

PICK & CHOOSE

**JUST RED? JUST WHITE?
JUST CALIFORNIAN?
JUST ITALIAN?
HOW ABOUT A
COMBINATION?**

CALIFORNIA WINES

Artisan Series –
\$29.50/month, a red and a white
Winemaker Series –
\$59.50/month, 2 reserve reds
Artisan red–Winemaker red –
\$46/month

ITALIAN WINES

Artisan Series –
\$32/month, a red and a white
Winemaker Series –
\$62/month, 2 reserve reds
Collector Series –
\$112/month, 2 collectable reds
Artisan red–Winemaker red –
\$48/month
Winemaker red–Collector red –
\$87/month

CALIFORNIA–ITALIAN COMBINATIONS

CA Artisan red–IT Artisan red –
\$33/month
CA Artisan white–IT Artisan white–
\$29.50/month
CA Winemaker–IT Winemaker –
\$62/month
Alternate CA & IT Artisan Series –
\$29.50/\$32/month
Alternate CA & IT Winemaker Series–
\$59.50/\$62/month

DOUBLE UP

You can also receive more than two bottles per month. California sales tax is included. Shipping is extra.

I'll be there in about 12 years. That's not a long time from now. I don't want to be doing this for the rest of my life. I'd love to be able to turn it over to my family, but I have two daughters, and neither one of them is interested. One of them has two little boys in Southern California, and the other one has a career headhunting for doctors and is doing well. They're not interested at this point, maybe down the road.

Do you actually get your hands red, or do you devote your time to the business side?

I mostly devote myself to the business side, but my consulting winemaker Gary Galleron and I discuss options. I know enough about making wine so that I can make the final decisions. I write the checks, so I make the decisions. He's okay with that. He made wine for Chateau Montelena for eight years. That's very expensive wine, and he did an incredibly good job. He was also at Whitehall Lane for seven years. So he has a good background, and we use him as our consulting winemaker. A lot of winemak-



ers open their own businesses, but they are not good marketing people. I have run into that like crazy. They don't know the first thing about perception of value in packaging. They don't know how to see themselves or their wine. They've got a terrible business sense. But what I did right off the bat is I went out and did what any wine broker would do. I went out and got beat up in the wine-selling world, so that I would know how to relate to brokers when they're telling me things about the business. So that was an education, seeing what the competition is out there, pouring wines, and trying to get them placed on restaurant wine lists, and then getting stores to carry my wines. That's been a chore. I knocked on all the doors. But that experience has paid off very well.

What scares you the most about the wine business?

There are two things actually. One is making more wine than I can sell. The other is selling more wine than I can make. It's a double-edged sword. But I'd rather have the last one. ■

SEND A GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

to family, friends, business associates, and clients for any number of months that you prefer.

CHOOSE:

- California Artisan Series \$29.50/mo.
- California Winemaker Series \$59.50/mo.
- Italian Artisan Series \$32/mo.
- Italian Winemaker Series \$62/mo.
- Italian Collector Series \$112/mo.
- Or select from "Pick & Choose" above & write here:

Prices include 2 bottles of glorious wine, the newsletter, and CA sales tax. We include a gift card with your personal message. Shipping extra.

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San Rafael, CA 94901

Or call 1-800-700-6227 or fax this form to 1-415-457-3362
Or order from our website at www.celebrationswineclub.com

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Please charge my Visa Mastercard Discover

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CELEBRATIONS
WINE CLUB

YOUR ACCESS TO OUTSTANDING WINES FROM CALIFORNIA AND ITALY

California Winery of the Month



CelebrationsWineClub.com

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner
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San Rafael, CA 94901

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December 2005

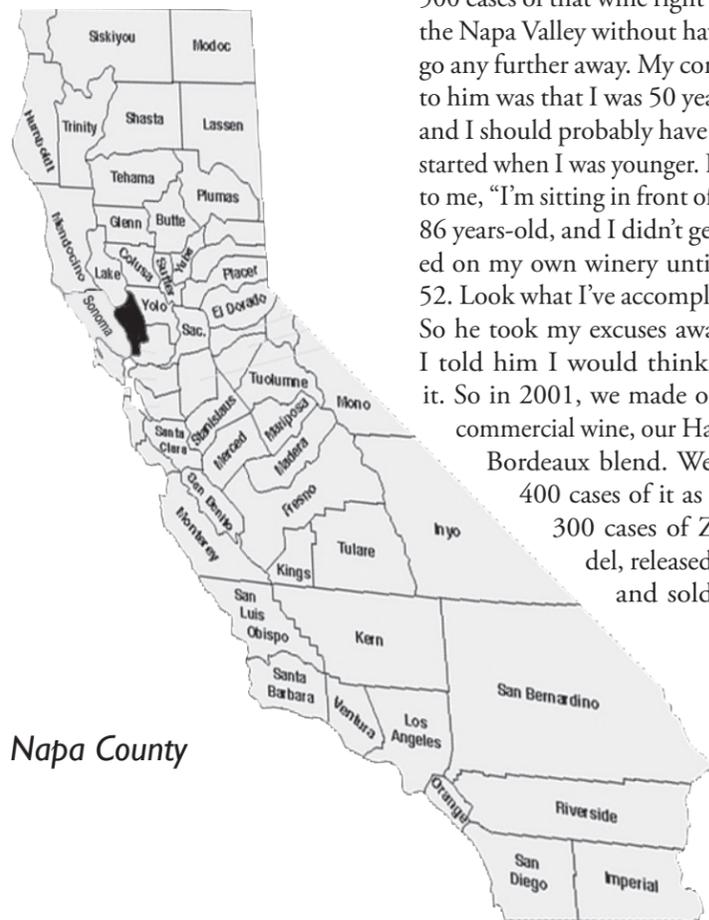
Life Begins at 50 Bourassa Vineyards

With Italian immigrant grandparents on one side and French on the other, winemaking aromas were part of the air Vic Bourassa breathed, growing up in Worcester, Massachusetts. "My Italian grandfather on my mother's side would make Port wine with his friends when I was a kid. They would smoke cigars, eat spaghetti, and have a good old time," he remembers vividly. Those memories followed him across the U.S. when he came to California 40 years ago. But it wasn't until he was 50 years old, after two other careers, that he seriously indulged himself in those heady aromas and began to make wine commercially. ➤

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Although he initially lived in Southern California, Vic became a frequent visitor to the Northern California wine country. In 1996, he made a career change from materials handling to real estate development and moved permanently to the Napa Valley. Before long, he was working for Visatui and then Franciscan, learning what he could, and began making wine at home. He served as president of the Napa Valley Home Winemakers Association for two years, continuing to educate himself and fellow members. But when Robert Mondavi admired Vic's wines and rebuffed his argument that at 50, he was too old to be starting a winery, Vic seriously thought about developing a commercial business. At that point, Vic had enough winemaking education, including short courses at the University of California, Davis and Napa College. What he needed was a business strategy



that would serve him well if he was going to build a successful commercial wine business at this point in his life. With boundless energy and optimism, supported by business skills well-honed in two other careers, Vic came up with a plan for his winery: an excellent product, low overhead, and a serious marketing program, his recipe for success. I reprint our conversation with minor editing for clarity.

How did Robert Mondavi influence your decision to open a commercial winery?

We had a mutual friend, who brought him to my house in 1999 to taste my wines. He was sitting in my backyard, and I served him *bruschetta* and a bottle of Pinot Noir that I had bottled. He was 86 at the time and kept filling his glass and drinking it. We were also drinking it, but he drank most of the bottle himself. It was amazing. He basically said that I could sell 500 cases of that wine right here in the Napa Valley without having to go any further away. My comment to him was that I was 50 years old, and I should probably have gotten started when I was younger. He said to me, "I'm sitting in front of you at 86 years-old, and I didn't get started on my own winery until I was 52. Look what I've accomplished." So he took my excuses away, and I told him I would think about it. So in 2001, we made our first commercial wine, our Harmony Bordeaux blend. We made 400 cases of it as well as 300 cases of Zinfandel, released those, and sold them



"if you take a common product and make it uncommonly well, you will have success."
—Vic Bourassa

out in eight months in Napa Valley, although we released most of them in Southern California. So then the next vintage we made about 1,800 cases, introduced white wine, a Viognier and a Sauvignon Blanc. They went over very well, sold those out, and then increased our crush capacity so that we were up to 3,000 cases. Now this year, we're crushing about 5,000 cases worth of wine. I travel from state to state and set up brokers and distributors, so we're in ten states in addition to California now.

So you were making delicious wine from the very beginning, and it only got better.

Somebody once said that if you take a common product and make it uncommonly well, you will have success. That's my mantra. Napa Valley creates only four percent of California's wine, but that four percent is about 80 percent of the economic value of wine in the state. Ten billion dollars worth of wine comes out of this little five by 35-mile little stretch, ten billion dollars. I do not buy any grapes from anywhere but Napa Valley. We're exclusively a Napa Valley winery. I learned early on that the quality of wine is affected by what we do in

the vineyard. If you have great fruit, you have the potential to make great wine. But also the winemaking process itself is important. We treat the wine gently during fermentation and during pressing. We don't do the standard pump-overs (mixing the fermenting juice and solids by pumping the fermenting juice from the bottom of the tank over the cap of solids that rises to the surface). We use a spray system. A valve on the bottom of the tank sprays only the juice up over the cap, not seeds, skins, and stems that are rising from the bottom, so that we don't release more phenolic compounds than necessary from the solids into the fermenting juice. The spray system slowly lowers the cap of solids on top of the tank into the juice to get the tannins and pigments out of it but without the bitter elements. We



it really tastes great, and you can tell that the wine has good bones. When you start pressing harder and harder on the pulp and the skins to extract all the wine, you break stems, seeds, and skins in that process, mashing them against one another. You're releasing more phenolic compounds into the wines. But when you stop the pressing

with the thought that it will dissipate and won't affect the wine that much. I don't want it affecting my wine at all. So our wines are drinkable sooner after bottling, partially based on this treatment.

Where do you make your wine?

Catahoula Lake Winery is a state-of-the-art winemaking facility in east Napa, where we are a bonded winery inside of their winery. They're ten years old. They have 15,000 feet of wine caves cut into the hills right in back of the winery, so it's a perfect place to store the barrels of wine. They give us *carte blanche*, and we can use the caves any time we want for tastings and other events. Probably seven or eight wineries work out of there. I think it's a great way to go. If I were younger, I would go out and buy vineyards, and I would buy a piece of property where I could build my own winery and bring the public in. But I don't think I'll be doing this at 65 or 70 years old, and



do something else during pressing. I learned this from making wines at home and then at the winery. During the press, when you taste the first free flow juice and taste it immediately after fermentation,

at a specific spot when the wine starts to get that bitterness coming out of the press, you stop pressing and throw the rest away. Most wineries in Napa Valley are into quantity. They will blend that wine

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