

V.3

LOAM Baby

A Wine
Culture
Journal

NAPA VALLEY ISSUE



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Opening Letter

When I launched Loam Baby, a few of my friends asked why I didn't make the first issue about the Napa Valley. It was, after all, the place where I grew up and where I first fell in love with wine.

I explained to them that sometimes it's hard to write about something you're very close to, and so I wanted a couple of issues of Loam Baby under my belt before focusing on a place that in many ways will always feel like home, no matter where I end up living.

Some of the happiest years of my childhood were spent attending Yountville Elementary School. My fifth-grade teacher, Jeff Wade, used to sing us Peter, Paul and Mary songs, and coached our soccer team, for which I played right wing forward. He seemed to always be in a good mood, and I looked forward to going to school each morning. My sixth-grade teacher, Bobbie Saunders, gave me my very first real book: *Watership Down*. I still credit her to this day for instilling in me a love of reading and writing. This issue is dedicated in part to them, wherever they may be.

It is also dedicated to Vince Arroyo, the very first winemaker I befriended, and someone who set a fine example early on in my career. He's always been a hard-working farmer, first and foremost, and a humble man, intent on making great wines in his own time, in his own quiet way. I owe him a debt of gratitude for always demonstrating to me, through his actions, that loyalty and patience are two of the greatest gifts you can give to a fellow human being.

For a time, I worked for Robert Mondavi. He informed my career greatly. No matter who he was with at the time – dignitaries, celebrities, famous chefs – he always took the time to address me by my first name and asked how I was doing. He was elegant and forward-thinking. So many of us who are in the wine industry today owe him a debt of gratitude as well.

Lastly, this issue is dedicated to you, Dear Reader, and to R., for being a great man, mentor and friend.

I hope you enjoy this trip through my beloved hometown.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.H. Drexel". The letters are fluid and connected, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the word "Drexel".

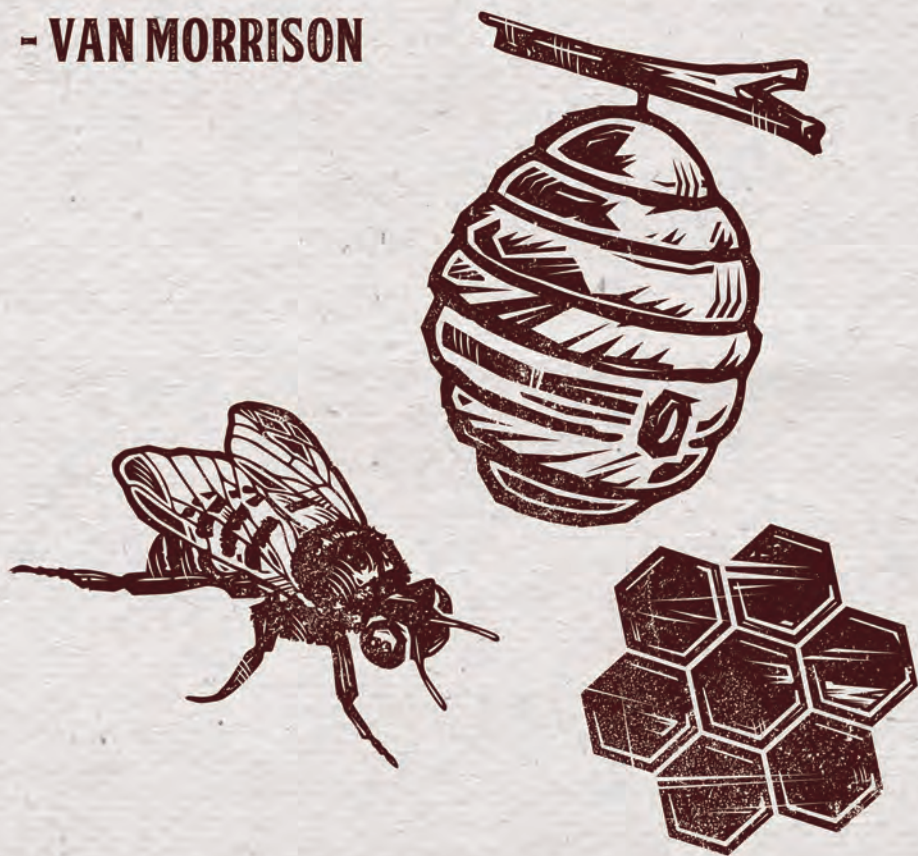
R.H. Drexel

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**“ YOU CAN'T STOP US ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM
YOU CAN'T STOP US 'CAUSE OUR EYES CAN SEE
MEN WITH INSIGHT, MEN IN GRANITE
KNIGHTS IN ARMOR INTENT ON CHIVALRY
SHE'S AS SWEET AS TUPELO HONEY
SHE'S AN ANGEL OF THE FIRST DEGREE
SHE'S AS SWEET AS TUPELO HONEY
JUST LIKE HONEY, BABY, FROM THE BEE ”**

- VAN MORRISON



The Doctor's Son

Philippe Melka is one of the most respected wine consultants in the United States. Some of his clients, past and present, include Dana Estates, Moone-Tsai, Brand, Hundred Acre, Dalle Valle and Bryant Family Vineyards, to name just a handful. When I sat down to chat with Philippe Melka earlier this year, I felt I should apologize to him for some inexplicable reason, for an article that had appeared in the Wall Street Journal about wine consultants just prior to our interview. The journalist who wrote the piece seemed more focused on the number of clients each consultant had, and how much money they were earning, than on the actual day-to-day nuts and bolts of the services they provide clients.

In the article, the perception that certain consultants produce monolithic, homogeneous wines was, at least in my mind, somewhat supported by the journalist. She at least made this topic prevalent in her piece. It's so easy to jump on the bandwagon and state that wines made under the guidance of consultants like Michel Rolland or Philippe Melka all taste the same. One has only to spend real time tasting through even a sliver of their client portfolios to realize that the wines upon which they place their astute imprimatur are distinctive, many of them memorable and reflecting the land where they found their provenance.

We touched upon this topic, and a few others, when I sat down with the soft-spoken and intelligent Philippe Melka.

RH Drexel: *What does a wine consultant do?*

Philippe Melka: Well, it's hard work. The wine business is 24/7; that's how I feel. It's very consuming. Consulting is a little different from what winemakers do, I would say. Technically, consultants do less labor, and we drive a lot more. [Laughs.]

RHD: *I have to say I was pretty disappointed in that Wall Street Journal article. It felt too focused on how much money wine consultants earn, rather than delving into the services they provide clients.*

PM: You know, over the years, she [*the journalist*] has been kind to me, so the article was unexpected. You don't really ask people those kinds of questions – how much money do they make and that sort of thing. And, you know, it was very uncomfortable, because from client to client, things are a little different. There are so many factors. Some clients I have had for fifteen years, so my relationship with them might be different from a more recent client. The difficult part was feeling like people think you want to be a consultant just to make money. Consulting is a very complex topic. I don't think I've ever read a good article about wine consultants. This idea that it's just to make money... To tell you the truth, that is not it at all. It is a job that suits me



very well. It fits my strengths. Rather than working with the same wine every day, or managing an estate, my strengths are better suited to working with a number of different clients.

The most important thing for me is to love what I do. My dad was a general practitioner in the old days in France. That meant he did house calls. He would visit people in their homes, morning and night. He helped many patients every day. He would go to the local hospital to assist in births and so on. He loved to help people.

I have this same need as my father had: to see this movement of life; to see different people, in different environments, and to help them if I can. This concept of helping is very important to me. For me, this concept of helping someone to achieve their dream is the essence of consulting. My dad's job was much more important as a doctor. He took care of people. I just make wine. But maybe I help someone to realize their dream.



RHD: *How much of your job is managing client expectations?*

PM: This is not so much a factor for me. I am working mostly with people who love wine. They understand that theirs is a long-term project and they are willing to work hard to get there. They are very focused. But there is a small percentage of clients...I don't know what that percentage is, but I have to kick their ass a little bit. I have to tell them, 'Don't let us do everything. You really have to be a big part of this if you want to be successful.' So, there's a little bit of that going on. And, as you know, we're in the Napa Valley, so we are dealing with very small, mom-and-pop kinds of wineries. This is not their full-time job; they came from another business, so for some, their idea of being in the wine business is this lifestyle, you know...to have fun. They come from a very naïve place, which is good in a way, because if they knew how hard the business really is they would never get into it in the first place. So the lifestyle attracts them, but then, hopefully, they learn to work hard for success.

Most of my clients, though, they are in this for the very long term. They are building something for their children. These kind of people, you know, they are not so concerned about high scores and all of that.

But I work for the score-types, too – the ones that want the high scores. I have to admit, though, that very few people nowadays mention scores to me. I think part of it is because so many people want direct sales these days. So they are more focused on how to capture people who come into this valley and introduce them to their story and their wines, and build a relationship with the customer.

Most of the people that come into Napa Valley...I would say 80%...don't know or care

about scores. The people who care about scores are already in the wine business. They are retailers, wholesalers, distributors.

RHD: *Are the days of scores mattering over?*

PM: I don't know. I think they can still help to educate people if they need it. I wish people would focus more on the descriptions of the wines, which can be wonderful and helpful, instead of just the number.

There are a lot of good wine writers who really know how to describe a wine. And this helps the consumer if they don't have time or money to sample everything.

RHD: *Have you run into this phenomenon wherein someone who has made a lot of money in another business just assumes that they'll also make money in the wine business?*

PM: Yes! Absolutely. They don't realize at all how different the wine business is from any other business. I have to say to those people, 'We are not making soup!' Sometimes a client will want me to come in and blend a wine that day, and I have to explain to them that blending does not work that way. The wine has to be in a good mood. I have to be a good mood. Things have to be in sync. The wine needs to show well, and personally, I need to want to blend that day.



Sometimes they think I am just a machine. So it's part of their education for me to tell them that in order to create those special, high-end wines, everything has to be in sync. And, also, everyone needs to be excited about it. You need to have that true excitement, and that takes time, and it needs to come from everyone involved.

A lot of what makes up the wine business is almost counter to the American mentality; it's counter to what they have learned and what they understand. It doesn't make sense to some people that they have to wait, wait, wait in the wine business. They have to plant their vines, and then wait for the fruit, and then wait for the wine to be in the barrel and then wait for it to age in the bottle. This is a difficult part of consulting – teaching people to wait for something special when they are used to getting what they want right away.

RHD: *Is it possible for you to fall in love with a wine, even just as consultant...when you do not own that wine?*

PM: Oh, yes. At the end of the day, they are still my babies. I am very proud of them. I guess the toughest part for me is having people critiquing your style, but I understand that. But, it's like someone critiquing your children, whom you love and worked hard with. What people don't realize is that, as a consultant, it takes time, at least for me, to really get into a project. I need to be able to feel the owners, feel the vineyard, feel the reaction of the wine. You put so many years into a wine. When you create a wine, it's also made of brain cells and human relationships and pride. That's why it's difficult to accept criticism, but you know some criticism is good. You can learn from it.

RHD: *Do you feel like you have a certain winemaking style?*

PM: That's an interesting question, because some people might say that I have a style, but my real reputation is for not having a specific style. What I bring to the table is that I want to tell the truth: the truth of the estate, the truth of the wine's concept. In order to tell the truth, you have to remove yourself as much as you can.

Bob Levy said years ago that if you give two winemakers the exact vineyard sources, the same grapes, they are going to make two different wines. And this is true, you know, because even if one harvests ten days later than the other, this is already a big difference. So, yes, we all have our choices, how we've been raised, the foundation of our life, that affects the kinds of wines we make, but I still try to remove myself from this as much as possible.

My personality is to let other things shine, not me. I am more comfortable being in the back ground. I was very shy originally; that is also part of me just being me. And this personality trait fits well into consulting because I want the wines to shine, and not to be famous, necessarily.

RHD: *Are there vineyard designates or sub-appellations of which you are especially fond?*



PM: I have to admit that I have a few spots that I really like. They make sense. If you're thinking purely of classicism in Napa Valley wines, if you go from Yountville on the east side, starting with Dominus, and you go up North, including Vine Hill Ranch, To-Kalon, Stag's Leap, Scarecrow, Inglenook...this section for me represents very classic wines. And also Harlan is very classic. Hillsides bring exception to wines, too, like Pritchard Hill. That is a very intriguing place for me.

RHD: *What is your definition of a good wine?*

PM: Great texture. Length. A great foundation, structure. Complexity. Sophistication. Age-worthiness. For me, I always work with texture and structure much more than with flavors. The feeling of the texture...it can be soft, edgy...the weight and length creates the harmony of the wine. Of course, I want a positive impression of the flavors, but I look for texture, structure.

In the '80s and '90s, many winemakers were all about pushing the envelope. They were all about concentration. This younger generation is more

about an intellectual approach to winemaking. Their palates are a little more evolved. They're eating better than we used to, so they look more for weight – not based on sweet or fat, but maybe on structure. And they look for minerality.

My feeling is that the Napa Valley is on a great track. I think the wines being made in Napa Valley today will excite the market again.

RHD: *What do you think of the sommelier culture?*

PM: I have not had much luck with sommeliers. I think of their culture as the masturbation of wine, if you can call it that. They seem to want a lot of recognition and so they seem to go for crazy wines, unusual wines. That is okay, but the best way to learn is to start at the beginning – to understand the basics and the foundation. You want to taste the classic wines from Bordeaux and Napa, you need that basic foundation. Then, after you have the basics covered, you can go a little insane. I'm sure that in the world of sommeliers, there are many amazing ones. No doubt. But there is a tendency among them to be against Napa Valley wines for some reason. In particular, sommeliers in New York and San Francisco seem close-minded to Napa Valley wines.

RHD: *Did you have a mentor in the wine business?*

PM: My American mentor is Paul Draper. There is also a sentimental side to this story, because I met my wife while she was working in the lab at Ridge. I was working at Dominus at the time when I met Paul Draper. I still think he is...I don't know... He is a man of mystery. He is a philosopher. He has an open mind. He always wants to learn more. He is fantastic.

And it might surprise you to learn that I have a weird respect for Helen Turley. She's very controversial. On a personality level, it's hard to understand her sometimes. But I have to respect her for what she has done for consulting. She has elevated the role of the consultant. All consultants should respect what she has done for the field. And she has made some beautiful wines.



A Heart Wide Open

At 31-years of age, Ketan Mody is carving out for himself a small vineyard and life in the wilds of the Diamond Mountain appellation. Part Grizzly Adams, part modern-day philosopher king, he is disarmingly reflective and resourceful. He is slowly clearing a small stretch of land that will become his estate vineyard. The wood he felled he used to build the small cabin where he lives.

Set to launch two highly personal wine projects, Jasud and Beta, Ketan made time to meet with me recently up at his hilltop vineyard site just outside of Calistoga. We visited on two separate occasions, and by the time I was set to depart after our second interview, I hardly wanted to leave him.

If you think that living in a small cabin atop a remote hill is lonely, think again. Ketan is tackling life day-by-day with a heart wide open. The energy he emanates from his small, remote homestead is formidable and rare.

On being asked, "What does the Napa Valley look like to you?":

My Napa Valley? My Napa Valley is back roads. Hidden gems. Driving in the hills. Being in the forest. Amazing sunsets. And also, the 3-star Michelin restaurants and great grocery stores. You have to find a balance between nature and commerce.

My valley also looks like these get-togethers that we have, three to four times a week, at someone's home or at a bar. There is a really good sense of community here... mainly eating at other people's houses. Community cooking is a huge part of our lives here. My friends are working in every part of the wine business – sales, distribution, production, the vineyard... We're here for each other and we support each other.

The Napa Valley is a really hard place to leave. It provides a balance for me between hard labor and fine living.

I went to France and I loved it. It's very special, but you don't see a lot of wildlife there like you do here. I mean, in the forests up here there are still things out there that will get you; and that's nerve wracking, but it's also exhilarating, you know. Even in areas up here that are somewhat urban, you'll still see deer, raptors, all kinds of interesting birds, and I love that about the Napa Valley. I'm not saying you don't see that in France, but I don't think you see as much there as you do here.



On pricing his upcoming cabernet sauvignon:

Pricing Napa Valley cabernet has become really challenging. You want to be somewhere on the top shelf, but you don't want too offensive a price point applied to your wine. And, also, you don't want to price a wine so cheaply that people don't give a second thought to just opening it up. I mean, you want people to consume your wines, but you want them to remember them, too. And you don't want folks buying them just because they are trophy wines. I haven't figured out pricing yet. One guy I've been kind of studying is Justin Smith over at Saxum. You know, he's been cranking out great wines for a long time. When he started getting great scores, he didn't raise his prices that much, not like a lot of other producers did and continue to do, and I really respect that.

It's funny: when you start thinking about pricing and observing the kinds of people who buy really expensive wines, a lot of times the people who can afford expensive wines are some of the most offensive people around. And I'm thinking, I don't want some rich asshole buying my wine just to buy it. Anyway, I just haven't figured out my pricing yet. It's got to be an honest price, though.

On giving and receiving a helping hand:

I have had people that helped me when no one else would help me. People are usually pretty good if you give them the chance to be. I want to believe in people more than I don't want to believe in people.

Also, I've realized about myself that making people happy makes me happy. When I have people here, and I feed them and I hear them laugh, that makes me happy. When you can put a smile on someone's face – well, that's super-important.

On Lyme's Disease and the road to becoming a winemaker:

I was born in Georgia and was pretty much raised in Florida. My dad is from India and my mom's from Mississippi. I grew up in a very traditional household; cattle farmers and peanut farmers. I left home when I was sixteen to attend boarding school at the North Carolina School of the Arts. I was there for two years and loved it. I found public school to be very difficult; I never fit in. Finding other like-minded individuals was really important to me and I found that there for a time.

I then headed off to Boston and attended the Museum School for Painting. I was around twenty years old then. That lasted for about three weeks. I had been working on a series of paintings that were all about boats, so I ended up leaving school and working for a boat shop,



where I started an apprenticeship to learn how to build wooden boats. During that time, I had been battling this sickness. No one knew what it was. I was living by myself and I started having terrible seizures. It turned out to be Lyme's Disease.

My Lyme's Disease got to a really advanced stage, where it was basically attacking my nervous system. I could no longer live by myself. I had to quit building boats. I returned to Florida, where a doctor who specialized in Lyme's Disease started my treatment. Every day for a year I had a PICC line deliver IV Rocephin – a very strong antibiotic – into my body. It was pretty gnarly. It was a very, very difficult time.

I was too sick to return to building boats, so I went to work with my brother, a businessman. We worked on a hotel in Atlanta. Then, after a while, we ended up partnering with Hooters, and doing their private label credit cards. I managed a lot of their point-of-sales materials, call center diagrams, etc. I was living in Atlanta, making a lot of money, but one day I woke up and wondered what the fuck I was doing.

I realized then that I hated my work life. Here I was, tattooed from head-to-toe, a free-spirit, but I had to wear a business suit, and no one really knew who I was. I hated my life. I felt like I was on the wrong path.

So I quit working with my brother and started playing around with home brewing, while taking on a job at this small oyster farm on the North Fork of Long Island called Widow's Hole. It was very small; just me and one other guy. What got me about oysters was that, due to different salinity levels and nutrient levels in the water, you could get all of these different flavor profiles in basically the same oyster. The water currents, the nutrients, and how they informed flavor; I just really started to get into that.



My parents and I had been estranged at that time – for about five years. Then, the first time I saw my dad after those years of estrangement, we had a 2001 Quilceda Creek Cabernet Sauvignon. That was the first wine that I'd had that was an epiphany wine. Maybe it was because I was drinking it with my dad, and the taste of the wine – that bottle was just killing it that night. And, so that's how I started to really get into wine.

A while later, I moved to New Zealand and started to work at a winery, and that's when it all came together. I had been so lost and then I got found. I chose this path – of winemaking – this path that will take a lifetime to mold me into who I want to be, not who I am right now.

I ended up eventually working for Harlan on and off for a couple of years. I still consider Cory Empting, who is the winemaker now at Harlan, to be the best, most thoughtful winemaker in the Napa Valley, without a doubt. That guy is making some of the best wines, the most honest, terroir-driven wines in the Napa Valley.

My dad and I – we're no longer estranged; we probably talk every other day – wanted to do a project together, so we bought this place [a mountain top off of Diamond Mountain Road].

In 2011, I made the first vintage of my wine, Jasud. That was my grandmother's name. *Jasud* means hibiscus. She was very important to my father and my father is very important to me, so that's why I chose that name.

The fruit came from the Montecito Vineyard, up by Monte Rosso. Old, head-trained cab. It's kind of obscure. All dry-farmed. The flavor profile from there is very classic. Lots of structure and great tannins. I also have another wine project called 'Beta', a Hindu term of affection. It means 'my son', or 'my child'. Eventually, Jasud will be estate-only, and Beta will be more available, and available earlier. The Jasud estate wines will not be available for another 8 years, so for now I source my fruit from other vineyards that are producing the kind of fruit that I want to work with.

On building a one-room cabin and planting a vineyard in the middle of a forest:

This is who I want to be. This can be a tough place, because I want to be tougher. You can build yourself a big house, which will keep you inside, around all of your stuff. Or you can build a smaller house, which will push you outside and into nature. You can build more shelves to keep all of your shit, or fewer shelves so that you don't need so much.

There's that old adage: you don't have anything unless you have your health. And you don't realize how true that is until you're really sick. After Lyme's Disease, my mind got super-fragile. I got very sensitive to being in the woods. I got really scared of these little tiny creatures, because one nearly devastated me in my twenties. I'm in remission now, but it will never go away because I had it for so long. I felt like having Lyme's Disease broke my mind, and it has

taken me a long time to piece things back together again. I no longer want to make fear-based choices. That's why I'm living up here; it's how I face my fears.

And, I think this place also chose me. There's this sense that this is where I'm supposed to be. This is where I'm supposed to have a vineyard. There's no immediate gratification in being up here. Living up here and having a vineyard up here has made me a more patient person.

My father, being an immigrant from India, taught me a lot about legacy. I want this place to last far longer than I do. I want it and the wines grown here to be great long after I am gone. That's what's great about Burgundy; it's not about the person, it's about the vineyard. It'd be way better if my name was never mentioned and this was just considered a great, great vineyard. And whoever came in next after me would care for it and allow it to be what it needed to be in order for it to be great.



The easiest thing in life is to have an ego. The hardest thing is to just let go.

As an old man, I want to break myself working here. I want to die up here.

On being in tune with the vineyard:

The most important part of winemaking is being in tune with the vineyard – making the right choices in farming. It feels great when you're in the winery, and you see the fruit come in at harvest. It looks great, it tastes great, and you know that it's going to be a great wine because you've done your work in the vineyard.

There are so many winemaker guys out there that are so full of shit when it comes to farming. You see them make these presentations, and they talk about how they're so into their land, and you know for a fact that these guys, when they're back home, are the kinds of guys that don't even want to get dirty. There is so much bullshit in this business.

What is terroir ?

I see terroir as a triangle. It's air or climate; it's soil and it's human. People are just as important to terroir. Listen, shit doesn't make itself. Grapes don't fall off the vine by themselves and fall into the cellar. People make choices. I think the French understand that much more than we do here. You can't disown that human component in terroir.

On Parkerization and whether or not it exists:

After phylloxera attacked the Napa Valley in the 1980s, we had to essentially tear out most vineyards and replant again. We basically planted with French rootstocks that pushed ripening. In France you need that type of rootstock because of early rains, but here, not necessarily. That's when brix levels really started to rise. Then, because of a lack of skilled labor, these farming companies started to pop up, and they implemented the same farming techniques pretty much valley-wide. So, you have all of these vineyards that are being farmed pretty much the same way, so fruit starts to taste the same. They were all using the same kinds of equipment and implementing the same trellising systems, etc. Add to that the fact that you had all of these young vines that hadn't been planted for long. Young vines can be so clumsy; the fruit can taste really weird, so folks started to improvise and add lots of new wood so that they could sell their wines upon release, so that they'd taste seductive. Those factors are what created this bigger, riper style. It wasn't Parkerization. It's much more complicated than that.



On spirituality:

I believe in something far greater than I am, but I don't consider myself a religious person. I know there's something bigger out there; I just don't know what it is, and I'm content not knowing what that is. It's enough for me to know there's something out there. I try to live a good life and try to be an honest, good person, which is really hard. I think a lot of people find religion so that they'll have something or someone to forgive them if they fuck up. Forgiving yourself is the hardest thing of all. You have to give that gift of forgiveness to yourself. No one else is going to give it to you.

The older I've gotten, the more solace I take in knowing that life doesn't escape anyone. That billionaire that everyone wants to be – he cries and feels alone like we all do at times. To be human is to be ridiculous, but also, hopefully, to be honest and vulnerable.

Wine has brought purpose into my life that I never thought I would have. And it's brought community into my life. And so I am very grateful for that. I'll never be the best winemaker, or the best taster, or the best anything; but I hope to always be a fan – to just be into it...into wine and into this life.





"THAT'S HOW I TROLL"

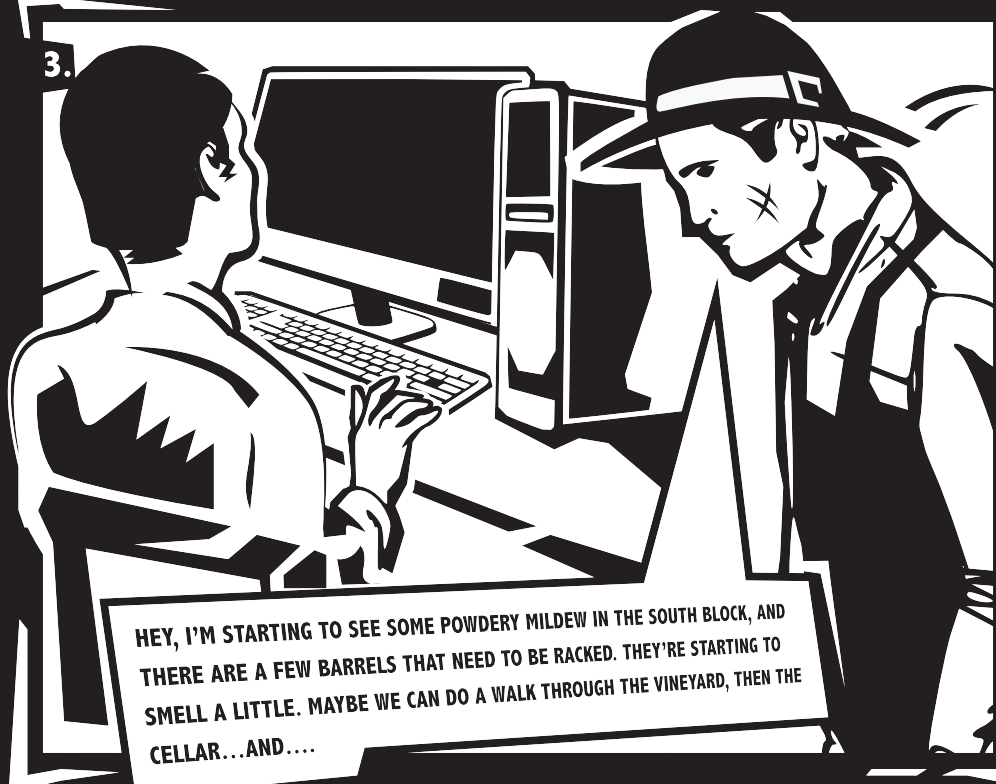
1.



2.



3.



HEY, I'M STARTING TO SEE SOME POWDERY MILDEW IN THE SOUTH BLOCK, AND THERE ARE A FEW BARRELS THAT NEED TO BE RACKED. THEY'RE STARTING TO SMELL A LITTLE. MAYBE WE CAN DO A WALK THROUGH THE VINEYARD, THEN THE CELLAR...AND....

4.



I'M GOING TO BE IN NYC NEXT WEEK. WOULD LOVE TO DO A DESKSIDE TASTING WITH YOU. WOULD BE GREAT TO SHARE OUR TERROIR WITH YOU. I HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH SOME EDGY VINEYARDS...

CAN'T YOU SEE I'M BUSY? DUDE, JUST PULL ONE OF THE GUYS IN FROM THE VINEYARD TO HELP YOU OUT.

Off-Trend Embrace



I was in my twenties when I first met Vince Arroyo. A tour guide at a large, commercial winery at the time, I'd visit other wineries on my days off in an attempt to learn as much as I could about wine. Vince was always a great host at his eponymously named winery, presenting each of his wines in an unaffected yet thorough manner. He was avuncular, patient, and always a straight-shooter.

I'm now edging towards fifty, and Vince's winery still looks the same as it did back then. He lives in a modest, ranch-style house, just a few feet from his tasting room, which also doubles as his barrel room, both housed in a simple, clean barn. Out back, there's a small crush pad, a workable production space, and a case goods storage room.

It's a small, well-run operation, releasing delicious wines from the Vincent Arroyo estate, year in and year out. It's not the easiest winery to find, as it's not on most Napa Valley wine-tasting maps, but it's well worth the trek to Greenwood Avenue, a couple of miles north of Calistoga.

I've long counted Vince as one of my heroes in the wine business. It's a small list: Robert M. Parker, Jr., Robert Mondavi, Linda Reiff, Steve Tanzer, Richard Ward, and a handful of others who did or do things, in true Sinatra-fashion, their own way.

RH Drexel: *One thing I've always admired about you, Vince, is that you've created this business model that fits perfectly into your lifestyle. You sell what you make; you're not out on the road a lot. Do you even work with distributors?*

Vince Arroyo: No, none. No distributors.

RHD: *How'd you pull that off? Is that something that, from the beginning, you decided to do?*

VA: It just worked out. I mean, I tried distributors at the very beginning, but working with distributors is like working with another problem. If you get rid of the problem and work directly with the individual, it makes life easier.

RHD: *It's funny; these days, everyone wants to see their DTC [direct-to-consumer] numbers grow. And they're all running circles around each other trying to figure out how to do that. And here you are; you've been selling DTC for how many years?*

VA: About thirty years. And I have no wine club, either. I just have a list of repeat customers.

RHD: *How long do you think your average customer stays with you?*

VA: I would say on average, about ten years. I honestly believe that our customers are the best people in the whole world. They're the greatest. The cream of the crop.



RHD: *That's great. And then you have these Open Houses, too, right? I mean, what does that entail?*

VA: We just had one last weekend. About five hundred people came. We cook three six-foot diameter pans of Paella. And we have Spanish chorizos, and Spanish tortillas, which are more like potato omelets. My ancestors came from Salamanca, Spain, so we like to keep a little history with us.

RHD: *But you were born here, right?*

VA: Yes, in Hollister, California. A very rural area.

RHD: *You worked in another field first, though, right? Before you got into wine?*

VA: Mechanical Engineering. I did it for about ten years. I didn't want to do that anymore. I was into wines at the time, so when the opportunity came up to buy this place in Napa Valley, we did. Pulled all the prune trees up and planted grapes. We're known for

our petite sirah. We also make a cabernet sauvignon, but everybody makes a cab. Good petite sirahs are hard to come by. Ours is all estate fruit. And we make chardonnay...zinfandel.

RHD: *Do you use a vineyard management company these days?*

VA: No, we farm everything ourselves.

RHD: *I don't really ever see your wines scored or reviewed. Do you ever feel like you'd like scores to help sell your wine?*

VA: No, I don't think I need those. My view is that everybody has an opinion, and so you should use your own opinion. You don't really need someone to tell you what you like. My best review is when one of my customers pats me on the back and tells me they like my wines. That's amazing. You can't really beat that.

RHD: *What's your average price per bottle?*

VA: Probably thirty bucks.

RHD: *Have you ever thought that if you did get great scores on your wines, which I think you would if you submitted them, that you could then raise your prices?*

VA: I don't believe in that. What you want is for your customers to be loyal. For example, you have these critics out there saying that the 2011s are not going to be that great. Well, my customers will still hopefully buy those wines because they are loyal. Every year, they each get their share, and that's it. They aren't fickle.

When people buy our wines, we ask them if they want to be a Standing Order Customer,



and all that means is that it allows us to tell them what new wines are coming out and remind them of what they previously ordered. There is no obligation – no automatic running of a credit card or anything like that. We just hope to hear back from them. If we don't hear from them, we may give them a call, just in case we feel they missed something. But that's it. We hear back from most of them. They appreciate not having their credit card run every quarter or whatever, and they appreciate getting to choose what they want to order.

You know, with other wine clubs, you'll get three or four bottles, and you may not know what's coming. We don't do that. If that approach works for other people, that's great, but that's just not how we do it.

We don't advertise, so our customers are all referrals.

RHD: *Have you found yourself changing your style over the years? Are you always making your wines the same way?*

VA: I have changed my style...a little bit. You always hope to change things, to get better. Like with our chardonnay; it used to be really big and buttery, now I make one that's crisper.

I also like old chardonnays, which most people don't. They take on that nutty, oxidative quality, and I enjoy that. Last weekend, we brought out some older chardonnays for our Open House. We opened our 2005. We only have a few cases left, so I sold a few bottles and kept the rest for myself. [Chuckles.] I really liked it.

But, you know, when I was younger, I drank a glass of wine on its own, and so it was okay that it was very fruity and with a lot of oak. As I got older, I started liking wines that go better with food, and so I started to make wines that maybe go better with food, and my customers seem to like them.

RHD: *Are you still experimenting with new varieties?*

VA: Yes, our newest one is Tempranillo. We've been making that for about three years.

RHD: *And how is it?*

VA: It's great. It's not overpowering. It's very well-balanced. You get flavors up front, in the middle, in the end.

[I later taste this wine with Vince, and indeed, it's a lovely Tempranillo, demonstrating typicity and great length, not something usually found in American Tempranillos.]

RHD: So, do you attend the Napa Valley Wine Auction, or Premiere Napa Valley?

VA: No, not really. I usually head to Texas during the Wine Auction. I get out of town. We have about 600 customers in Texas. They are very loyal people.

RHD: There's this perception that the Napa Valley lifestyle is a pretty tony lifestyle. What does your Napa Valley look like?

VA: Well, my Napa Valley is quite different from *the* Napa Valley. In the Napa Valley, I feel there is some of that kind of lifestyle, but I kind of live my own life up here. For me, it's farming. We grow grapes, we make wine out of them, and we sell it. It's not a roadside tomato stand, but it's pretty simple.

The wine business is big business today for a lot of people – people getting bought out, consolidation, and things like that. But people don't come to the Napa Valley just to visit one winery. It takes a lot of different kinds of wineries to make Napa Valley what it is. That's why it works for us.

I do think we have enough wineries now.
[He chuckles.]

RHD: What wine have you tasted lately that really impressed you?

VA: Well, I have this neighbor who has a pretty old cellar. He comes over every Saturday and brings a bottle of wine for us to taste. He brought over a '76 Mayacamas. It was probably the best bottle of wine I ever had. Sometimes he'll bring a bottle over that's old, but it'll be too old... like rust water. So, we'll dump it and open something else. Not this time. We drank that whole bottle of Mayacamas between the two of us and after it was finished, I kept hoping for more.

RHD: You seem to really love what you've built here, Vince.

VA: I don't know anything else. You sacrifice some things, but it's a good life.



Reporting from the Battlefield:



An Interview with Jayson Woodbridge



Political correctness is a funny thing; in many regards, it often serves to rob us of the humanity it was originally intended to cultivate. Political correctness has caused many of us to become the morality police; someone says something wrong...something distasteful...and we collectively smell the chum in the water and attack. There is little turning inward, recognizing one's own past mistakes... one's own misjudgments or regretful cruelties. With great self-righteousness, political correctness allows us to point the finger at those less perfect than we are. It can rob us of our compassion, of allowing for the fallibilities, eccentricities or down right human error of others.

In St. Helena, the nexus of Napa Valley's wine culture, political correctness often rules the day. Winemakers are careful about what they say to the media, and to each other, at high-profile events. Behind each other's backs, they might talk shit with abandon about a certain colleague, often ganging up on them in their absence at one of their tony dinner parties, but as soon as a major wine critic or gatekeeper enters the valley, they have nothing but well-heeled things to say about their wine community on a whole.

Enter Jayson Woodbridge.

Woodbridge, the creator of Hundred Acres, one of the most critically successful wines from the Napa Valley, and Layer Cake, a hugely successful portfolio of delicious, affordable wines, could very well be one of the most hated men in St. Helena. In a buttoned up, elegant town, Woodbridge's in-your-face swagger can't always be contained. His honesty and bold posturing often hits St. Helenans smack dab in the face, like a hot blast of whiskey on a biker's breath. He isn't afraid to speak his mind, trump social niceties, or march to his own drummer.

He has been known for wearing a buck knife at his waist to high-ticket, exclusive events, not to pose a threat, but because he feels like it. If he doesn't like you or what you stand for, he'll probably let you know - not behind your back, but to your face. He's fearlessly dedicated to his vision; few winemakers have the confidence to put their names behind a 15.00 bottle of wine (Layer Cake) and a 300.00

bottle of wine (Hundred Acre) with the same measure of pride and focus.

I sat down with Woodbridge a while back for a long chat while he played pool with a close circle friends. I went into our interview wondering if I'd find him arrogant and rude – a perception based on gossip only, as I'd never met him. I left our talk respecting the man, his gifts and his fearlessness.

RH Drexel: *I consider you to be a baller.*

Jayson Woodbridge: A baller? What's that?

RHD: *You know, someone who's not afraid.*

JW: I'm not afraid of fucking anything.

RHD: *Well, the wine business is not for the faint of heart. Are you ever afraid of failing?*

JW: Winemaking is a calling. I view it as pre-destiny. It's pre-ordained. Have I ever worried about failing? No. The only thing I've ever worried about is not doing as good a job as I could have. I've never worried about failing. I always felt that we would stand amongst the very best. Failure was never in the equation.

RHD: *Do you feel you're standing among the very best now?*

JW: I think we're standing among the very best. To a certain extent, we stand in the long shadow of many houses that have been around for a long time and that have done very well for many years. I want to make my best effort every year to make sure we're always standing among the very best. You know, you have to look at it like... okay... the Masters Tournament. I was watching the Masters Tournament and Rory McIlroy said something really brilliant. He said, 'Listen, I've won three championships, and Tiger Woods has won fifty-eight. So, when you ask me a question about comparing myself



to Tiger Woods, there's no comparison. That showed a degree of modesty which I thought was so admirable. The very fact that he said that spoke volumes about him. Now, we've been making wine for about fifteen years, and I and the team have done very well. But, you have to remember that there are houses that have been around for one hundred years that have done very well over a very long period of time. That needs to be acknowledged and recognized. You have to show respect.

It doesn't mean that I don't think the French are capable of making wines that aren't worth a shit. But, once in a while, they get it right.

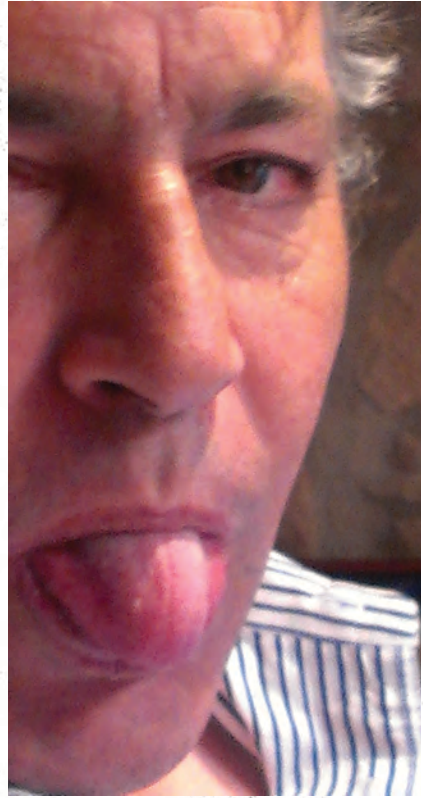
I think there are Spanish and Italian winemakers...old families...that have a great tradition and have been making great wines for many, many years. So you can't proclaim yourself to be making something glorious when you only have fifteen years under your belt.

I do five vintages a year. I have about seventy-five vintages under my belt. From four continents, five countries. Most winemakers don't have that amount of vintages under their belt. Now, if a house has done well over that many vintages, you have to recognize the greatness of that. So, I'm not trying to hold us up as anything more or less than some of the great houses. But, we are one of the great houses. I look at what we do on a world scale. I don't think about what we do on a Napa Valley scale. I look at us in comparison to Château Latour, Château Mouton, Le Pin, Pingus...all of them. I don't try to emulate them. We're unique in what we do. I look at them and I respect their work, and so, you know...it's a long answer, but the long-short of it is...I don't care about the latest trends.

I want to create greatness over time.

RHD: *Is it important to you to be a part of the Napa Valley community?*

JW: No, I don't care about that. Listen, I'm not a diplomat. I'm viewed as being a bit of a rebel. Brad Grimes is a really great winemaker. He makes Abreu. He knows what the fuck he's doing. I respect him. Bob Levy from Harlan. I respect him. Phillippe Melka. I respect him. He taught me many vital lessons in the early days. There are a lot of guys I respect. David Griga, for example. He has a little, itty-bitty winery. He fought in Iraq, came back and is 80% disabled. He healed himself by making wine. I respect him a lot. There are a lot of great guys in this valley. It doesn't mean I hang out with him. I don't hang out with them. I don't have dinner with them. But, if they call me and tell me they need something, I'm there.



But there are also a lot of arrogant assholes in the valley. I would probably be rated as one of them by a lot of people. The people that would rate me that way...well, I'm fine with their decision in that matter.

RHD: *Because you disagree with them?*

JW: If they consider the fact that I don't want to have two words with them as arrogance, I don't give a shit. You know, they can go fuck off. I hang out with the guys I hang out with. There are a lot of good guys around here that are honest, forthright and bona fide. They have bona fide intentions in this business. There are others...a lot of them...that have intentions to gentrify themselves in this business, and I'm not one of them. I don't give a shit about gentrification. They can go gentrify themselves in whatever way. Napa Valley is a very wealthy valley. There are a lot of people who actually work here, but there are a lot that don't work.

RHD: *Do you think the wealthy lifestyle has eclipsed the importance of the wines in the Napa Valley?*

JW: No. I think the wines are still numero uno. There are two parts of the society here. One part is living the high life – going to the best restaurants, that kind of thing. Then, there's the other half – those of us who actually work in the business and are out there doing it. I don't think the two meet that often. I go to work and get the job done. We just make our wine and it's the penultimate. That's what we're trying to do.

RHD: *How much does your success have to do with the wines themselves, and how much do you think has to do with your personality, with regard to how you market your wines?*

JW: I'm hardly ever in the public arena. We do so little advertising. The wines speak for themselves. We basically just make the wine. At the end of the day, when someone opens a bottle, I'm not there. I'm not talking to them. They're the ones tasting the wine. They're making the decision as to whether or not we're doing our job. And, that decision is very simple: it's either right as rain or it's not. I've always believed this. My primary responsibility, for example, with Layer Cake is for it to taste like 50.00 or 60.00 dollars, but for it to cost 15.00. I want people to be able to afford great wines. That's important to me. I want it to totally over-perform. I want people to buy Layer Cake, taste it and go, 'Shit! This is really good. How the hell did I get this for 15.00 bucks!?' The whole objective is to have people say, 'I love this.' That's the whole damn idea. The whole damn idea is, less Budweiser, more beautiful wine. I mean, you open up a good bottle of wine, your girlfriend is going to cuddle up with you. You're going to have a good dinner. You can't get that with a couple of cans of Budweiser. For me, good wine makes life magic.



My grandfather was a poor country gentleman from Sicily. He could never afford in his entire life to buy a bottle of Hundred Acre. One day I was driving around in Australia and I saw a vineyard, and I thought, 'You know, I have to make something for my grandfather to drink.' So, we started Layer Cake for people that can't crack a couple of hundred dollar bills out of their pocket for a bottle of wine, but they still want to have a good life. So the objective became to make wine that was under 20.00, where you got some change back...5.00 bucks, and go home to your gal and have a great bottle of wine.

At first, my CFO said, 'Oh fuck, this is craziness. We're never going to make any money doing this.'

I told him we have to do it. And I don't buy bulk wine. We buy the fruit we work with.



I make the wine with my team. We fly around the world to make it. I don't leave it to someone else to make. The whole concept has been 'pay it forward.' What can we do to make the world of wine a better place? I tasted a lot of cheap wines while creating Layer Cake. And you know what the problem with them was? A lot of them sucked donkey dick. And I sat there and thought, 'Holy fuck! What the fuck is going on here?' I don't think I realized there were so many really bad cheap wines out there.

I make a Layer Cake Primitivo. One of our guys said, 'You can't sell primitivo.' I said, 'I don't give a fuck if you can't sell it. I like primitivo. It's from the heel of the boot of Italy. Puglia is the size of Switzerland and it's all covered in these really beautiful 100-year old vines of primitivo. I told this guy, 'Wake up! This is one of the greatest reserves of old-vine zinfandel known to man. It's just called primitivo.'

So, after two years, Southern Wines & Spirits came to us and said, 'We have sold more Layer Cake Primitivo than we have sold all primitivos combined since the beginning of the company. They said, 'People love it. Make more of it.'

We don't have focus groups as a company. We're basically a collection of misfits. I mean, we play pool. We ride motorcycles. We do whatever the fuck we want, and if people don't like it, they can blow me.

If I'm going to stand here at 6' 4", 280 pounds, and say that I have a gift, and I'm not going to make a great wine that the regular folks can drink, well, what kind of man am I? Where are we going if we don't have that?

And we're making an American whiskey called The Duke. John Wayne's son, Ethan Wayne, told me that one of his dad's last musings was that he wanted to make an American whiskey. So, we started a distillery together. It's a really cool project.

RHD: *What's the best thing about being in the wine business?*

JW: Making people happy. Having someone call me up and say, 'I proposed to my now-wife over a bottle of Hundred Acre.' Or, 'when our child was born, we celebrated with a bottle of Hundred Acre.' Or, 'I bought a case of Layer Cake, and I'm already through 10 bottles and it's delicious.' That is a great, great feeling.

RHD: *What's the worst thing about being in the wine business?*

JW: Listen. There are probably two million professions in the world. Maybe ten million. And I get to make wine for people. I have a gift. I feel blessed. For me, none of this is difficult. It's a piece of cake. I've tasted with other winemakers, and they struggle so much. The taste and taste and taste and struggle. I look at them and they're lost. Completely lost. But some of us have a gift. The gift just comes naturally, like riding a bike. There's no struggle, no issues, no problem. It's so easy. It's just right. If you're a math genius, you know you're a math genius. This isn't like that. It's as natural to me as walking down the street.

RHD: *Is it important to you to be admired? [Woodbridge and his friends all laugh heartily at the question.]*

JW: Only for my girth. *[More laughter.]* Look it's the least important thing to me on earth. I couldn't care less about stuff like that.

RHD: *That must free you up to just be yourself. It seems so important to so many people in this valley.*

JW: If someone doesn't like me, I tell them to go fuck themselves. Look at my hands. *[Woodbridge shows me his thick, strong, scarred hands.]*

I've been in lots of fights. I've had guns fired at me. I've had bullets go past my head. I've had lots of shit happen to me. If someone doesn't like me, I don't care.

RHD: *Can you attribute this attitude to anyone? Perhaps the way you were raised? This sense that you don't care how others perceive you?*

JW: That would be John Wayne. When I watch *The Searchers* and some of his other movies, I say to myself, 'Don't give a shit about what other people are going to say about you.' Winston Churchill once said, 'I don't care what people say. I only care what they do.' I only care what people do. People can think and talk and say all kinds of shit. I don't care about that. I only care about whether or not they get out on the battlefield and make it happen. That's the bottom line. As a man, if you can't do that, hang the spurs up.



IPOB: In Pursuit of Beauty

*And you, of tender years
Can't know the fears that your elders grew by
And so please help them with your youth
They seek the truth before they can die.*

Graham Nash
"Teach Your Children"

In recent years, it has become inexplicably fashionable, at least among a vocal handful of "gatekeepers", to regard the wines of the Napa Valley as passé. This position is staggering in its arrogance and idiocy. To think that they know where this uniquely-branded, hugely complex, diverse and expansive slice of Earth is headed enologically, after only a few decades (!), is essentially to state they have a better grasp on nature and all its mystery than, say, Mother Nature does. Yeah, good luck with that.

Compared to many of the older winegrowing regions in the world, the Napa Valley is still a mere toddler. And what a brilliant toddler it is becoming. The Napa Valley's future has never looked more promising than it does today.

Here, then, is a glimpse of the next in a long line of generations to come that will surely put their own stamps on this splendid region.

Alex Kongsgaard: Skeletons vs. Robots

Alex Kongsgaard, yes *that* Kongsgaard, has been making wines under the name Skeletons vs. Robots. As of now, they are not available for sale, and perhaps never will be. Alex draws the "labels" directly on the bottles themselves, and shares the wines with friends and family. At his day job, he helps his father, John, make wines under the Kongsgaard label.

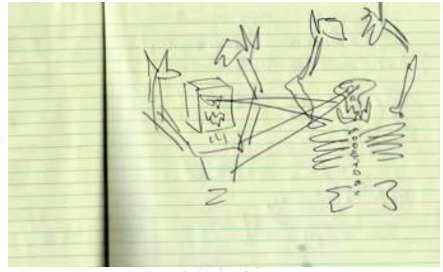
I studied the History of Philosophy in college. I started to notice that, basically, every philosopher I read was, essentially, wrong, if you believed what the philosopher that came after him said. You kind of learn that you're never really going to learn anything by simply reading it, because someone else will just tell you that what you read is wrong. So eventually, I thought, I'm just going to believe in something myself, rather than having someone else tell me what I should believe in. So my own philosophy was born out of observing arroyo dogs.

In Santa Fe, there are these beautiful dry river beds. In the summer, they'll run if there's rain, but in the winter, they're just covered with snow. There are these semi-feral dogs that run around down there. They'll chase you on your bicycle and they're pretty nasty, but they do belong to someone. They have collars and they eat dog food at night, but during the day, they're very feral.

I've always been into wilderness, but I've also been into this idea of a need for civilization, for an education, for example. These dogs represented for me that perhaps I don't have to choose between wilderness and civilization. You don't need to commit yourself completely to the wild, nor do you have to be totally domesticated.

I try and live a life that bridges wilderness and society. I want to live a wide-spectrum life. I feel like this was the first idea I had that was my own idea. Clearly, other people have had this idea, but it's the first one that felt to me like my own philosophy that I could own and stand behind.

The Skeleton vs. Robots philosophy came next. It's a more complex idea and more all-encompassing. It started as a simple cartoon drawing. The Skeleton and Robot are battling each other. This lends this idea some epic value. The Skeleton and the Robot each represent a side of life. The Robot represents the future – or futurity – which is the idea of looking forward and marching forward. It has some resilience and is happy, as it knows inherently where it's going. It may be shallow, but it is content.



Alex Kongsgaard

The Skeleton represents the past. Tradition. The Skeleton is inherently sad; it knows loss and death. It is ruminative and looks inward. The Skeleton is anthropomorphic. It is mortal. It is somber. It is sacred.

Essentially, what I'm talking about here is Science versus the Anthropomorphic. Wine requires both science and tradition, both looking forward and looking backward. It requires Nature, and then also the sensibilities of man to make it into something. The key to making good wine is to have tension – tension between nature and science. You can't have either one of those dominate a wine or it just doesn't come together like it should.

The Skeleton vs. Robots is supposed to be kind of a silly analogy that I use for discussing this otherwise serious philosophy, at least to me. Surfing also requires science and tradition. You have this very rigorous approach to surfboard building,

and then you have the ocean which you are surfing. So, again, you have the Skeleton and the Robot, battling one another.

My Albarino has the Skeleton on it. It is traditional. But there's tension there, as there is also some Robot in this wine; it's sterile filtered. So, each of my wines is more about the battle between, the tension between, the Skeleton and the Robot.

At Kongsgaard, we're mostly in the Skeleton camp but we have a little of the Robot in us; for example, we keep our cellar very clean, which is a Robot trait...a trait dictated by science.

So, each of my wines, and each of our wines at Kongsgaard, represents the tension between Skeletons and Robots. They battle each other in each wine. If either one won, that wine would be off-balance. So you need them alive and battling in every bottle, which creates this beautiful tension.

Wine provides me the opportunity to have great balance in my life. I want to be able to wear dirty, dusty clothes or a fine suit with equal amounts of grace. I get dirty working the vineyards, tired and wet washing barrels, etc. Then I get to be creative, thinking about a wine philosophically. When it comes time to sell the wine, I get to dip into the world of commerce. The fancy restaurants and, to a lesser extent, the world of wine collectors, which is also rarified. I don't think one can have integrity in this business if one isn't still involved and grounded in nature and labor on a regular basis.

My father and mother are incredibly wonderful people. I was home-schooled as a kid, and so spent a lot of time with them. As a result, I am very comfortable interacting in their world, as they are in mine. We enjoy spending time together, which is very rare. It doesn't feel hard for me to live under the guiding principles of my parents, at home or in the winery, because those principles are good and simple. I understand them. In the winery, I was not taught to be non-interventionist, necessarily. I was taught that planting a vineyard is a conscious decision. Rescuing a wine and bottling it, before it turns into vinegar...that is a very conscious decision. So we back away from saying we are non-interventionist, and we accept our role in the life of a wine.

Julia Weinberg: Mossik

Julia Weinberg has a small project named Mossik, which is Yiddish for mischief-maker. She works exclusively with cabernet franc from White Rock Vineyards. Her first harvest was in 2011. She has produced a complete cabernet franc, with great texture and an arrestingly long finish.

I love dirty, Loire-style wines. When I first started, I didn't know what I was doing. I had a good mentor. Christopher, the winemaker at White Rock Vineyards, was and is a perfect mentor, actually, because he didn't make any decisions for me, but he also made sure I didn't fuck it up. So I did some research on what some of my favorite cabernet franc producers do; I love Chinons...and then gave it a go. Native ferment.

Open-top. Whole-cluster. Neutral oak. I only have 25 cases of my 2011, but there'll be a little more 2012.

What first drew me to the Napa Valley was the community. The dinner parties at people's houses. Coming from the City, where there's so little space to do anything, I just fell in love with the way of life here. People who have backyards where they can entertain, and their own little gardens, and they share the wines they make at the dinner table. There's a lot of thoughtfulness and creativity here in this small town. I'm so excited to watch my friends figure themselves out creatively and find some success.



Julia Weinberg



Jake Stover

Jake Stover: Farmer

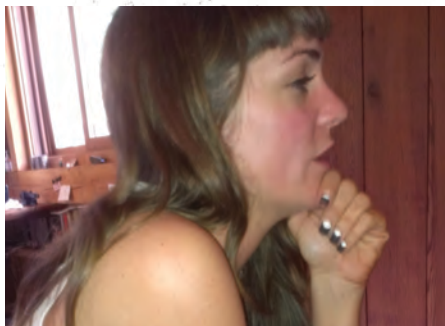
At 27, Jake Stover is one of Napa Valley's younger farmers. He works for Ron Wicker Vineyard Management, assisting in the farming of various vineyard sites throughout the Napa Valley.

In the Old World, you have mostly people who are overseeing a wine, from vineyard practices through to the end, when the wine is put into bottle. I think that is somewhat lacking here. I would like to see a paradigm shift in the United States where there is more continuity from the vineyard to the winery. You see it at places like Failla and Matthiasson, but it's not as common as I wish it were.

Oftentimes, vineyard management companies are the middle men between the vineyard owner and the winemaker. Part of my job is being the mediator between the vineyard owner and the winemaker when expectations from both camps differ.

I come from a farming background in Kansas, and so I'm comfortable with the knowledge that there'll be another harvest next year and the year after that. Some years are not going to be as good as others. Last year, we had an abundance of fruit. This year's crop might be smaller, but maybe better wines will be made. Who knows? So I try not to let a challenging vintage or disagreements between winemakers and vineyard owners get to me too much. You have to look at the big picture.

If you really want to live in the Napa Valley, you figure out a way. It's an expensive place to live. I've moved seven times since arriving here from Kansas.



Christina Turley

Christina Turley: Turley Vineyards

A Certified Sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, Christina Turley, 28, also passed the WSET Advanced program with Honors. After a successful stint as the Beverage Director for David Chang's Momofuku Restaurant Group, Turley joined her family's namesake winery, Turley Vineyards, full time in 2010.

When I worked in New York, people would hear my last name and they thought it was a coincidence. They'd say, oh, you work in wine and your last name is like that winery, Turley. I was always drinking champagne and high-acid Rieslings, so they just didn't connect my last name with my family's winery name. I wanted to tell them, the two are not mutually exclusive.

I started off thinking I'd do something different than the wine business. I tried theater. I worked at a gallery. But then I decided to pursue wine and take it seriously. Learn as much as I could. I'm often asked if I'll ever be a winemaker, like my father, but that's not really my skill set or interest. I never took Chemistry in school. I think there's something to be said for recognizing what you're good at, and what I'm good at is storytelling. That's what I do for Turley.

In a sense, I don't think it was a loss working for an art gallery. I learned to represent artists and tell their stories to the market. Some of them were not that socially apt, so I learned to translate their stories into stories I could tell out in the world. It's a challenge to do that and be effective and genuine.

It's been really important to me to study Napa Valley's past and be very aware of what people have done before my generation, and to also be very aware of what's happening now. I want to honor the past but also move forward. My challenge is to honor what my father has accomplished and still keep that story relevant. People have a lot of preconceived notions about Napa wines. I'm so over the whole low-alcohol trend and the non-interventionist thing. Sometimes I'll be listening to some winemaker, and they say they're totally non-interventionist, and I just want to ask them, 'Then why am I paying you for this? What the fuck did you do? Why is this so expensive if you didn't do anything to it?' [Laughs].

In my mind, Turley will always be relevant because zinfandel is as close as we get to an indigenous variety in California. We work with a lot of all old vineyards, so we're not only about creating wines, but also helping to preserve the wine culture in California. I love European wines. My friends and I drink a lot of European wines. At the same time, I'm not interested in competing with European wines. That's not the point. That totally misses the point. Why not embrace where we are? That's the only way we'll ever be taken seriously in the long term, because the Napa Valley is very, very young. So we'll need to learn what works best for our soils, rather than try and make something that 'tastes' European. I'm tired of hearing American winemakers say that they want to make a 'Burgundy-style' pinot noir or a 'Bordeaux-style' cabernet blend. We should be making wines that taste like our soils. Influenced by our origins.

I want to find a way to apply my skills to helping the younger members of our winemaking community. My family does a lot of philanthropic work, and there's so much real need in so many places, so I can hardly advocate for giving money to these young winemakers who are struggling to find a way to afford living here. But, at the same time, I want to see this part of our culture continue, and these younger winemakers and farmers are struggling to be able to live here. So I want to find a way to help them in whatever way that I can so that we can preserve and sustain this wine culture in the Napa Valley.

For me, the greater picture is finding a way to keep all of this going. What's great about so many of these more established wineries is that a lot of them allow some of these younger winemakers who work for them to also make a little bit of wine on the side, often with the assistance of free fruit or equipment.

Maybe something that I can do for our wine culture is simply connect people and bring people together who can help one another so that we can sustain this great thing that's been created.



Massimo Di Costanzo

Massimo Di Costanzo: Di Costanzo

One of the most impressive wines I tasted during the development of this issue of Loam Baby was the 2010 Di Costanzo, made by Massimo Di Costanzo. Massimo was the day-to-day winemaker at Screaming Eagle during the famed 2006 and 2007 vintages. While this may be impressive to some readers, Screaming Eagle has never, for my palate, quite lived up to its hype. What I tasted from Massimo is far greater, at least in my estimation, than the wines he made for Screaming Eagle as the assistant to Andy Erickson, and I now count him as one of my favorite producers in the United States. He produces 150 cases of cabernet sauvignon from the Farella Vineyard in the Coombsville AVA of the Napa Valley.

This is my first vintage. It's all self-funded. This is my baby. I've been in the business for 10 years. I went to UC Davis and then, like a lot of young people getting into wine, I traveled around and worked some harvests in Europe. I worked at Antinori, which was a great experience for me. My father is Italian. He's from Positano. And my grandfather was a fisherman in Positano, so that's where the inspiration for my wine came from. I also worked in South Africa, where Badenhorst was my mentor, so I was very fortunate. When I came back here, I met up with Andy Erickson and worked for him out at Ovid for a while. A while later, he called me when he joined on at Screaming Eagle, so I went to work as his Assistant Winemaker and was the day-to-day winemaker over there. That was super-cool. Luke, my production assistant at the time, and I lived on-site and had lots of whiskey-fueled BBQ's, but we worked our asses off. It was very nice to be a part of that story. I look back very fondly at those years.

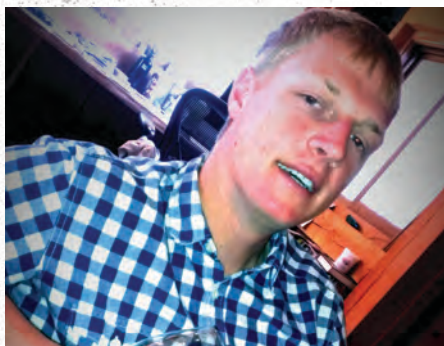
I was ready for a change, though. I wanted more of a challenge, to be honest, so I went to work for Philippe Melka, just helping him out with different projects. Then I met Tom Farella, and he offered me some fruit from his Farella Vineyard. And I was falling in love with Coombsville at the time, so I told him I'd work for him if he helped me out with the fruit. So, now I work for Tom, while making my own wine. It's been a great way, financially, for young guy to build a brand.

When people think they have Napa Valley wines and their style figured out, I just say, well fuck that. They don't have a sense of what's really going on in the Napa Valley now. I'm not fond of a very rich style. I don't like a lot of oak. I like wine that goes with food because I like to cook. I want my wine to be refreshing. But, still, the bones have to be there for long-term aging. So there isn't just one Napa Valley style. There is so much going on here.

I have always loved cabernet....those old Napa Valley wines. I just love those.

The hardest decision I've had to make is pricing my wine. My wine is 85.00 a bottle. It's not a cheap bottle by any means, but hopefully it's affordable to some people. I didn't want it to be over 100.00. I didn't want to make a trophy wine. I want to make a wine that people will actually drink. When I was making Screaming Eagle, it was sad, actually, making a wine that people just don't drink. It almost stopped being a wine. So I want people to be able to drink my wine.

A great wine is a wine of vision. If there isn't a real vision there, then it can never be great. When you make a wine with your family name on it – you know, it's not just my name, it's my brother's name, and my little sister's name, the people who came before me, the people who will come after me – so it's important to me that it's a wine they can all be proud of.



Austin Peterson

Austin Peterson: Ovid

The poised and reserved Austin Peterson is the winemaker at Ovid.

On the Ovid label, it says 'Napa Valley Red Wine.' It's not about me or someone else; it's all about the place. This isn't really a personality-driven project.

One of the fun things about making wine in the Napa Valley is thinking about all the great sites in this region. I may not get to work with all of them, but I get to taste them. A lot of times, I'll look at a vineyard and think, 'I wish I could get a couple of tons of that fruit.' But then by drinking someone else's wine from that site, I'm at least able to enjoy the taste of it. In many ways, a lot of what you're after when making wines is universal among great

wines. Regardless of whether it's great Riesling or Bordeaux, or a South African GSM, you're looking for balance and the expression of that place. Sometimes it's easy to get drawn into one area and just taste what's made there, but I like to taste wines from all over the world.

It's a really great and dynamic time to be working in the Napa Valley. We're starting to understand what grows well and where. We're moving past just looking at things dogmatically. We're moving past saying, 'Only cabernet can grow in Napa.' It's also a great place for cabernet franc. And there are some pockets that may be very good for syrah. Grenache might be fantastic in Calistoga.

But cabernet sauvignon does grow beautifully here. That's been proven.



Ely McElroy

Ely McElroy: Bond Estates/Harlan

Ely McElroy, a laid back, easy-going guy, works for Mary Maher as a viticulturist on her team at Bond Estates/Harlan. He's unassuming for someone who has his boots on the ground at a one of the better known Napa estates. That's Ice Cube on his t-shirt.

I grew up in the Napa Valley. In some ways, it's a weird place to grow up because it can be kind of fake. But what I love about this place is that so many of us get to be in touch with the land and what it represents.

Napa Valley provides you with a way to express how it imparts its feeling onto a wine, how the land here imparts its identity onto a wine.

No one ever really knows a place's potential just by looking at it. You can see a site and think, 'Oh, this would be an awesome place to farm.' Then you plant and you do everything you can with the farming, but the wine still doesn't turn out how you thought it would. There have been vineyards we've worked with that have been very, very difficult. And you work with them and you work with them. Then you'll change just one tiny, easy, simple thing, and it completely changes the wine in a positive

direction. And that's what it's all about.

The best farming is sometimes very simple.

I like to drink Napa Valley wines, but at home, I tend to drink a lot of beer. I live close to La Luna Market [*in Rutherford*] so I drink a lot of Tecate.

I don't possess a microbiological sense of what it takes to make wine; I'm just not there yet, so I don't know if I'd ever make my own wine. Every year feels like a learning process, and I just don't understand the winemaking part of things. I wouldn't mind having my own vineyard, but that's just a dream. It's expensive around here, but, sure, I'd like to have my own place where my dogs can run around.

We're kind of indebted to the movers and the shakers up here, because they've given us everything we need to do our work and do what we want to do up here. We're, in a sense, at their will. If you want to have your very own project, without the help of one of them, you have to buy your own land and build your own winery, which is very, very expensive. But, fortunately, we can buy fruit from some of them and make wine with some of them, so that helps us out a lot.



Jerome Chery

Jerome Chery: Saintsbury

The Loire-born Jerome Chery is the winemaker at Saintsbury, a winery that does not receive nearly as much credit as it should for its consistently well-made and elegant pinot noirs, chardonnays, and cool climate syrahs. Before it was cool to make restrained, site-driven wines, Saintsbury's house style was already inside that wheelhouse and continues to be there.

I like acidity in wines. So does Dick Ward [*co-owner of Saintsbury with David Graves*]. If anyone has convinced me to go after acidity and allow for as much of it as I want, it's Dick Ward. We really both like acidity and so we both agree on where we want the wines to go.

We are purists in our winemaking. We try not to add things to wine, so we're very dedicated during fermentation to taste every day. We taste every morning, and we try to develop a history of tastes. We'll try to recall the previous year's taste of a certain wine. We try to think about what happened in the past with a certain wine, but also project ourselves toward the bottling dates. We taste the tannins and ask ourselves, 'Is it too tannic? How will it be approaching bottling?'

If you don't taste regularly during fermentation, that wine may turn out out-of-balance. I really like the intensity of that 10-day fermentation window. It can have so much to do with how the future of a wine will taste.

We walk our vineyards in a very disciplined way. One of the hardest things to do – at least for me – is to taste grapes. You're really not taught that in school because in school, you're not working in the vineyard. To understand how a berry tastes – its physical aspects, its texture...that understanding is very critical. It's a practice that takes years and years. It has taken me about nine years to really understand how to taste a berry.

When I moved to this country, I tried a chardonnay that was very popular at that time. And I was blown away by how much oak it had. It just wasn't what I was expecting. Then, when I worked at Littorai, where they were only using about 50% of oak, I noticed this scaling back, which I like much better. I feel that if you have too much oak in a wine, it's just no longer fun to drink. It doesn't really go well with food.

What I like in a wine is simple: acidity and fruit. Let's not forget that wine is made of fruit, so I like refreshing fruit in a wine. Wine is very convivial, and to be enjoyable, it has to go well with food.



Samantha Sheehan

Samantha Sheehan: Poe

Napa Valley-based winemaker Samantha Sheehan started the Poe brand in 2009, and is the winemaker for this exciting, small project focused mostly on pinot noir from the Angel's Camp Vineyard in Anderson Valley; the Hudson Vineyard in Carneros; and the Manchester Ridge Vineyard, northeast of Point Arena. She also makes a chardonnay from the iconic Ferrington Vineyard. Her wines, especially

the pinot noirs, possess typicity, lovely weight, and great texture.

I grew up in Los Angeles. They filmed *The Birds* in the '70s at Universal Studios, which was right next to my house. So after filming, we saw all of these birds around our neighborhood. And there were these beautiful black ravens all around us. The ravens would watch these song birds in their nests, and just before the baby birds could leave the nest, they'd attack them and eat them.

Later, I moved up to the Napa Valley, to Anderson Valley, to start making wine and they filmed the other version of *The Birds* in Anderson Valley, and they again released these birds after filming and the entire vineyard was covered in these giant ravens. It was really bizarre.

There's this old Aesop's fable about these crows that are trying to get a worm out of this glass, but the water level is too low, so they cannot reach it. They then drop pebbles in the glass, so that the water will rise and they eventually get the worm. Well, they actually tested that theory and the ravens actually behaved the same way, and dropped pebbles to make the water rise, so they're very smart, interesting birds. Brilliant, really.

And so I chose Poe, because of these ravens and also because he was such a beautiful poet and writer.

I went to Burgundy in 2005, and I didn't know much about wine back then. So I went on-line and started to read about the best producers in Burgundy, and I made a list of all the top people and just emailed them. I emailed DRC not knowing anything about it at the time, and told them I was coming to Burgundy and that I'd like to visit. Aubert De Villaine wrote back and said, 'Sure! We'd love to host you.' And, I was blown away by what I saw there and tasted there, so I decided to try and make pinot noir here in the U.S. There are certain cities that really appreciate a food-centric wine like Poe. My wine has been well-received in New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. I only make about 300 cases of pinot noir, and I charge about 48.00 a bottle for it. This year I found this great little vineyard near the Sonoma Square, just past Broadway. There's this vineyard that was planted in 1974 to the Martini clone. Dry-farmed. Head-trained. I'm so excited about it. So I'm excited to show what Carneros used to produce, back then.

Michael McDermott: Label Artist

Michael McDermott has designed 174 in his relatively young years. What I love about Michael's work is that it doesn't all look the same; not by a country mile. So many label artists these days seem to phone it in, churning out wine labels that all start to look the same. Just a glimpse at some of Michael's label designs – from Favia, Semper, Flex, Di Costanzo, Arrow & Branch, Victory Vineyards to Tenbrink, The Sum, Straight Line, and Jonata – suggests just how singular and relevant a vision he possesses. In short, Michael is a great, engaged and sensitive listener, and his labels emerge as classic and timeless works of art.



Michael McDermott

There's this color of blue that I want to use and I'm just trying to find the right project for it. It's called *carta da zucchero*. In Italy, in the markets, they wrap bulk sugar in this blue paper. It's this very particular blue. Tiffany got close to it, and I think there's a way to get even closer to that color.

I kind of fell into designing wine labels. I had a studio in Oakland, and I would have these studio parties maybe once a month. Annie Favia and Andy Erickson came to one of my parties and we hit it off, so Annie asked me to do her label. We came together on the Favia label, and it became this game-changer, I think for both of us.

It's still my most treasured experience in the label design business. They encouraged me, promoted me, and pushed me into all of these new directions.

I'm on press about three times a week, and I ran into Chuck House at a press check. And I was totally star-drunk. I was almost too nervous to talk. I really respect Chuck House and what he does. My approach is very sculptural. I took a hiatus for two years, and I did art and architecture with an artist/collaborator in Los Angeles, and I discovered that if I really want to make a mark, I was kind of already under-way here, so I came back and really started to work hard so that I could nail it.

I interview clients up front. I have a whole process of discovery with potential clients. I need to know that we'll be in a collaboration. I have a way of discovering if people are not willing to go to a really creative, collaborative place. If it doesn't feel that way, then I recommend them to someone else.

If they're not comfortable in my shop, then I know we won't be able to work together, but if they get there and go, 'dude, I get this, I love this,' then I know we'll be able to work together. And it's not that they have to like 'my work,' because it's not 'my work.' It's always a collaboration.

The genre of a wine influences the design. If it's a Riesling, pinot noir, or a Bordeaux variety, sometimes those cultural influences tend to influence the complexion of the wine. I love letting cultural information corrupt the process. That's natural.

It's really more about the people – their personalities and character. That's where I really get into it. I have to connect with them. Really talk to them. I love it when people share their history with me, the interior of their houses with me. Photos. Anything that tells me their story. I need to know, 'Why are you doing this?' It's about the 'why'.

I've been so lucky to work with people who fucking give a shit.

There is nothing about wine culture that is quick. It's all about taking the time to pay attention and to discover.

How long does it take me to design a label? That really varies. With some brands, the label will be done in our minds before we even sign the contract. With other brands, the person who engaged me may really like what we've come up with, but then it has to make it past investors, or other waves of people that are involved. I then have to prove why that label might work to this group of investors. So it really depends.

A lot of people that I've had a positive relationship with become friends. I go to their holiday parties, because as a label designer, you kind of become their therapist, because you're representing their ethos, so you get very close to people.



Erin Sullivan

Erin Sullivan: General Manager, Acme Fine Wines in St. Helena

Erin Sullivan was trained through the Court of Master Sommeliers and the American Sommelier Association. For four years, she was the sommelier at Del Frisco's Steak House in New York City, and later became Wine Director at PRESS Restaurant in St. Helena. She speaks fluent French, lived in Languedoc-Roussillon for a number of years, and currently calls St. Helena home.

I was somewhat enchanted and disarmed by Erin's charm, warmth, and intelligence.

It really works well having a shop in St. Helena. I have people approach me all the time and tell me about a new project their launching, so Acme Fine Wines provides a platform for them. We have this great wine club called 'The Pulse'. A lot of my friends have joined it. Every month, you get 3 bottles of wine, either from the Napa Valley, or from Spain, France, Germany...wines from all over the world. It's a way for folks in the wine industry to keep their fingers on the pulse of what's happening in the world of wines. Sometimes we'll include a wine from an assistant winemaker in Napa that just made his or her first barrel of wine. It might be a Chasselas, Tannat, or a Trousseau Gris. Or we'll send a wine from Italy's newest DOCG. And grower champagne. All kinds of neat and quirky things. I'm always thinking about what I'll do next. Bringing in import wines is a really fun day dream. To kind of have a business model like Kermit Lynch. It's a great way to be satisfied on a lot of different levels. Importing wine is a great way to remain connected to the rest of the world.

At the shop, I still get a lot of people looking for scores. Some people come in with a page torn out of the Wine Spectator. I used to roll my eyes at this, but now I accept it. You know, it'll be someone from Canton, Ohio, or some place outside of California, that cares about wine but needs help with his choices. Usually, the demographic that uses scores is 60 +years of age. The younger shoppers tend to take more risks with their purchases and typically let our staff recommend wines, rather than relying on a score or review. It's neat; I'm seeing this transition in wine purchasing habits where people who tend to shop at Farmer's Markets and buy food from local purveyors are supporting more and more small local wine producers. They seem to like knowing their money is going to an artisan versus a corporation.

Some people are still looking for a 'milkshake in a glass' type wine; heavy palate weight, lots of vanillin, a super creamy texture. For that type of buyer, that's what represents satisfaction for them. I can pull the cork on several bottles in the shop, and they'll keep saying, 'No, that's not big enough. No, that one's not big enough, either.' They seem to be at an early stage in the wine loving process. I think that's why a wine like 'The Prisoner' has been such a huge success. It looks like a cult wine, with that label, and then when people taste it, they just think it's yummy right away. They don't have to sit there and think



about it; it's not a cerebral wine. I think 'The Prisoner' made a lot of people feel good about themselves, because it was this sophisticated-looking wine that was very easy to understand, which made people in turn feel good about themselves and not intimidated by it. I think you then hopefully graduate to different wines, as well. Perhaps more cerebral wines. It's like developing a taste for Scotch. Or for oysters. You kind of grow into those tastes.

One of our customers I really enjoy is this woman from Arizona. She'll call me once in a while and say, 'Can you put together a case of tannic red wines for me – 150-dollars-a-bottle price range? And, then can you put together a case of buttery chardonnays so that my husband has something to drink?' I just love that.



Dan Ricciato

Dan Ricciato: Winemaker at undisclosed Oakville location

Dan Ricciato is a dashing, poetic winemaker who was born in Boston and later lived in New York before arriving in the Napa Valley in 2007. He is immensely thoughtful, engaging, and philosophical about his pursuit of beautiful wines.

We are not in control. Mother Nature is in control. All we can do is give her what she needs for maximum benefit. You try to do that to the best of your abilities, understanding that things will always change in the vineyard, from year to year. If you do your best to interact with what you're given, then, ideally, the fruit comes into the winery and from there, you should have a real basic set of guidelines to guide the fruit through processing...through primary and malo-lactic fermentation. When I taste wines, I love thinking about sculpture. I think about it in structural terms. Certain wines have very angular components; certain wines have smooth, flow-y components.

Take Michaelangelo's David for example. That is the perfect example of the human form. And, with wine, you can also look for that kind of perfect form. Wine has a shape. You can't just use the fucking flavor wheel. That won't get you anywhere. What's really going to get you some place is how that wine affects you as an individual. If you ask yourself, 'How does this wine react with my sensibilities,' then you're getting somewhere.

For example, if someone gives me a Napa Valley Cabernet, I don't go into it thinking about this pre-existing Napa Valley template, with set descriptors and expectations in place. No, I go into it thinking of it as a wine, with many facets, offering many experiences. I think in California winemaking right now, we're so caught up on defining a wine according to some set of pre-existing descriptors, like the flavor wheel provides, which is total bullshit. Instead we should open ourselves up to interpretation. It's not just about defining a wine; it's about interpreting a wine. It's not about what everyone else has set forth; it's about what you individually feel and think about that wine you're making.

That's something that I try and focus on when I drink a wine, too. I'm not trying to compare one cabernet to how every other cabernet tastes. I'm trying to interpret a wine based upon the totality of my wine-drinking experience. If you think cabernet is just always this one thing then you limit yourself as a winemaker.

If you're a foodie, you can go to a steak house, and have a big fat juicy steak and mashed potatoes, and say, 'That was an amazing dinner.' And you can go to a sushi restaurant and have rice, with rice wine vinegar, and have this light, ethereal dinner, and you can say, 'That was amazing, too!' But, in the wine world, there is all of this divisiveness and these camps, you know...and I hate this. You'll have one camp that only wants low alcohol, and then you'll have another camp that only wants extracted, uber-concentrated wines. Why shouldn't we be able to love both? We need to begin accepting the fact that just because different styles exist does not mean that one style is superior to another style.

My goal, at the end of the day, every single time, is to express the individual characteristics of each site I work with. How can I put that forth in a pure, manageable way?

If all you're doing is trying to fit your wine into a stylistic varietal category, then you're fucking up. You're not doing the right thing. You're just following the path towards the mass commercialization of wine. But, if you actually aim towards expressing that variety as it expresses itself in a specific site, then you're onto something. But that requires a great deal of understanding of where the grapes come from, and requires a far greater understanding of what that set of parameters, offered by that site, needs in order to emerge pure. Because purity is the essence of everything.

I mean think of it this way. If you're a person, and you're always trying to be like someone else instead of your best self...well, then you're fucking fooling yourself. How can you be a pure person - meaning 'the real you' - if you're just trying to copy somebody else? And grapes are a lot like people, and vice versa. There is so much nuance and complexity in both. There are so many variables that come into play. If you try and shape yourself into something you're not, against the natural will of who you actually are as a person, then you're failing. You're not doing yourself justice. So you're not doing a wine justice if you're just trying to shape it into some pre-existing varietal template, where the individualities of site are not even considered.

We're at a critical point in California winemaking. We need to stop comparing our wines to the old world wines. We have our own climate, our own soils, our own uniqueness. What we need to do is start defining ourselves as a wine culture so that our future and our identity are fully realized.





Steve's Mixed Tapes

The Napa Valley is fortunate to list Steve Matthiasson among its hard-working, talented sons. While he is making splendidly fresh, vibrant, honest wines, and getting them out there in front of all the gatekeepers and influencers that the industry says matter, he is also the kind of guy you'd hope to meet at a corner bar over a cold beer and a good game of darts.

There's a bullshit-free zone around Steve, and if you didn't know beforehand that he's one of Napa's most closely-watched winemakers, you'd think maybe he was a blue collar guy, busting his hump, day in and day out, like the rest of us. And, you know, you'd actually be right about that. Men and women like Matthiasson do Napa Valley a favor, infusing Her as they do with some genuine humanity, all the while keeping Her standard for quality and typicity in wines high...without ever being highfalutin.

Over a glass of his Matthiasson Napa Valley white wine – a blend utilizing sauvignon blanc, ribolla gialla, semillon, and tocai fruillano – our talk turns early on to music, something we both really love. So I ask him to create playlists for this issue of Loam Baby, inspired by the parts of Napa Valley he finds himself driving through often. I get distracted, though, by this lively white wine we're drinking and I say so.

RH Drexel: *This is going to sound like a horrible cliché, but there is so much minerality in this wine, and also, this great, great salinity.*

Steve Matthiasson: That's the ribolla gialla. Ribolla gialla is so cool; the thing I love most about it is this very distinct taste of crushed oyster shells. And it has nothing to do with the soils...it's the variety. Our ribolla gialla is grown here and you can taste it in the fruit. It's overall not that flavorful a variety...kind of like semillon. When you taste them off the vine, there's not a lot of flavor there, but ribolla gialla finishes with this great saline. This wine with oysters is killer.

RHD: *It's funny...whenever I have a good wine like this one, I feel like it belongs in my body, if that makes sense. Like it's returning home or something.*

SM: Oh, I love that you say that. That's exactly what I look for in a wine!

RHD: *Really?*

SM: Yeah, like, I'm not a big juicer, but when you drink carrot, kale and ginger juice, it may not taste that great, but you chug it, because you feel like your body is just absorbing all this nourishment. Bob Cannard, an early pioneer of sustainable farming in California – he provides the vegetables for Alice Waters at Chez Panisse – has this concept of etheric sweetness. If you eat a carrot, say, from good soil, grown sustainably, in a good environment, you taste not just the carrot sweetness, but etheric sweetness. Etheric sweetness is the kind of sweetness that nourishes the body and soul. It feels good being in the body. That's something that I want in my wines. Not sweetness necessarily, but this sense that these wines feel good in the body. You can sense this instinctually...it's not cognitive...your body is telling you, drink this. Bring it into your body.

A lot of natural wines taste like shit. Some of them are good, but a lot taste like shit. But even the ones that taste like shit...they can feel good in the body. It's something I think a lot about, but I haven't really figured out yet.

I don't think a plant's living environment in the vineyard should be too sanitary. Trying not to manipulate a wine – that matters in order for a wine to feel like it belongs in the body. And moderate ripeness, I think, is really important. There's something yeast does at high sugar levels – you can de-alc the wines, it's not the alcohol – but there are things those yeasts are creating at high sugar levels that can strain one's system: Co-genres, biogenic amines... they can be hard on the body. Too much oak is hard to process. It can put a strain on the system.

And wine picks up the personality of the winemaker, for sure. There's a lot that plays into that, on the physical plane, as far as stylistic choices go. But, I'm not convinced that wine doesn't also pick up on the vibe of the winemaker.

RHD: *If you weren't in the Napa Valley, where else would you want to make wine?*

SM: Well, I'd make wine wherever I was. If I had to be in Florida, I'd make muscadine, you know?

RHD: *Do you find yourself socializing a lot with people in the wine business?*

SM: Well, there's this group I call the St. Helena Mafia. [*We both chuckle*]. It's like a 'thing,' and you're either in or you're out. I've been able to do all right without having to participate on that level. These are winery owners, heavy-hitter winemakers, general managers, vineyard management owners...you know, a lot of them vacation together and talk about being members of Meadowood and stuff like that. For our business [*Matthiasson wines*], we have our own network. Like Ketan Mody, for example. I am helping him pick out rootstocks for his wines, and he's going to dig out my septic tank. That's how our network survives, we help each other.





Calistoga:

Calistoga is still a funky old farm town. They have the tractor parade, the sprint car races, the farm equipment dealership. It's hot and sunny, and the air is still, with the smell of dry grass and hot pine trees in the summer. It's the end of the line in Napa Valley, and has a slower pace. It's a country music kind of pace, and not the new stuff. Classic country. Red Meat is a "newer" roots band, and their song Queen of King City really gets at the love of a hometown, and people in Calistoga love their town like nowhere else in the Napa Valley. It's a real community.

NV PLAYLIST - Calistoga

- Red Meat -
- Queen of King City*
- Willie Nelson -
- Uncloudy Day*
- George Jones -
- The Race Is On*
- Hank Williams Jr. -
- All for the Love of Sunshine*
- Merle Haggard -
- Okie from Muskogee*

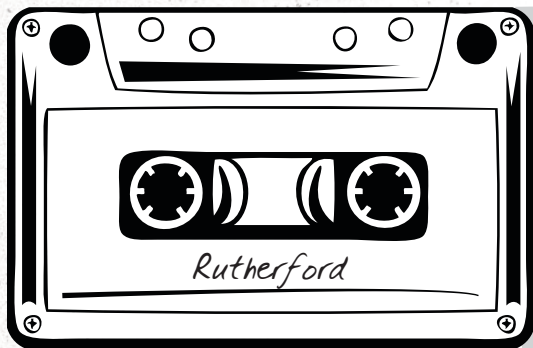


St. Helena:

There is something about St. Helena that brings back my rebellious teenage feelings. It's a cool town with great vineyards, restaurants, people, and history, but it's so damn successful and perfect that I need to listen to punk rock when I'm driving through to balance myself out. Like anywhere in Napa Valley, if you scratch below the surface a bit you'll find tons of good hardworking people, a lot of whom sacrifice to live here because they love food and wine so much. To me, punk isn't negative, it's positive and life-affirming, and it sort of serves life the way tannin and acidity functions in wine - to provide structure and balance out the sweetness and richness.

NV PLAYLIST - St. Helena

- Black Flag**
- *American Waste*
- Minor Threat**
- *Out of Step (With the World)*
- Dead Kennedys**
- *California Uber Alles*
- 7 Seconds**
- *Young 'Til I Die*
- T.S.O.L.**
- *Superficial Love*



NV PLAYLIST - Rutherford

- Minutemen**
 - *Corona*
- The Weavers**
 - *Sixteen Tons*
- Los Lobos**
 - *Flor De Huevo (Son Locos)*
- Calexico**
 - *Guero Canelo*
- War**
 - *All Day Music*

Rutherford:

Rutherford isn't much of a town, really it's just an intersection, and that intersection is defined by the La Luna Market. With a constant flow of winery and vineyard workers gaining sustenance, La Luna is oxygen for a big stretch of the valley. You can get your straw hats and grape picking knives there too. I feel kinship with the workers of the valley when I pull in for a burrito, and wanted to reflect that with these songs. The workers at harvest get paid by the ton, and a year doesn't go by that I don't sing that old Weavers song to myself while I watch them pick grapes. It's not all work though; War is classic Chicano Sunday afternoon park music where I come from in Tucson, and Los Lobos and Calexico both celebrate the shared culture that makes California possible.



NV PLAYLIST - Oakville

- Stephen Malkus**
 - *Phantasies*
- Stereolab**
 - *Spark Plug*
- Sonic Youth**
 - *Hey Joni*
- Built to Spill**
 - *Made-Up Dreams*
- The Feelies**
 - *Real Cool Time*

Oakville:

I don't have a strong connection to Oakville, most of the vineyards in the AVA are on the larger side and owned by wineries, and I haven't done much work there, so I mainly drive through it. These types of songs are driving music to me, complex and more orchestral than hooky, mellow and flowing, to listen to and daydream while the scenery slides by.

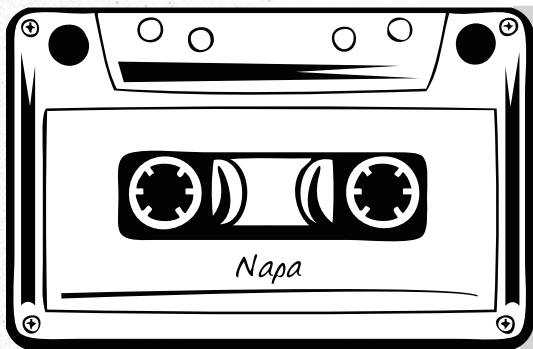


NV PLAYLIST - Oak Knoll

- Levon Helm**
– *Got Me a Woman*
- Ralph Stanley**
– *Sharecropper's Son*
- John Prine**
– *In Spite of Ourselves*
- The Knitters**
– *In This House That I Call Home*
- Neil Young**
– *Old King*

Oak Knoll:

Oak Knoll is home to my family and me. This is where we farm, mostly sharecropping vineyards, but also farming the small vineyard we were finally able to purchase. Located at the Southern mouth of the valley, it's a large and flat AVA, filling the big plain between Napa and Yountville, receiving the morning fog and the afternoon sea breezes. It's the most affordable land in the Napa Valley, which is why we're here. When I'm home I want to listen to good honest music, nothing too fancy. Rootsy stuff with themes of family, love, and the land.



NV PLAYLIST - Napa

- Motorhead**
– *We Are The Road Crew*
- D.O.A.**
– *Taking Care Of Business*
- Minutemen**
– *This Ain't No Picnic*
- Neil Young**
– *Ordinary People*
- Jimmy Cliff**
– *You Can Get It If You Really Want*

Napa:

Napa is the city where the masses that do all the work in the wine country leave from in the morning and come back to in the evening. It's a solid working class and middle class city, full of plumbers, welders, teachers, firefighters, cooks, tasting room employees, cellar workers, etc. I love Napa. We raise our kids here, it's a community, it's just the right size, and it's real, which is important to maintain sanity when living and working in a vacation spot. The songs for this list are straight-ahead anthems that celebrate work. They're songs that whip up a thirst for a cold beer more than a glass of wine, and that's ok. It's about life.

**“YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO
GIVE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT,
YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO GIVE THEM
WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW THAT
THEY WANT... YET”
- DIANA VREELAND**



Consultants to Watch: Victoria Coleman

Provenance: Seattle, Washington

Years as a winemaker: 14 and counting

First wine job: Production Assistant at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

Regions: Consults in Napa Valley, Sonoma, and China

Specialty: cabernet sauvignon, sauvignon blanc



Style of winemaking: “I have been told that I make my cabernet sauvignons with a pinot noir touch. I hope that was a compliment. I don’t think I have a specific style. Everything I do, I do according to texture and taste. I like a light touch in wines.”

Challenges of consulting in China: “Getting fruit to ripen in China. And the violent rainstorms. I did an internship in France, so I didn’t get as worked up during the storms this past harvest as my clients did, but it can be nerve-wracking. And, with brix levels, it’s not unusual for us to get to 16 or 18 brix...sometimes 20 brix. Ripening is a great challenge there.”

Challenges of consulting in general: “It’s hard when a client tells you what they want their wine to taste like. One client I had really loved oak, so that was very challenging for me. We had to find a compromise. He ended up loving the wine, which was good. I’m trying to make wines that my clients like, but that I also believe in.

“I’m really happy that my clients now are starting to understand that a great wine is made in the vineyard, and that they have to have great farming if they want to have great wines. It’s not going to be me that makes that great wine, it’s going to be their vineyard.”

Personal Project: “I’m making a pinot noir for myself now. I have kind of been pushed into the cabernet sauvignon category, which is fine. I love cabernet, but maybe because everyone wants me to and expects me to make cabernet, I am finding that I really enjoy making something else entirely.”

“I’m thinking of starting my own little label, and it will probably be with this pinot noir. I like it; it’s unfinned, unfiltered. Very untouched. Never racked. My Chinese production assistant was here visiting during harvest, so we harvested it together, which was great. Only about 25 cases.”

Favorites to drink: “I love to drink champagne, cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir...and recently I had a Littorai Chardonnay from Mays Canyon that I really loved. I drank it and thought, ‘I would love to make a wine like this.’”

Best thing about making wine: “It’s just given me a great quality of life. I get to be outside in vineyards every day, and take my dog to work with me. Being outdoors is so great. And, also, I love to be able to recognize something I’ve made. It’s not that I have a recipe or anything, or need to have my name on it. I just try and learn the vineyard sites as well as I can. And then, when I taste a wine that has that vineyard inside it, and I can also recognize that I put my hands on it...that’s a great feeling.”



Things We Love About Napa Valley

Napa Valley Wine Country

The Napa Valley is about 30 miles long and can stretch anywhere from 1 mile to 5 miles wide. That is a relatively small amount of land for as much diversity - culturally, agriculturally, and sociologically - as is evident in the Napa Valley.



Napa

Napa - the town proper - can claim older, quaint neighborhoods, and newly gentrified ones, not unlike the **Waterfront** district, which boasts a handful of impressive restaurants, including the **General Store** and **Angèle**, and a jazz club named **Silo's**.

Oxbow, a food market near downtown Napa, is one of the most fun and delicious sights to visit. You can spend several hours there, as I often have, grazing on a wide array of foods, including fresh oysters at **Hog Island Oyster Company**.

The best sandwiches in all of Napa can be found at the **Genova Delicatessen**. It's been around since 1926, and though it's found improbably in a strip mall, the sandwiches are hearty, generous, and made with the freshest ingredients. If you're looking for a great breakfast place, **Butter Cream Bakery** is an old greasy spoon, frequented mostly by elderly, cantankerous locals.

Red Rock Café makes juicy, memorable hamburgers and BBQ ribs. And, if you're nostalgic for old farm and feed supply stores like I am, check out **Wilson's Feed**. It's one of the last true-blue feed stores in the Bay Area.

Yountville

Yountville, just north of Napa, is small and well-appointed, with several luxury hotels, outstanding restaurants – including **The French Laundry** – and lots of great shopping. I love Yountville in inclement weather; it's just so romantic and smells so great when it's raining out. When I'm visiting, I love to grab a coffee at **Bouchon Bakery**. The restaurant next door, by the same name, is also terrific, with a dynamic wine list, and a fruits de



mer platter that is dizzyingly fresh and delicious. **Bistro Jeanty** has simple, well-prepared French country fare, while **Redd Wood** boasts an eclectic menu and some mean, inventive cocktails.

After lunch, I often like to walk around in the old **Yountville Cemetery**; a peaceful setting and the ideal location for a contemplative stroll, just up the road from all the wine-country commerce.

Rutherford

The **Rutherford Grill** is a popular hangout with winemakers and vineyard managers. The lunches and dinners feature mostly classic comfort food and a serious wine list. If you're a total wine geek, you'll be star-struck, running into the likes of Chuck Wagner of Caymus and Cliff Lede of Cliff Lede Vineyards.





St. Helena

St. Helena is a great place to stay while visiting wine country. It's a foodie's paradise, with great wine to boot, and to top it all off, great antiquing and shopping. I enjoy staying at the **Inn at Southbridge**. It is conveniently located near all of the elegant restaurants and shops. **The Farmstead Restaurant** is perfect if you're casually dressed, but in the mood to eat gourmet food and drink well. If you're traveling with kids, make sure to stop by the **Big Dipper**, St. Helena's very own old-fashioned ice cream shop.

If the pace and high living of St. Helena starts to overwhelm you, you may find sanctuary at the old **St. Helena Catholic Church**. Irrespective of your faith, you'll enjoy the peace of their gardens and the interior of the church itself, which often smells of fresh-cut roses and frankincense. **Ana's Cantina** is a great place for a few shots of tequila and a good game of pool. **Sunshine Foods** is ideal if you're planning to stay in for the night at your hotel, and want to bring gourmet prepared food back to your room. For breakfast, you cannot beat **French Blue**. **Steve's Hardware** is a classic old hardware store, featuring everything from hammers and nails to wine glasses, toasters, and dog toys.



Calistoga

Calistoga is the northern-most town in the Napa Valley, and it's special and lovely in its own, funky way. **Café Sarafornia** is the best place in Calistoga for breakfast. **Enoteca**, run by the incomparable Margaux Singleton, is one of the most well-appointed wine shops anywhere in Northern California. You'll find rare bottlings from around the world there, as well as hand-picked bargains that Margaux has discovered.

If you cannot afford one of the more costly hotels in St. Helena or Yountville, look no further than the **Comfort Inn** in Calistoga. The staff is friendly, the rooms are very clean, the room rates are low, and it's conveniently located near the Silverado Trail and Hwy. 29, for ease of commuting up and down the wine country roads.

And don't let all of the fancy restaurants, expensive wines and luxury shops intimidate you. Some of the best service industry professionals I've ever met live and work in the Napa Valley, and more often than not, they take great pleasure in making people feel welcomed and relaxed, no matter how upscale the environment.





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Notes

