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JUST CALIFORNIAN?
JUST ITALIAN?
HOW ABOUT A
COMBINATION?

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\$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.

the land but could just be there to scratch out a living somehow, were kicked off the land. Their houses were burned. It was a brutal, violent process. And that forced a lot of people to the New World. A lot went to Canada. It was the same with the Irish. Scotland and Ireland are tough places to grow food. There wasn't much industry there either.

Did your family continue to be farmers in this country?

I'm not sure. My great grandparents homesteaded land in the Bishop area of California. But they couldn't farm it because it was too dry. They moved there because my great grandfather had lung disease from coal mining back east. His son, my grandfather, and his brothers got into simple small business in southern California. My dad was the first of the family to go to college. It's a typical migration story, folks who came here in hard times without much money, and everything's gotten better for them since then.

As the world turns, here you are engaged in farming.

My story is just one of enjoying making a living at something I love. I've stayed in Sonoma for my whole career and have focused on this area of Carneros and continue to be fascinated with how to make better wine. We have been farming for ourselves since 1997. Our vineyard is a mile north of Sears point in the western hills on Wildcat Mountain, which is one of the boundary points of the Carneros appellation. So it's the very western edge and has a unique climate. Carne-

ros is about 30 miles wide, and it's different over there than what the traditional Carneros is over on the Napa side where it's a little balmier, not quite as windy, more protected, a little warmer. My vineyard definitely has a more coastal influence. The wind buffets through every day. It's a higher elevation, so it's cooler for that reason too. It's a farming challenge, but it's beginning to make wines that show compelling, vibrant, strong flavors. We have 58 acres and three different varieties planted, Syrah, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. The pleasurable part for me is to focus on an area that is really exceptional. About 20% of our production comes from there, and we buy the rest of our grapes from a number of growers. With slight exceptions, we do everything based in Carneros, whether it's on the Napa side or the Sonoma side. I started making Carneros wines when I was at Hacienda in the late 1970s. There were a couple of vineyards where I bought fruit, the Niles Vineyard and the Sangiacomo Vineyard. I was really intrigued with the fruit, fascinated with the brightness and structure of those Chardonnays. When I started my own winery in 1987, I started with that little formula, Chardonnay like that, Carneros Chardonnay, and built it up to about 5,000 cases and then started making red wines too. We're now making 25,000 total cases a year, and we want to do more with estate bottlings from Wildcat Mountain to complement our little portfolio with wines of exceptional structure and character. We have a different label for those wines. We want them to be our higher end, a small amount, just a few hundred cases each of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah. ■



YOUR ACCESS TO OUTSTANDING WINES FROM CALIFORNIA AND ITALY

California

Winery of the Month



Start small, grow big, and whistle a happy tune

MacRostie Winery and Vineyards



CelebrationsWineClub.com

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner
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San Rafael, CA 94901

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March 2005

During the roaring nineties, plenty of people had \$500,000 to a million to throw at glamorous businesses. This was the decade of wish fulfillment, and wineries were on the dartboard. People with money bought land, built wineries, and put their names on \$90 bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon from famous appellations. If they needed to make money from these enterprises, at this point, they are gone or just hanging on. If attention was partly what they wanted, they got it. Because their stories couldn't compete, the people who faded from view were the ones who had always been there, those who started with nothing and were in the process of working their way up in the business. Steve MacRostie was one of them and made his mark with Chardonnay from the Carneros appellation, where he has spent his entire 38-year career. He asserts that people can still start small in the wine business and that many are doing so now, probably even more than in the past as consumer demand for wine continues to grow. I reprint our conversation with minor editing for clarity. >

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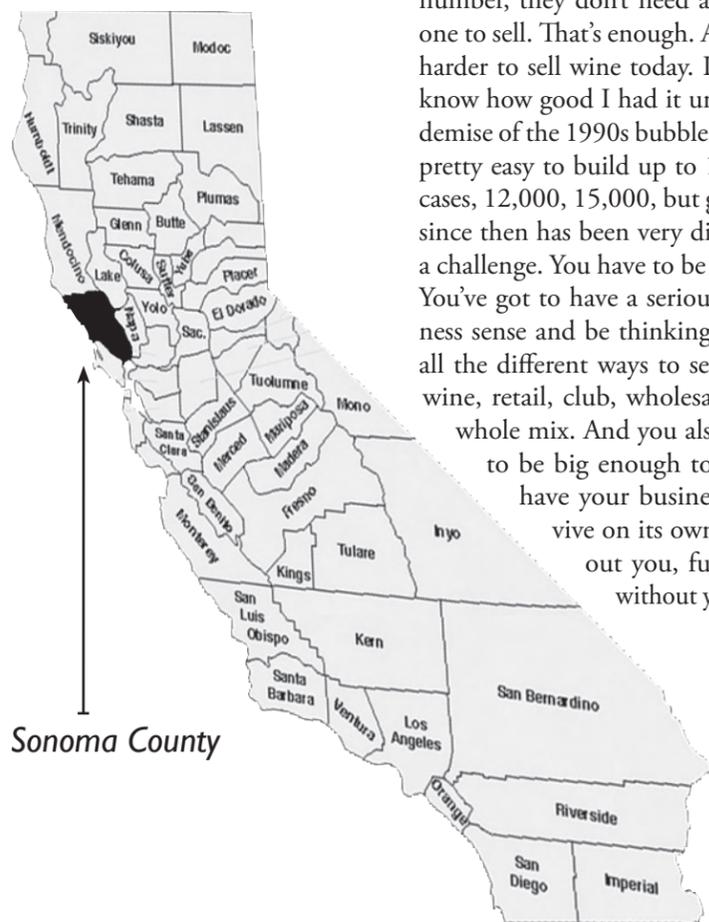
How many years have you been in the wine business?

I've been in the business for 30 years now, and it's really all I've done as a career. I worked for Hacienda Cellars here in Sonoma for a long time, between 1974 and 1986, and then I started this business very modestly. I didn't have any money and had to borrow the start-up money from my mother-in-law and just build a little over time.

Is it still possible to do that, to start modestly?

Absolutely, but don't buy a winery. Don't even invest in any equipment. Find an arrangement where you can make your wine at somebody else's facility. There are people who are happy to do that for you, to offer their services. The Napa Wine Company is a good example. Laird also has a nice facility over in Napa, predicated on doing just that. They make a little wine for themselves, but they have

a gorgeous, big, fancy facility, and they're set up to bring other clients in and make wine for them. You can do it. I began my business for about as little as it could possibly be done. The key thing is finding the grapes and having a marketing concept. How are you going to sell your wine? It's possible to do, and I'm impressed with the number of people who are doing it. Then there's talk from time to time of the number of big-buck start-ups in Napa Valley with a Cabernet or some other high-end red wine concept. I don't know what the number is, but I hear it's fantastic. Patrick Muleady, who just joined us as Vice President of sales and marketing left his job at Pine Ridge last summer and was looking around and found lots of opportunities in places like that. He just thought they weren't realistic and would have a hard time in the market. When a wholesaler's got 5, 6, 7, 10 nice \$60, \$70, \$80 Cabernets, whatever the number, they don't need another one to sell. That's enough. And it's harder to sell wine today. I didn't know how good I had it until the demise of the 1990s bubble. It was pretty easy to build up to 10,000 cases, 12,000, 15,000, but growth since then has been very difficult, a challenge. You have to be astute. You've got to have a serious business sense and be thinking about all the different ways to sell your wine, retail, club, wholesale, the whole mix. And you also have to be big enough to really have your business survive on its own without you, function without you. It's



"I didn't know how good I had it until the demise of the 1990s bubble." — Steve MacRostie

hard to be a one-man band. Ultimately you're not going to be doing everything completely effectively. And it requires a fair amount of volume to do that.

Well you're there, so what is the next step?

I'm there. It's going well. I'm having fun. I'm thinking about the next phase but don't quite know what that's going to be yet. How much bigger do we want to get? And if we outgrow this place, where are we going to go after? We can do about 35,000 cases here, so that's our plan now to increase the Chardonnay and keep the reds more or less the same. We're not making much more red wine.

Chardonnay pays the rent. Even with all the Chardonnay out there, all the competition, that's the wine that sells the easiest.

Yes, isn't that funny? When I first started, a lot of people looked at me and said, "What the hell are you doing? The world doesn't need another Chardonnay." Eighteen years ago, our Chardonnay was \$14 a bottle, a good value then. I just worked, worked, worked at it. I'd go to Chicago. It wasn't easy, going into those retail stores with the sales reps. "I've got 50 Chardonnay's on the shelf," the store

managers would say. "Why do I need another one?" I don't know. We stuck to our knitting, kept our eyes on a style that was becoming more accepted. From the get-go, we had a fruitier, more delicate, more balanced style of Chardonnay. Retailers particularly liked it. We didn't do as much with restaurants. We were fairly priced, and we were easy people to deal with, had good people selling our wine. Bit by bit, it worked. People still buy a lot of Chardonnay. If you look at the pie chart of the U.S. wine market, Chardonnay is big.

Chardonnay is all over Europe now, all over Latin America, all over Australia, and all over California.

It's versatile. It makes good wine in a lot of different places. It's easy to pronounce. It's a white wine that beginning wine drinkers like, and they can start with the simple, fruity, sweeter ones and go up to the fancier, oakier ones, and do everything else in between. It's a good wine for a sales person to recommend. Women buy a lot of it too.

Women buy more wine than men.

Yes, and that's another thing. Chardonnay is a likable wine for women, who don't want oak bombs or real macho style wines. But we're now one of 1000 California brands. It's exploded, and people say it's going to keep doing that. Where's all of that wine going to get sold?

Judging from the wines that I've tasted here, your wines are elegant and traditional, not the heavy, high alcohol wines that seem to be popular now.

We don't subscribe to that style, but we do pick riper than we used to, believing that we get better tasting grapes and therefore better tasting wines, but not pushing it to an extreme. But it's a tightrope. It's a challenge because we get sugar development and therefore potential alcohol before we get maximum flavor. So we can be picking grapes at what used to be a pretty ample ripeness. But in this cool Carneros climate, our little spot at the north end of the Bay, we can get 24 brix and still have green flavors in our wine. We have to be careful about that. So it's difficult because we wait a little longer even though we risk making a higher alcohol wine.

But we don't go to the extreme. We don't like raisened grapes. We like grapes that are ripe but not raisened. We know people who are letting their grapes get to absurd levels of ripeness or over-ripeness and developing pruneey, raisiny flavors, very high pH, poor structure, and the wines are not going to last very long. That's unfortunate.

Macrostie must be a Scottish name.

Yes it is. It came from the Perthshire area, the southern end of the Highlands. They came here in 1820 and settled in upper New York. In those days, lots of people were leaving Scotland for various reasons. The people who owned all of the vast tracks of rural Scotland discovered that it was much more lucrative for them to raise sheep than to rent to little tenant farmers. So the serfs, so to speak, who didn't own



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