annual production of 17,000 cases.

And during Francis's research years, a number of new vineyards and wineries were established in the region: Acacia in 1979, Bouchaine Vineyards in the old Garetto Winery in 1981, David Graves and Dick Ward with Saintsbury the same year. A Los Carneros American Viticultural Area (AVA) was established in

1983. Francis called the forming of this AVA a "highly politicized effort." The original application lacked inclusive representation. In 1985, the Carneros Quality Alliance was formed, a California innovation that included growers and vintners, with Francis as its first president. Ultimately, its work was successful. Not only had the Alliance been about keeping out a freeway; it was also about the exclusivity of a certain region: the farming of grapes in Los Carneros. This AVA was the very first to combine wineries in more than one county, and between 1983 and 1987, thanks to the Alliance, property values went from as little as \$2,000 an acre to as much as \$15,000.

In 1986 Francis freely shared the results of his clonal research with the wine industry because he wanted other producers to be able to make good wine. By improving the pool of information—taking Pinot Noir from leaving a brown-orange ring in the glass to its full range of color and varietal characteristics—Pinot Noir consumers would be happy and the market would expand. Francis reflects, "This was when you still pronounced the "t" in Merlot." Interest in Pinot Noir began to pick up in the 80's and 90's, as the effects of clean clones planted in the right locations took hold.

Francis created Fleur de Carneros (now Fleur de California) in 1991. Next, he and Kathleen bought their silent partner Balfour out in

1992. With an outside investment in 1998, the winery was expanded and updated, freeing Francis to tend vineyards and his family rather than worry about case production, which had grown to 30,000. Versed in small lot production, Ken Foster came on in 2002 as winemaker and winery ombudsman to create Mahoney wines. Now an important next step loomed. Were any of the three Mahoney children interested in the winery? No. One was at Intel, one teaching in Montana, and one studying medicine. With 30 years of clonal research bookending his efforts at Carneros Creek, Francis says it made sense to sell, but hold onto the vineyards and brands—Mahoney and Fleur. In 2004 Michael Mondavi Family Estate bought Carneros Creek. [That facility and 13 acres of vineyard has since been sold to Kieu Hoang Winery.]

Mahoney Vineyards' own first release was its 2004 Pinot Noir. Francis says this vintage marks a return to “wine that comes from the place—the *terroir*: of soil, climate and style—rather than for the numbers, the critics.” In addition to Pinot Noir, Francis has planted Chardonnay on the hills, and in honor of his wife's Italian heritage (and the *terroir*),

Montepulciano and Vermentino at Las Brisas, in a part of the vineyard Francis characterizes as “very Ligurian.”

In big bearing years Mahoney makes eleven wines: Albariño, Chardonnay, Montepulciano, Nebbiolo, four Pinot Noirs, Sangiovese, Syrah, and Tempranillo. The client, however, comes first and Mahoney is farmed as its clients stipulate—type, clone, leafing, applications. Laughingly, Francis warns, “Grower obstinacy is not a good quality!” Depending on the year, Mahoney fruit is crushed at Bouchaine Vineyards or Viansa, where it is fermented and barreled. The wines then travel west in Los Carneros to age. Fleur de California, which enjoys a wide sourcing of grapes for its Los Carneros Pinot Noir and Vin Gris, and a Central Coast Petite Sirah, is now at 20,000 cases.

At home the Mahoneys share the cooking. Francis says he likes to grill salmon, lamb, and vegetables. He and his wife cook and eat lots of fish—he used to have a boat at Bodega—and are partial to crab and salmon. A new favorite of his is grilled sweet potatoes; Francis was just planting Beauregards at this interview. He says, with a sweep of his hand, they can be delicious with olive oil, that every place has its own character. The cooler climate of Los Carneros gives acidity, flavor that isn't floral: brighter—just like Francis. ■



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Wine Appreciation Faculty and REPORT Interviewees

Faculty consists primarily of Napa Valley winemakers, winegrowers, winery principals, and chefs. Instructors and interviewees for the last three years follow:

Garrett Ahnfeldt
Allen Balik
Jon Berlin
Lily Oliver Berlin
Wayne Burgstahler
Jim Cross
Timm Crull
Kara Pecota Dunn
Mike Dunn
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