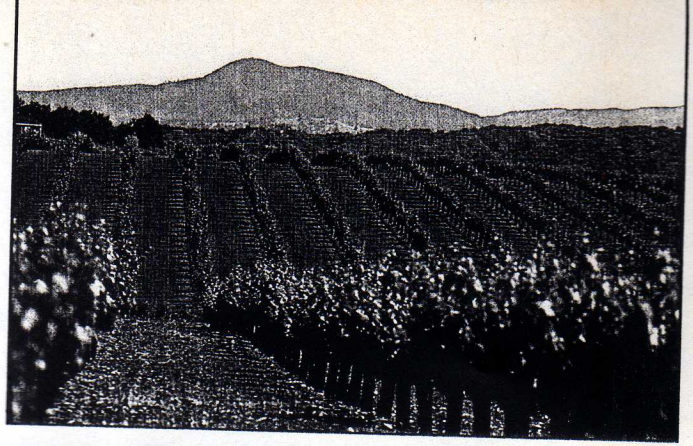


Mount Saint Helena looms above the vineyards of the Napa and Sonoma Valleys, that stretch as far west as the Pacific Ocean. — Photo by Janet Herring-Sherman.

A Savored Lifestyle



A late summer dawn finds the morning sun turning the dew on heavy grape clusters to scarlet jewels. — Photo used with permission of Sebastiani Vineyards.

The California Wine Country has a History Rich in Wine, Roses and Romance

by Janet Herring-Sherman

The face of California's wine land is a hallmark of rural beauty. Travelers to this fabled Eden — where famous footsteps still echo — are never disappointed.

An hour north of San Francisco, acres of grapevines march up the hills and through the quiet valleys of Napa and Sonoma Counties. The ordered vineyards create patterns on the earth akin to patchwork quilts. Stretching alongside clear brooks that gurgle past old stone bridges and reclaimed woods, the vineyards take on every shade of green and crimson as the seasons change.

With spring's onset, wild mustard carpets the fields in meadowlark-yellow, while overhead, rainbow-colored hot air balloons are gently moved along by the sea breezes that make these valleys one of the finest grape-growing regions in the world. A late summer dawn finds the early morning sun turning the dew on heavy grape clusters to scarlet jewels. Autumn brings the bustle of harvest, and truck loads of aromatic grapes move from field to winery like clockwork. In winter, the wineries, shrouded in a blue mist, assume a reverent look.

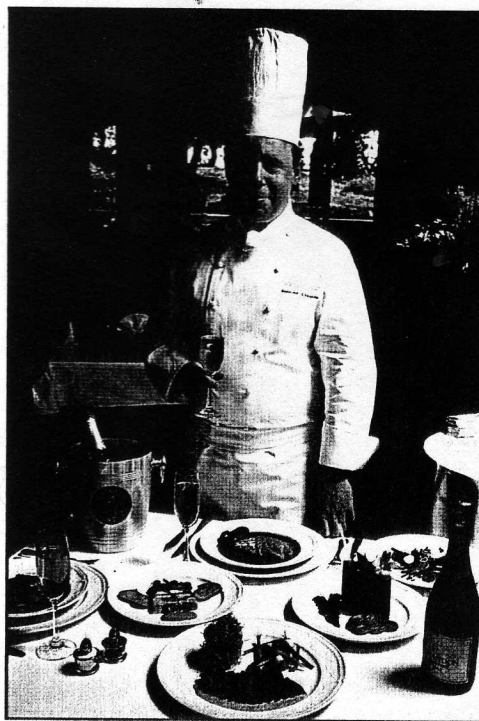
lemon pesto nested in vegetables, rum crème brûlée and apple sorbet, crowned with selected tastings from the Inn's impressive wine list. Its Grille menu includes a spa food section so that dieters and non-dieters may comfortably order and dine ensemble. Executive Chef Alan Barone believes in the artful yet straightforward presentation of food in its natural state: "There is probably nothing more perfect in design than a whole strawberry . . . Lemons are naturally beautiful, so why slice them or cover them with a cloth when you can serve them shining and piled high in a country basket?"

The Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa's nutritional meals, peaceful serenity and plush privacy, insured amidst bursts of bougainvillea and sentinel-like eucalyptus stands, attract an international clientele concerned about counteracting the rigors of stressful careers with individualized health and beauty programs.

The wine country of California, with its scenery, spas, fine wines, chic apparel stores, art galleries, antique shops, candle makers and collections of gastronomic shrines (owned and operated by France's newest generation of great chefs) are a mirror image of France's historic wine duchy, Burgundy. Even the sport of ballooning, a favorite wine country adventure popularized by Napa Valley Balloons, Inc. and others, had its origins in France in 1783. Most wine country balloon rides end appropriately with a champagne brunch.

A certain stylishness is seen and felt in the wine country's towns and on its farms. It is the purest blend of homegrown pride and gracious sophistication. This personality spills over into the hospitality that is second nature here, in private homes, winery tasting rooms, resort hotels, elegant restaurants and the cozy bed and breakfast inns that flourish in and around the vineyards. Overview Farms in Sonoma typifies the California bed and breakfast inn, so parallel to France's *gites ruraux* arrangement. Overview is an 1880s Victorian farmhouse that was once part of the famous Spreckels estate. The period decor creates a delightful return to early America. There are dozens of wine country bed and breakfast inns, many with names reflecting their whereabouts: Grape Leaf Inn, Vintners Inn, Wine Way Inn, Camellia Inn and London Lodge.

The Auberge du Soleil, "Inn of the Sun", is one of the premier hostleries for wine country visitors and epitomizes the unfailing warm welcomes and relaxation synonymous with the wine country. Located in the



Domaine Chandon's Chef de Cuisine Philippe Jeanty.
— Photo by Karen R. Preuss, used with permission of
Domaine Chandon Winery.

borough of Rutherford and fashioned after a country inn found in the south of France, the Auberge is hidden away in a 33-acre hillside olive grove, with panoramic views of the wine country. Owned and operated by Frenchman Claude Rouas, who was formerly associated with Maxim's in Paris and L'Etoile on San Francisco's Nob Hill, the Auberge's every appointment carries with it an air of authenticity and grand yet peaceful sumptuousness.

The Auberge's restaurant has been acclaimed by critics since it first opened in 1981. Paris-educated Chef Michel Cornu's *les entrées* list reads, in part: duck in pastry shell with goose liver and port wine sauce; rack of lamb with mustard seeds; chicory salad with goat cheese, gruyere, prosciutto and lukewarm mustard sauce. *Les friandises* (desserts) might include delicacies such as *dentelles* with iced banana soufflé and praline sauce, or hot pear tart in caramel sauce.

Robert Mondavi and his wife Margrit Biever.
— Photo by Faith Echtermeyer, used with permission of Robert Mondavi Winery.



Just minutes west of Auberge du Soleil, in Calistoga, is another refuge for wine country journeyers, this one an architectural blend of classic European, Mexican and American lines. Known as the "Grande Dame", the Villa St. Helena was designed in the 1940s by Robert M. Carrere, noted for the spectacular mansions, villas and chateaux he created and restored in the eastern United States and Europe. A citadel of country quietude, walking trails and an ambience that runs the scale from intimate to lavish, the Villa's guests find it both congenial and intriguing. Complimentary wine is served in the wood-paneled library and continental breakfast in the sundrenched solarium.

Rancho Caymus Inn in Rutherford is built in the Spanish tradition. The spacious interior is augmented by vibrantly colored South American art. With four master suites, Rancho Caymus is ideal for longer getaways. The Silverado Country Club in Napa is a 1,200-acre resort boasting the two finest 18-hole golf courses in northern California, eight swimming pools, ponds, lakes and a beflowered tennis complex. At Silverado, guests select spacious studios or cottage suites and enjoy three celebrated restaurants, ranging from casual to formal.

In Sonoma and Napa Counties combined there are now more than 220 wineries and, yet, the prevailing attitude is one of comraderie rather than competition. Vineyards and wineries were not always so abundant. They began developing as a force in the 1840s, but were outshone by the Gold Rush. In Stevenson's book, *Napa Wine*, he phrases it thus: "... we look timidly forward, with a spark of hope, to where the new lands, already weary of producing gold, begin to green with vineyards." The author was confident that California wine would become "bottled poetry". And so it has.

The wine country legacy reaches back to the Franciscan missionaries who carried Spanish vines from Mexico as far north as Sonoma. By the late 1800s, California wines were winning international competitions and selling respectably well in Europe. Between an epidemic blight, the 1906 Earthquake and Prohibition, many wineries

had become ghosts by Repeal in 1934. The survivors struggled on. With the affluence of the early 1970s and the continuing shift in drinking habits from distilled spirits to wine, the California wine and food industries have reached new heights and taken on new dimensions.

Napa and Sonoma Valleys now have more than 53,000 acres planted in grapes. Nearly every grape made famous by France, Germany and Italy is grown here. In a proverbial turn of the tables, many French winemakers now seek out premium grapes from Napa and Sonoma. U.S. exports to France were 63 percent higher in 1985 than in 1984; 1985 exports to Japan and Switzerland were up to 138 percent and 113 percent, respectively. California is the uncontested leader in wine exports, producing as much as 98 percent of the wine shipped overseas. Today, California wine represents a \$5.4 billion industry annually. In keeping with the active marketing of California wines overseas, ten Napa Valley wines were showcased this past spring at the Kulm Hotel in the Swiss resort town of Hrosa.

The wine country has always been an easy land to love. Many accomplished and famous people have taken up residence in this modern paradise, such as authors Arthur Hailey and M.F.K. Fisher, and former Russian prima ballerina Natalia Makorova, to name a few. Other notables have become directly involved in the wine business. Lillian Disney ventured into the business in the mid-1970s with the purchase of two vineyards. The



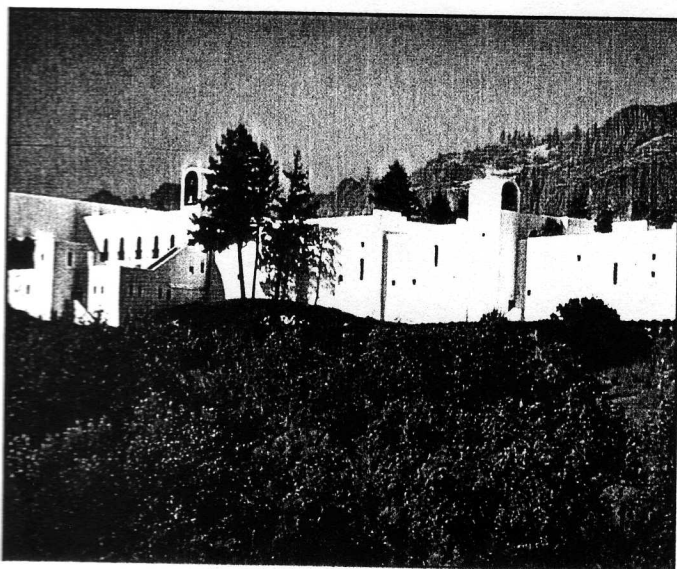
Robert Mondavi Winery's series of Great Chef Cooking Schools stresses the importance of food, wines and their presentation. — Photo by Faith Echtermeyer, used with permission of Robert Mondavi Winery.

Disney family's Silverado Vineyards, named after the historical Silverado Trail between Napa and Calistoga, now span 180 acres of steep terraces and sandy slopes from Stags Leap to Yountville.

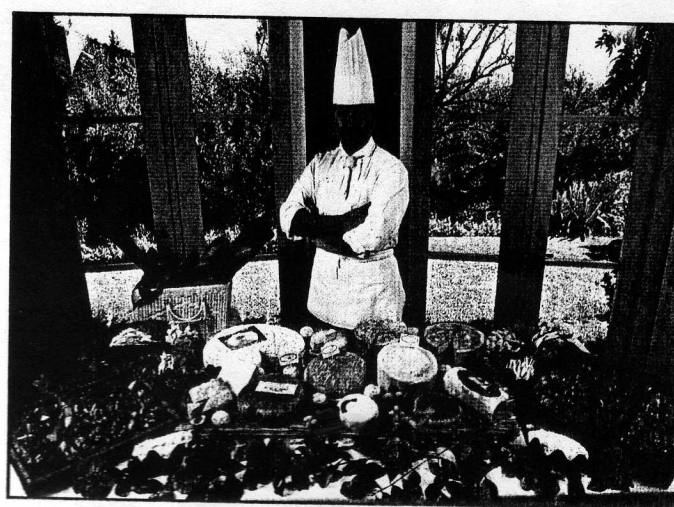
Inspired by memories of his grandfather's homemade wine, film producer Francis Ford Coppola purchased the 1,500-acre estate of Inglenook Vineyard Company's founder, Captain Gustav Niebaum, in 1975. The Victorian carriage house has been converted into a winery and motion picture/sound studio. (The movie "Cotton Club" was completed at Coppola's secluded Napa Valley electronic research facility). Coppola describes his intention for Niebaum-Coppola Winery like this: "When I first considered how the wine would be made, I conceived of it as a clear blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, and asked that it be a full rich wine that would live 100 years." Niebaum-Coppola's inaugural vintage is a 1979 Rubicon.

Like true aficionados in search of fine wines, Dennis Groth, President of Operations at Atari during its heyday, and his wife, Judy decided to produce their own. The outcome, Groth Vineyards and Winery in Oakville, is truly a labor of love, with the finest in modern equipment and prized vineyards.

Founded in the Americana-like town of Oakville in 1966, the Robert Mondavi Winery was the first major winery built in the United States after 1935. Mondavi



Antique English bells peal from the pristine belfries of the Sterling Winery, which looks reminiscent of a Mediterranean monastery. — Photo by Scott Clemens, used with permission of Sterling Vineyards.



Auberge du Soleil's Chef de Cuisine Michel Cornu.
— Photo used with permission of Auberge du Soleil.

has been a trendsetter ever since. The Mondavi family (each member remains actively involved in the operation of the winery and 1,600 acres of vineyard) has remained true to their philosophy: "To make the best wine possible and to educate the public about wine." As their wines gained world fame, Mondavi set about educating consumers that wine is a part of civilized life, a natural partner to good food, not a mere alcoholic drink.

In 1976, Mondavi Winery introduced a series of "Great Chefs Cooking Schools" taught by legendary French chefs like Gaston Lenôtre, Michel Guérard and Simone Beck — all accomplished in the realm of *nouvelle cuisine*. Acclaimed American chefs such as Julia Child and Martha Stewart were soon incorporated into the series. These highly regarded schools for *bons vivants* encouraged the move toward the now classic lighter, more naturally flavored dishes. Several wine country cooking schools have since been patterned after Mondavi's, including Sonoma Mission Inn and Matanzas Creek Winery's jointly hosted American cuisine series, "Hot Chefs and Rising Young Stars of America."

The wine world on both continents remembers Mondavi Winery for its joint venture with Baron Phillippe de Rothschild, of Chateau Mouton Rothschild, in Modoc's Claret country near Paris. Formed in 1980, this was the first alliance on equal terms between a great French wine-growing establishment and a California winery. The resultant Opus One wine was first released in 1984 at \$50 a bottle. Supporters of the arts (as evidenced by the musical term "opus" turned wine name), the Mondavi family regularly hosts concerts, theatrical performances and art shows at the winery.

One of the largest mountain vineyard holdings in the Napa Valley is owned by art devotee and Swiss citizen Donald Hess. High atop Mount Veeder, more than half of Hess' 440 plantable acres are presently producing Bordeaux Reds, as well as Chardonnay. Here, again, is a

Founded in 1882, Korbel is the oldest U.S. producer of method champenoise champagnes, a method developed by Dom Perignon in the 17th century. Throughout the grounds of the Korbel Champagne Cellars — in the railroad depot, the brandy tower, the cool dark cellars and century-old gardens — there is a prevailing sense of tradition. — Photo used with permission of Korbel Champagne Cellars.

marriage of old European winemaking and modern California technology. Hess recently signed a 50-year lease on the Christian Brothers' chronicled Mont La Salle Winery in St. Helena. Following restoration, the building will be home to a most commendable duo, the Hess Collection Winery and a museum/gallery of contemporary European art. The first Hess Collection wine will be released in 1987.

Calistoga's Sterling Vineyards has led a charmed life, and sports a revered guest list, with Prince Charles of Wales, who toured in 1977, among its visitors. Founded in 1964, Sterling's first wines, vintage dated and estate bottled, were produced in 1969. Sterling was purchased by Coca-Cola Company in 1977 and was subsequently sold to Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. in 1983. The first case of wine from Sterling's dramatically terraced Diamond Mountain Ranch sold to private collectors for \$3,000 at the 1985 Napa Valley Wine Auction.

Like Mondavi, Domaine Chandon Winery has important ties to France: its French parent company is Moët-Hennessy, whose subsidiaries include the famous champagne houses of Moët & Chandon, Ruinart and Mercier, as well as Hennessy cognac and Dior perfumes. In 1973, Société Moët-Hennessy purchased land in Napa Valley to establish Domaine Chandon's vineyards, becoming the first French investor in a winery on American soil. Domaine Chandon's own French restaurant is an adjunct to the winery, with classic menus that flatter the sparkling wines. Here, too, the fare is lighter and less rich than traditional haute cuisine.

French native Philippe Jeanty, Chef de Cuisine, learned the fine points of French cuisine and the art of making champagne sauces from chef Joseph Thuet, acknowledged as the best chef in Champagne. Both Domaine Chandon's menu and wine list are extensive and make good reading; Chef Jeanty's epicurean creations include loin of veal with a fricassee of wild mushrooms and *salmon noisettes* with *langoustine mousse* and *beurre noisette*, often followed by nougat with candied fruits and apricot honey sauce or a baked-to-order puff pastry with fruits of the market.

Gourmets embarking on a round of wine country tastings would be wise to keep in mind the Miramonte Restaurant and Country Inn, and Le Rhône, both in St. Helena. Le Rhône offers a change of pace, with cooking in the traditional French manner. George Chalaye, a native of the Rhone Valley, and his wife, Elaine, own and operate the eating establishment. George prepares prix fixe five-course dinners that conclude with seductive desserts. A typical entree would be scallops in a



delicious mousse garnished with lobster meat and ringed with a creamy saffron sauce.

A century before Domaine Chandon became a rising Napa Valley star, the Korbel brothers (Francis, Anton and Joseph) were planting grapes beside western Sonoma County's stately redwood trees, not far from the Russian River. Korbel champagne made its debut in 1882. By the turn of the century, Korbel had become entrenched as the preeminent maker of both fine champagne and oak-aged brandy. Korbel is today justifiably proud of creating exceptional dry champagne. Korbel Brut was selected as the official champagne for the 50th Presidential Inauguration in 1985. Korbel is, in fact, the oldest U.S. producer of method *champenoise* champagnes — a method developed by Dom Perignon in the 17th century. The Champagne region of France is, like Korbel's territory, a land of forests.

In silent tribute to Sonoma County's famous 1800s horticulturist Luther Burbank, the Korbel grounds are a profusion of 200 rose varieties, many of them antique and rare. The area's long growing season contributes to the ever-present kaleidoscope of gardens. Flowers, both wild and domestic, are important in the wine country. Whether rambling along white picket fences, neatly adorning winery picnic areas, growing willy-nilly along

The grounds of the Korbel Champagne Cellars are a profusion of 200 rose varieties, many of them antique and rare, fitting tributes to Sonoma County's famed horticulturist of the 1800s, Luther Burbank. Wild and domestic flowers ramble along white picket fences, adorn winery picnic sites and grow willy-nilly along vineyard boundaries.

— Photo used with permission of Korbel Champagne Cellars.

popularity and distinction, have packed up the Old Country lessons of their mentor chefs and immigrated to northern California's wine country, quickly establishing themselves as pioneers of *nouvelle cuisine*.

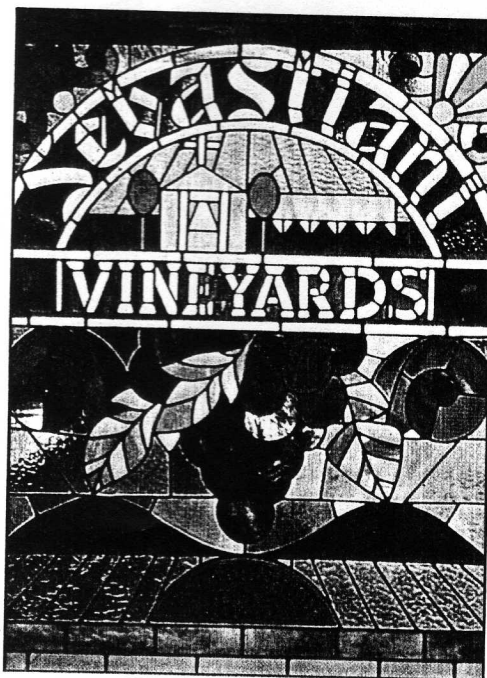
In retrospect, it is somewhat uncanny, if not mystical, how very alike France's Burgundy and California's wine country are. Both had unsettling histories, with their vineyards nearly completely destroyed by the same 19th-century blight. Both were endowed with the tradition of skilled farming and now declare the wine grape the most valuable product of their soil. Both are described as having the greatest and most diverse selection of wine and food that can be found, and, in fact, both count their restaurants, well-stocked wine shops and pastoral scenery among their greatest attributes. Burgundy and the wine country are places of exchanges and encounters, weekend rendezvous and summer holidays. Like Robert Mondavi Winery, Burgundy, too, hosts its "Musique en Bourgogne" summer concert series.

Cuisine is part and parcel of wine country history on both continents. Centuries ago in Burgundy, food and wine were favorite luxuries of the royal dukes. Dijon is

vineyard boundaries or enhancing formal table settings, they are an artistic statement in themselves.

Also found in Sonoma County is Sebastiani Vineyards, a well-known pillar of food and beverage. This family winery has its roots in the 12th-century Italian village of Farneta, where founder Samuele Sebastiani learned the art of wine-tending from Tuscan monks. His son, August, later popularized blush wines and introduced Nouveau Gamay Beaujolais in America. The late August's wife, Sylvia, was the first California winemaker's spouse to write a cookbook, *The Sebastiani Family Cookbook: Mangiamo, Let's Eat!*, now in its seventh printing. The Sebastiani Vineyards of the 1980s encompass 600 acres, including a state historical landmark (the first mission vineyard planted north of San Francisco in 1825).

The presence of family dynasties that long ago took root here is still prevalent. Just as many aristocratic old grape vines now reach for the sun alongside new young plantings, so a new breed of Wall Street professional-turned-vintner is creating an entirely new schema of boutique-type wineries in the shadow of the old. Extraordinary vintages are yet to be garnered from this mix of veteran and entrepreneur. The young chefs of France, meanwhile, excited by California wine's rise in



The wines produced by Sebastiani Vineyards have won as many as 58 medals in a single year. The winery also houses America's largest collection of carved wine casks and a veritable gallery of wine art. — Photo used with permission of Sebastiani Vineyards.