

PICK & CHOOSE

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JUST CALIFORNIAN?
JUST ITALIAN?
HOW ABOUT A
COMBINATION?

CALIFORNIA WINES

Artisan Series –
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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 –
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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.

ly and fertilize them, and take care of them, they'll perform. What phylloxera does is suck the juice out of the roots, so this phylloxera thing became really apparent when people started to go for riper fruit and more sugar. When we started striving for these higher sugars and better flavors and so forth, we'd get into September, and the winemaker's saying, 'Okay, we want to go for 26 brix this year, so turn off the water.' When you quit watering the vines, trying to get the fruit ripe, and you don't pick it and leave it on the vine, that's when phylloxera really takes over because the vine is stressed. It's weak.

You employ a highly regarded winemaker.

Yes, Kerry Damskey. He's worked for some very high-profile wineries. We actually make our wine at Pellegrini Family Winery in Santa Rosa. We chose Pellegrini because they had open-top fermenters with automated punch-down, and we like to ferment all of our reds in open tanks and punch down (the cap of solids that rises to the surface during fermentation.) We think that technique is essential. We treat the fruit very gently. We hardly crush the grapes anymore. We just de-stem them, and the grapes are almost

whole when when they ferment. But when we put them in the fermenting tank as whole berries and finish punching down the solids, the fruit is dissolved, so it doesn't really need to be crushed before. That way, the wine has a little bit more fruit flavor, and that's the technique that people use for Pinot Noir. More and more winemakers are using Pinot Noir technique for all other grapes. They put the fruit through a de-stemmer and then catch the berries in a picking bin. They don't even want to pump it through a pipe because that's too rough on the fruit. They just

pick up the bin and take it over and dump it into the fermenter. And this kind of extremely gentle treatment all started with Pinot Noir. So we're using that technique with all of our wines. And the oak is important. It's really nice to have a good oak signature. Back if time, we weren't spending as much money on oak barrels, and you can see the difference.

What are your plans for the future?

We're in the process of building right now. We've just finished building a new workers' bathroom/shower facility, and we're remodeling a big barn. We're hoping to start on our winery and guesthouse this summer.

"We think that technique is essential. We treat the fruit very gently. We hardly crush the grapes anymore. We just de-stem them, and the grapes are almost whole when when they ferment." — Chuck McCoy



YOUR ACCESS TO OUTSTANDING WINES FROM CALIFORNIA AND ITALY

California
Winery of the Month



Flying Fast and Light

Volante Vineyards

These days, young people are told to expect multiple careers in their working lives. No corporation will retain them indefinitely. No profession will sustain them over time. Any trade will force them to transform skills. Some people are uncomfortable with the prospect. Others embrace it because their psychologies would inevitable lead them to different pursuits and locations anyway. Chuck McCoy is one of the latter. Born on a farm in Arkansas, he attended Arkansas Tech and earned a degree in chemistry. From there, he joined the Army and after three years took a job in Michigan with Dow Chemical, which sent him abroad to Australia and France on numerous occasions. Wine caught his eye and his palate. Often, he and his wife would visit Northern California, and eventually they developed an unspoken agreement that one day they would live there and build a winery. *Volante* means "fly" in Italian. But more specifically in the field of music, it means "fast and light," a term that Chuck McCoy and his musician wife used to name their winery, a second career for both of them. No matter where they might have begun life, no matter where they had traveled, what work they had done, what decisions they may have made along the way, they lived "fast and light," ready to move, ready to dance to a new tune.



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March 2006

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How did your second career develop?

I'd been a wine fan for years. Even when I was in Michigan, I raised grapes. I bought a farm and planted a few vines just to be involved with wine, just strictly for fun. We visited Napa about four times a year at that time, so when we started looking for property, we looked in Napa first. One day in 1986, we were driving from Calistoga to Santa Rosa, and we saw a sign that said 'For Sale, 80 acres, pond, house.' So we called the phone number on the sign and went to look at the property. It was exactly what we wanted, perfect for raising grapes with an empty house that we could move right into. It was the tail end of the Carter presidency and the oil embargo, and interest rates were 18%. The man who owned the property had retired to Mexico, so we faxed him and made an offer. We didn't really want to buy the place at the

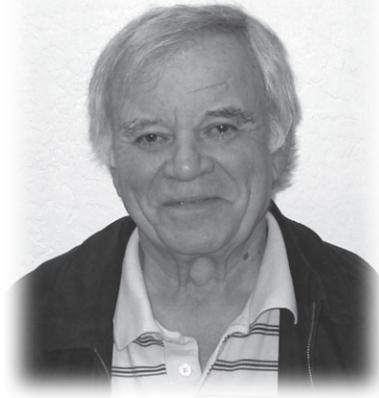
time because I was still working for Dow, but one thing led to another, and he accepted our offer. We bought the place. So then we started worrying about moving here. We went back to Michigan, and I retired pretty quickly from Dow. So we came out here and started planting grapes. But once we planted the grapes, it takes four or five years before the vines start putting out lots of fruit. We decided that while we were waiting for the vines to mature, we would get into the wine business. So we started importing wines from Australia.

Why did you choose Australian wines?

During my career with Dow, I spent a lot of time in Australia and got to know a lot of the wineries there. Back in the early days, they were making really good wine at really good prices. We wanted to get some experience selling wines, but we also thought it would be nice if we could take a couple of trips to Australia as part of the business. We developed a sales force. We developed customers. Then when our wine came on line, it was easy. When we started making our own wines, we just stuck them into our price book and never stopped selling Australian wines. So it worked out pretty well. I have a couple of Australian companies that I still work with.

But you can't compete with companies that are bringing it in by the tons.

The nice thing about this busi-



"It's very difficult to farm hillsides, but once you get the grapes established, you've got a treasure."

—Chuck McCoy

ness is that you don't have to do that. There are so many people who want to deal with small companies. I've had restaurants ask me, 'Now do you swear that I can't buy this wine at Safeway? It's not at Cost Plus?' They want something that nobody else has got, a little bit of exclusivity. People want to deal with the smallest possible entity. They want to think that we're out in the backyard handcrafting these wines. We make about 2,500 cases a year. It's pretty exclusive stuff. The Cabernet Franc is about 150 cases. The syrah is 155. If we make 1000 cases of a wine, that's really a lot. It turns over pretty fast, but it's a niche market that we're after. We're not trying to compete with Beringer or Mondavi. We're just trying to do small amounts.

Where is the property located?

We have 82 acres in Sonoma Valley. I guess the best way to describe the location is that it's between Santa Rosa and Kenwood at an elevation between 1,400 and 1,700 feet, overlooking Highway 12. We look down on Oakmont, Spring Lake, and Valley of the Moon, and we can see San Francisco Bay from the top vineyard. The house has a view of

Santa Rosa and Spring Lake County Park. Our vineyard is almost 100% hillside with a lot of terracing and a lot of rows going up and down. Hillside fruit is very popular. But the county has moved to make it more difficult to plant grapes on hillsides. They maintain that it's an environmental situation, runoff and that kind of thing. We've never had any runoff. But I suppose some people have. I think it's more of a visual problem. Some people don't like to look at grapes.

If you plant them on a hillside, you can see them from a long way away. They're pretty strict right now, but we've got permits from the county to plant another 26 acres. We'll never be able to plant all of it. Some parts of the vineyard are so steep that we can't get a tractor there and have to do everything by hand, but that's the way we want it. It's very difficult to farm hillsides, but once you get the grapes established, you've got a treasure. We have a dream property from the point of view of doing what we're doing with it.

Who are your neighbors?

The closest winery to us from our Syrah vineyard, where you look down at San Francisco Bay, is Adler Fels. If you look down over Adler Fels, you're looking at Landmark

Vineyard, and you can see the new St. Francis Winery too. We sell most of our fruit to St. Francis and reserve a small amount for our own production.

What grape varieties did you plant?

Initially we planted Cabernet Sauvignon, but we planted it on AXR rootstock, which was phylloxera prone. At the time, no one knew that. We've slowly but surely been

replacing all those vines, not in one fell swoop but as they needed to be replaced. In the 1,800s, it took the phylloxera root louse 60 years to get across France, and it took eight years to get from one side of my vineyard to the other. It's a fairly slow process,

but we've been replacing vines for seven years. We've turned a corner because we've now got more new vines than we've got old ones, new rootstock and new vines. A lot of people went in and ripped up the vines and started over. We just replace them as they die. I guess we have about 4000 vines, and we replace about 250 a year. Now we've got them about all replaced, and we've never missed a crop. We've planted only red grapes, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Syrah, and Zinfandel. I'm not sure that they all do

equally well, but I think our choice of rootstock, clones, and location gets better over time. The grapes that we're putting in now are definitely suited to the place and soil where we're putting them. Over the course of years, we probably made a few mistakes. Last year, we added another varietal, Petite Sirah.

How would you describe the style of your wines?

You have to make a wine that's accepted, a style that's accepted. I think the style that's popular right now is very fruity reds with a little bit of residual sugar, not sweet. But a little bit of residual sugar really enhances the palate and makes a wine taste good. These are the kinds of wine that are scoring very high in the Wine Spectator. I don't think they're tremendous food wines though. That's where the Italians come in. They're making wines that are really great with food. High scoring California wines taste wonderful. If you evaluate them technically, they're great. But if you sit down and eat pork chops or pasta with these wines, they're not necessarily great food wines. If you pick grapes too soon now, the winemaker really gets upset. In the old days, we picked the grapes at 23.5 or 24 brix (the measure of sugar in the fruit). Nowadays, if you don't leave them on the vine until 26 brix, winemakers get upset. That's one thing about phylloxera, if you have vines that have phylloxera, and you water them adequate-

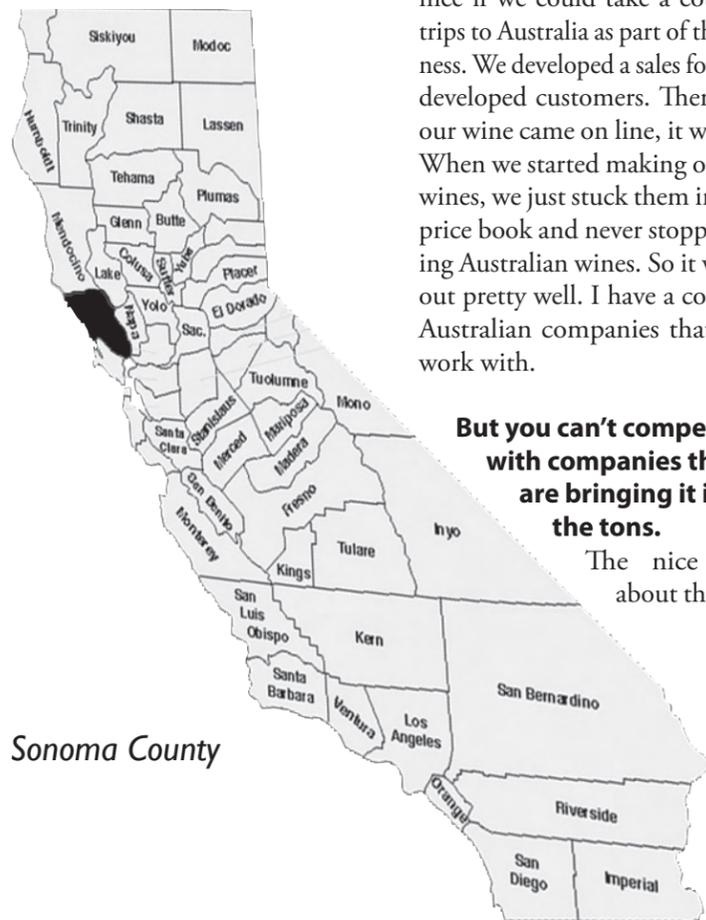
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