

## WINERY OF THE MONTH



### WINERY from cover

Yorkville, Boonville, Philo, and Navarro offer restaurants and accommodations to people who want a break from urban stress.

"If you look at the picture on our label, that's the view off of our front deck. There's nothing in front of us but trees, valleys, and blue skies." A friend visiting from Boston, looked up at the night sky and commented that she hadn't seen the Milky Way since she was a kid. "There's no ambient light and no city lights. I see everything very clearly," Fred says.

But in 1999 when Fred and Heather purchased the property, much of what they saw was murky. Knowing little about farming, they expected to hire consultants and felt lucky to have engaged Norman Kobler to plant and manage their 10-acre vineyard. Norman's parents, Hans and Theresia Kobler had developed Lazy Creek Vineyard where he grew up. "Norman has been a godsend. He could grow grapes on asphalt. He's just a very gifted farmer. In the beginning with my corporate viewpoint, I would ask him why something hadn't happened yet. He'd answer, 'because Mother Nature doesn't want it to.' It took me a while to understand and to be comfortable with how grapes grew and why it took so much more time than I wanted."

Fred and Heather at least knew a little about farming, but Philo Ridge is two miles off the electrical grid and entirely wind and solar powered. They knew nothing about that. "Talk about drinking from the fire hose," Fred laughs. Mendocino County calls itself *America's greenest wine region*. Its percentage of certified organic vineyards is higher than any other county. It protects heritage crops and has outlawed those that are genetically modified. The County is home to many wineries that use only renewable energy, such as solar, wind, and geothermal for all winery operations. On Fred and Heather's road, all of the neighbors are wind

and solar powered. One neighbor was an early designer of LED lighting and has designed lights for the new Philo Ridge winery building. "I can turn on every single light and illuminate the entire interior of the winery, the entire pad, and the back pad and use less than the power it takes to light two 200-watt bulbs because it's all high-end LED. This guy's a genius. He's been designing lights for the space shuttle, streetlights in Chicago, and lights for remote villages in Chile and around the world. It's truly amazing."

Fred says that being wind and solar powered has presented challenges and opportunities, not problems. White wines require a lot of refrigeration during the winemaking process, especially for *settling* before and after fermentation. Lowering the temperature allows particles to drop out of solution so that the wine is clarified. "We do all the settling for our white wines at Handley Cellars. We bring it up to our facility for fermentation and storage and then truck it back down to Handley for cold-stabilization and then back up to our place for bottling. So that's really the only challenge, and we're looking at ways to overcome that. We could increase our solar capacity and look at some different winemaking techniques and also some different technology for chilling wines."

Although Fred and Heather work together, Heather is the formal winemaker. "She's an engineer and very analytical," Fred says. "She loves to take a look at things and figure things out. She's also an excellent cook, and I think that's related to her ability to make our wines. She understands flavor. She understands subtle nuances." Fred says that basically, their approach to making wine is simple. "Our philosophy is not to make better wines through science." They don't filter or fine their red wines for example to preserve more varietal character. "Not to make it sound like we're

hicks from the sticks. We have access to all the modern equipment, but we choose not to employ it. Winemaking becomes more hands-on and time-intensive for us." To clarify the wine, they rack it from one barrel to another instead of filtering.

Their 10-acre vineyard is planted mainly to four different clones of Pinot Noir with different characteristics and ripening times, growing mostly on terraced slopes. But they buy fruit for their other wines and work closely with growers to insure quality. "We're working with tremendous raw materials and try not to screw them up. "Our tag line on our labels is that we hope people will enjoy our wines as much as we have enjoyed making them. It's really a passion for both of us. I love doing this. But I love drinking everybody else's wine too. I try not to drink our wine too much because otherwise you can develop a house palate. You lose your objectivity."

In addition to premium fruit and careful winemaking, Fred says that they don't push their wines out the door. In February of this year, they released their Gewurztraminer, Viognier, and Pinot Gris. "We feel that these wines need a little bit more bottle time to come through bottle shock and really settle down. We notice a huge difference between a wine that's only been in the bottle for three months versus a wine that's been in the bottle for six or eight months." Their current Pinot Noir is the 2006 vintage because they keep the wine in barrel for up to two years and then age it for another nine months in bottle before releasing it to the market. Holding back inventory means holding back income, a sacrifice that many wineries prefer not to make. "With a case production of just 2200, distributed mostly in the San Francisco Bay Area, it does well for us because we're trying to do the right thing by the wines," not to mention their enthusiastic customers.



## CELEBRATIONS WINE CLUB

Celebrating over 20 years of good wine, good food, and good friends!

[www.CelebrationsWineClub.com](http://www.CelebrationsWineClub.com)

California  
*Winery of the Month*



## From City Lights to Starry Nights

*Philo Ridge Vineyards*

Self-described "refugees from Silicon Valley," husband and wife Fred Buonanno and Heather McKelvey lived in San Francisco, and both had careers in the tech industry. Fred traveled 250,000 miles a year, setting up mobile distribution channels for telecommunication and computer companies. Heather was the VP of engineering for a software company. These were their public lives. But they had different aspirations that would determine their futures. Heather made wine in the basement, and Fred took wine business courses between trips to the airport. For four years they searched for paradise and eventually found it, a 40-acre parcel in Anderson Valley, a hundred miles north of San Francisco and five miles up a dirt road where they could grow grapes and make wine. The property was listed for sale in the San Francisco Chronicle. When they visited, they were awestruck, Fred says. "After two hours with the owners and two bottles of wine, we bought the place." For two years after that, they maintained their home in San Francisco and went to the property only on weekends. "I would literally fly back to the airport, get into my car, and drive to Philo. It got under our skins. We really wanted to do it. We felt so comfortable

and at home there."

Located in Mendocino County, Anderson Valley is unusually isolated. Access is Highway 128, a scenic but narrow, winding, 28-mile road that no one travels accidentally. Fred calls the road a *choke point* that prevents easy day trips. But the Valley is a splendid weekend destination. Twenty three miles long and two miles across at its widest part, Anderson Valley has clearly defined borders, Greenwood Ridge on the western side, which rises to an elevation of 1400 feet and the Whipple Ridge on the eastern side. The Navarro River runs through the Valley and out to the ocean through the Navarro River Redwoods State Park. Despite a big increase in vineyard plantings, much of the area is forested with fir and giant redwoods. Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, and Riesling flourish here in what is one of the two coolest wine regions in California. Like Philo Ridge, most of the wineries are small and family-owned, but the appellation also has its share of big names, like Roederer Estate, Cakebread, Handley, Navarro Vineyards, Sattui, Duckhorn, and Williams Selyem. Ferrari-Carano recently purchased Lazy Creek. Wine tasting is relaxed and friendly, and the little towns of

See **WINERY** back page



[CelebrationsWineClub.com](http://CelebrationsWineClub.com)

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner  
75 Pelican Way G1  
San Rafael, CA 94901

**1-800-700-6227**

Celebrate@  
[CelebrationsWineClub.com](mailto:Celebrate@CelebrationsWineClub.com)

June 2010

## RECOMMEND US

to family members, friends, business associates, and clients whom you think would appreciate Celebrations Wine Club.

**RECEIVE** a complimentary third bottle of outstanding wine with your regular shipment of two bottles, when they join Celebrations Wine Club.

Send this form to: Celebrations Wine Club  
75 Pelican Way G1  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Or call: 1-800-700-6227

*Anna Maria, please send information and a complementary issue of our newsletter to the following people. Please mention my name.*

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Cut .75 inches exactly off this side of the sheet.