

To: TTB, a late comment on Notice 68, Tulocay a.v.a.
Faxed 19 Jan 07

I, Bill Cadman, am the owner of Tulocay Winery,
located at 1426 Coombsville Road, Napa California.

I am writing to strenuously object to the establishment of a "Tulocay" viticultural area, as that action would cause inestimable economic damage to a label and wine reputation that I have worked over thirty years to create. My first vintage was 1975, and I have been using the Tulocay brand name every vintage since then. I grow no grapes, buying them from independent growers in Napa, Sonoma, Amador and El Dorado counties...for example, I have been making a Tulocay Amador County Zinfandel since 1975.

My objection is that if the a.v.a. is approved, the California State law would prohibit my production of many wines for which I have created faithful customers, as my brand name would be required to use only Napa grown grapes, thus ending Tulocay Amador Zinfandel, El Dorado Syrah, etc. The State of California could, by the same law, "seize and dispose of" any of my wines produced after January 1, 2001 that aren't made of grapes grown in Napa.

I have registered Tulocay as a trade mark, and have had Federal and California winery permits since 1975.

(I know that these comments are late, but the calamitous possibilities of this a.v.a. have only recently been learned.

Bill Cadman, Owner, Tulocay Winery

SUMMARY OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

On May 7, 2007, Vicki Portney of the Office of Chief Counsel received an e-mail message from Nancy Sutton of the Regulations and Rulings Division asking the former to contact attorney Kristen Techel in response to her inquiry. Ms. Sutton's e-mail message said that Ms. Techel had questions relating to trademark matters. On or about May 11, 2007, Ms. Portney contacted Ms. Techel, who indicated she represented Bill Cadman of Tulocay Winery and expressed opposition to the name "Tulocay" as proposed in the notice of proposed rulemaking for the establishment of a viticultural area. She explained the long history of the Tulocay Winery and stated that although Tulocay Winery's brand name was grandfathered under federal regulations, the winery would be precluded from using its brand name on wines it has been making if Tulocay were established as a viticultural area under federal law. She said that California law would still require sourcing at least at the 75% level from Napa County, and the winery produces wines that do not meet this sourcing level. She also indicated that the name "Tulocay" is not known as referring to the area in question and that it is understood as relating to a cemetery. She asked for consideration of these comments. Ms. Portney asked Ms. Techel to put the comments in writing and to submit them.



Memorandum

To: Vicki Portney, TTB (Vicki.portney@ttb.gov)

From: Kristen Techel, Hinman & Carmichael, LLP

CC: Bill Cadman, Tulocay Winery

Date: May 21, 2007

RE: Tulocay AVA

Vicki:

Thanks for speaking with me regarding the comments that Tulocay Winery submitted on the proposed "Tulocay" AVA. The additional information that you requested is enclosed, and expands on the previously submitted comment, which is attached as Exhibit A. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further information from our end.

Tulocay Winery Background

Bill Cadman has been making wine under the label "Tulocay" since 1975. He does not grow any of his own grapes. Sometimes he purchases grapes from within Napa County, and sometimes he purchases high-quality grapes from counties like El Dorado, Amador, and Sonoma. Approximately 50% of his current releases are made from grapes grown outside of Napa County, namely Chardonnay from Sonoma, Merlot from El Dorado County, Syrah from El Dorado County, and his popular Amador County Zinfandel. Both the 2001 and 2002 vintages of the Merlot, Syrah and Zinfandel are on the market at this time. Mr. Cadman also has wine sourced from outside Napa County in barrel for future release.

Mr. Cadman has lived on the winery property since the winery's first days of operation. The winery operations are his livelihood. He chose the name "Tulocay" for his brand because it sounds good next to "winery" and had no entrenched meaning. The idea for the name was sparked by the Tulocay cemetery on Coombsville Road, which is just down the street from the winery. Bill liked that the name Tulocay would not have a pre-disposed connection with any particular place, thing or person such that he could build a brand name that would only call to mind his wines.

The "Napa" Law

In August of 2004, the California Supreme Court issued an opinion in Bronco Wine Company v. Jolly that provides special status to wine in Napa. The case was largely argued by the Napa Valley Vintners Association to stop large-scale wineries (Bronco) from purchasing brands containing "Napa" or a Napa

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AVA and using them to make wine from Lodi and other regions where the vineyard reputations are less prestigious and grapes are more affordable. The full opinion is available at <http://www.abc.ca.gov/trade/Court080504.pdf>. California Business & Professions Code §25241 was supported by the decision. It states (emphasis added):

25241. Limits on “Napa” appellations. (a) (1) The Legislature finds and declares that for more than a century, Napa Valley and Napa County have been widely recognized for producing grapes and wine of the highest quality. Both consumers and the wine industry understand the name Napa County and the viticultural area appellations of origin contained within Napa County (collectively “Napa appellations”) as denoting that the wine was created with the distinctive grapes grown in Napa County.

(2) The Legislature finds, however, that certain producers are using Napa appellations on labels, on packaging materials, and in advertising for wines that are not made from grapes grown in Napa County, and that consumers are confused and deceived by these practices.

(3) The Legislature further finds that legislation is necessary to eliminate these misleading practices. It is the intent of the Legislature to assure consumers that the wines produced or sold in the state with brand names, packaging materials, or advertising referring to Napa appellations in fact qualify for the Napa County appellation of origin.

(b) No wine produced, bottled, labeled, offered for sale or sold in California shall use, in a brand name or otherwise, on any label, packaging material, or advertising, any of the names of viticultural significance listed in subdivision (c), unless that wine qualifies under Section 4.25a of Title 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations for the appellation of origin Napa County and includes on the label, packaging material, and advertising that appellation or a viticultural area appellation of origin that is located entirely within Napa County, subject to compliance with Section 25240. Notwithstanding the above, this subdivision shall not grant any labeling, packaging, or advertising rights that are prohibited under federal law or regulations.

(c) The following are names of viticultural significance for purposes of this section:

(1) Napa.

(2) Any viticultural area appellation of origin established pursuant to Part 9 (commencing with Section 9.1) of Title 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations that is located entirely within Napa County.

(3) Any similar name to those in paragraph (1) or (2) that is likely to cause confusion as to the origin of the wine.

(d) The appellation of origin required by this section shall meet the legibility and size-of-type requirements set forth in either Section 4.38 or Section 4.63 of Title 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations, whichever is applicable.

(e) Notwithstanding subdivision (b), any name of viticultural significance may appear either as part of the address required by Sections 4.35 and 4.62 of Title 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations, if it is also the post office address of the bottling or producing winery or of the permittee responsible for the advertising, or as part of any factual, nonmisleading statement as to the history or location of the winery.

(f) The department may suspend or revoke the license of any person who produces or bottles wine who violates this section. Following notice of violation to the person in possession of the wine and a hearing to be held within 15 days thereafter, if requested by any interested party within five days following the notice, the department may seize wine labeled or packaged in violation of this section regardless of where found, and may dispose of the wine upon order of the department. From the time of notice until the departmental determination, the wine shall not be sold or transferred.

(g) This section applies only to wine which is produced, bottled, or labeled after January 1, 2001.

There is no grandfathering provision in the California law, and the Bronco case makes it clear that the federal grandfather clause (27 CFR 4.39(i)(2)), cannot be used to save an otherwise forbidden brand. The Bronco case was carefully followed by Napa winemaking community as it progressed, and the wineries (other than Bronco) that held brand names containing “Napa” or an AVA were supportive of its passage because they were not making wines from grapes outside of Napa county. (See Bronco, fn 8, “Bronco asserts that the statute was drafted in such a manner as to protect other established Napa County wineries, and to target “only a single brand owner — Bronco” (and its three grandfathered brands). The record discloses, however, at least 32 other Napa-related “grandfathered” brands (none of which, it appears, *presently* produces any wine that would violate section 25241) that also would be covered by the statute, including the “Napa named” brands Napa Wine Cellars, Napa Wine Co., Napa Cellars, Napa Valley Winery, Napa Vintners, and “Napa viticultural appellation” brands Rutherford Hill, Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars, Stags’ Leap Winery, Spring Mountain, Mount Veeder Winery, St. Helena Vineyards, and Oakville Vineyards.)

Unlike the 32 wineries that the Bronco court surveyed and deemed to be unaffected by the lack of a grandfather clause, Tulocay Winery is actively making wine from counties outside of Napa and wishes to continue that practice. Tulocay makes the vast majority of its sales to consumers within California, and the passage of Tulocay as an AVA would prevent future vintages of Tulocay’s most popular wines from reaching California consumers. The 2001 and 2002 vintages currently on the market could be seized and thrown-out. The wine currently in barrel could not be labeled under the Tulocay brand. If the Tulocay AVA petition is granted, it will be the first time since passage of Cal. Bus. & Prof. Law §25241 that a new word will join the regulated list under section c, effectively cutting off Tulocay’s long-established brand without the consideration afforded to every other AVA-named brand in Napa. The TTB needs to exercise extreme precaution in granting AVA petitions within Napa because of the dire effects of this law. With each new AVA granted within Napa, existing brands will be subject to extreme limitation. The TTB must be absolutely certain that the qualifications for an AVA are met to avoid an unnecessary infringement of rights.

In the present case, an adequate showing has not been made that Tulocay meets the federal qualifications of an AVA and Tulocay Winery will be materially harmed if the AVA is granted.

The AVA Petition Must Be Rejected Because Tulocay is Not the Appropriate Name for this AVA

The foremost requirement for an AVA petition is evidence that the name of the viticultural area is locally and/ or nationally known as referring to the area specified in the application. 27 CFR 9.3(b). The name “Tulocay” does not meet that requirement.

Locally, the area described in the AVA petition is known as Coombsville. Unlike most Napa AVA’s, the proposed area is largely within the city limits and is separated from the touristy districts along Highway 29 and Silverado Trail, which have long-established geographic names. The proposed area covers a reasonably high-traffic area for locals (rather than tourists), and the locals most often refer to the area as Coombsville, which is in reference to the main traffic artery that stretches through the proposed AVA. The street was named after an early Napa settler named Nathan Coombs, who is said to have laid-out the plans for the city in 1848. Local real estate listings generally refer to Coombsville. The County General Plan refers to Coombsville. See Napa County General Plan Update Steering Committee Memorandum, noting “the Coombsville area is more transitional than most of the other urban bubbles. Older homes and ranchettes with horses and cattle are being replaced by new, larger homes with vineyards. (available at

http://www.napacountygeneralplan.com/meetings_and_workshops/files/staff_report_attachments_02012_006.pdf, pgs. 31-32). If the word Coombsville is not used, the locals refer to the area by the name of the local public schools, such as Silverado Middle School. If you ask a Napan that does not know the street address of Tulocay Winery to "meet you in Tulocay" they are unlikely to know what you mean.

On a national level, the name Tulocay is not a known place name at all. To the extent that the area is known on a national level, it is known as Coombsville, particularly with oenophiles that enjoy the wines coming from the proposed area. See "Putting Coombsville on the Map for Napa Cabernet", Wine Spectator, July 2001 (http://www.winespectator.com/Wine/Archives/Show_Article/0,1275,3289,00.html) and "The Future of Napa Cabernet", Wine & Spirits Magazine, December 2006, attached as Exhibit B, noting that the AVA proponents chose the Tulocay name "because Coombsville sounded too, well, hick. We wanted to avoid the Green Acres, screaming banjos thing." A casual researcher googling "tulocay" would find Tulocay Winery, the cemetery, and a Napa company that specializes in gourmet oils. In contrast, the results to a google search of Coombsville bring up unending listings of geographic locations within the proposed district and references to wine.

Tulocay is not a recognized geographical area on a local or national level. Coombsville would be a far more appropriate choice, but the wineries supporting the AVA like the sound of "Tulocay" better. As the TTB knows, a pleasant sounding name with spurious geographical support does not meet the requirements to become an AVA, particularly when there is a different name that is popularly used to describe the area. Coombsville is the appropriate geographic term, and Coombsville is what the wine industry already calls this area.

The TTB Should Reject the Application

The TTB is careful and methodical in processing AVA applications. In light of the regulatory framework in California, it is particularly important that the TTB is careful and methodical when processing an application for a new AVA within Napa County. It is not permissible to create an AVA with a fanciful name where there is a well-known and oft-used geographic term that better describes the area.

Tulocay Winery understands that the TTB is not bound by California law, but we urge the TTB to consider the harm that will be caused to the winery by pushing through an AVA application that is not honest as to geographic names. Tulocay Winery's federal trademark will be severely diluted and the winery will have to stop production of its popular wines from other counties. The winery may even have to destroy some of its existing wines. When Bill Cadman purchased his Coombsville Road property and was picking a name for his winery more than 30 years ago, he intentionally chose a name that was not commonly associated with a person, place or thing. The TTB should be wary of overzealous vineyard owners new to the neighborhood that are anxious to make it mean something more. The fact that "Tulocay" does not meet the federal regulatory requirements provides adequate legal basis to deny the AVA petition. And the harm and injustice that will befall Tulocay Winery provides a compelling reason for doing so.



the future of napa cabernet

by Heather Irwin

Coombsville may be the next great name in Napa Valley cabernets you've never heard of.

Just east of the town of Napa—past the Home Depot, car dealerships and *McDonald's* along the Napa Valley Highway—a quiet evolution is under way in this sleepy, locals-only corner of the valley.

So quiet, in fact, that when you mention Coombsville to cabernet-makers in more established appellations to the north, you're mostly met with a quizzical silence. Followed by a puzzled pause. And finally, a non-committal sort of dismissal that goes something like, "Oh sure. Coombsville, we are/will be/may someday try growing cabernet in that region, but they're still working out the kinks. And anyway, it's far too cold." Then they inevitably change the subject.

Which isn't really too surprising, considering the amount of time and money that's been spent in establishing Napa Valley's floor, benchland and hillsides. Radical ideas, like growing cabernet in a relatively cool area best known for dairy farms, are rarely welcomed with open arms as winemakers focus intently on making regions like

photos by Marvin Collins

Rutherford and Yountville synonymous with big, extracted reds that bowl you over with ripeness, wines that have come to define Napa Valley cabernet.

What you may not know is that a handful of Napa Valley's best cabernets have for years included Coombsville grapes in the mix. Call it Napa's not-so-secret little secret.

But is it really possible that this far southern region of the valley holds a key to the Napa Valley's winemaking future? Or, is interest rising simply because hillside development—the other Napa frontier—continues to be stymied by heavy restrictions and skyrocketing costs? Predicting the next great plot for Napa Valley cabernet turns out to be deceptively difficult.

Gazing into the crystal ball with Napa Valley's winemakers, dirt doctors and scientists, the pages of my notebook quickly filled with emphatic declarations: Coombsville and "anywhere but Coombsville;" the dirt; the hillsides; more scientific intervention; less scientific intervention; and finally, stark predictions of global warming making just about all of this a moot point. The question of Napa Valley's future, it turns out, depends on whom you ask.



NAPA'S NEXT GREAT AVA?

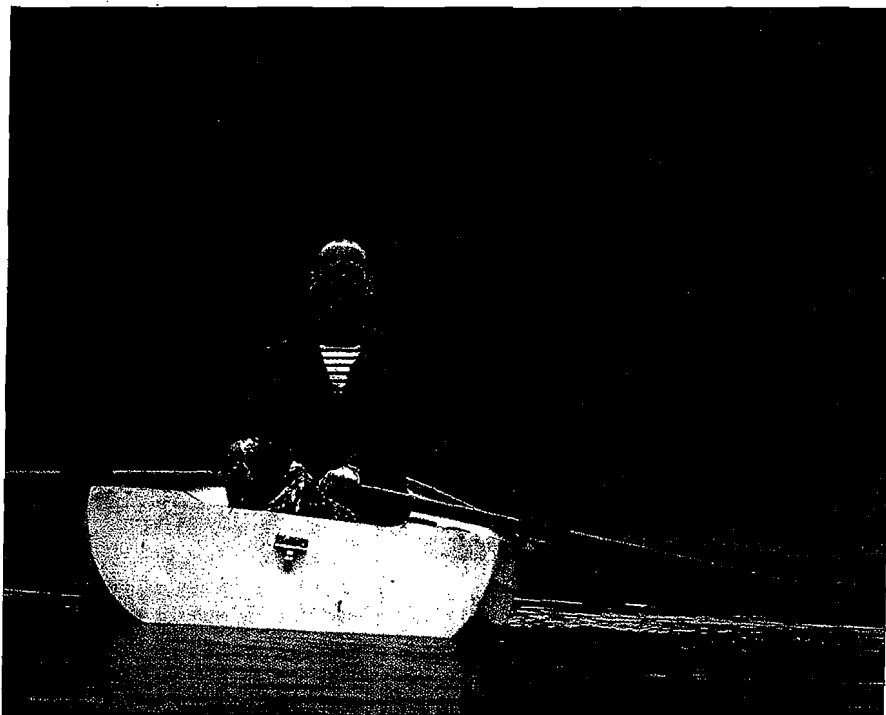
On a warm early October afternoon in Napa, John Caldwell is carefully waxing his old truck while just a few miles north, the rest of the valley is in the midst of a frenetic harvest. For the last two weeks of September, winemakers have been pacing the vineyards with their cell phones as they assess the ripeness of the grapes. Pickers assemble, trucks stand ready, crushers and de-stemmers grind into service, and tourists crowd in for a front-row view of the well-orchestrated chaos.

But Caldwell is in no rush. When he's finished with the truck, he throws on his straw hat and heads out to check on his grapes. Caldwell owns about 60 acres of cabernet vineyards in the rolling Coombsville hills, where the cooler climate leaves the vines weeks, if not a month, away from harvest. That's significant because, as the former shoe retailer-turned-winemaker tells me, his grapes will have all that additional time to ripen, concentrate and hang, giving them a far different flavor and tannin profile than the grapes now being harvested just a few miles away.

One of the first to successfully grow cabernet in Coombsville, John Caldwell has the rough, strong hands of a man who's been working in a vineyard for 23 years. That's considered a long tenure in the region and over the years, he's become its unofficial ambas-



With Coombsville wines commanding as much as \$125 a bottle, John Caldwell says, "You tell me if you can't grow cab here."



Aaron Pott, winemaker at Quintessa in Rutherford, has led the the push for a Tulocay AVA

sador. "In the Rutherford Bench, you can throw a dart and make a good wine. Here, we're still sorting things out," he admits, speaking of the far southern tip of the Napa Valley where chardonnay was once the only grape grown with any success. With a climate closer to Bordeaux, in fact slightly warmer, Caldwell dismisses the idea that Coombsville is too cold for cabernet. His client list proves his point, with such Napa Valley heavy-hitters as Phelps (for their Insignia bottling), Pahlmeyer, Viader and others.

Further proof, including his own highly sought-after wines, is waiting for me inside his newly built caves. Caldwell has assembled a sort of Justice League of Coombsville winemaking superheroes—Jay Buoncristiani of Buoncristiani Wines; Bulmaro Montes, former vineyard manager for Joseph Phelps; Kurt Niznik, who assists Caldwell's main man, Philippe Melka, with winemaking. We sample their three Coombsville cabernets, all still in barrel: From Buoncristiani, a ripe, inky blend that seems as eager and earnest as its winemaker; Montes' upcoming release, Marita's, a refined, graceful Gwyneth Paltrow of a wine; and Caldwell's cabernets, which Melka and Niznik made with a relatively new technique of barreling clusters of grapes along with the wine, resulting in a more complex profile. All are serious reds with juicy, ripe fruit, soft tannins (right out of the barrel) and

sophistication that many up-valley cabernets would be hard-pressed to rival. These Coombsville wines command prices upwards of \$80 to \$125 a bottle, and they don't languish long on the shelves. "You tell me if you can't grow cab here," asks Caldwell.

The region, in fact, has recently applied for its own official Napa Valley AVA, lead by Quintessa winemaker Aaron Pott. Quintessa, based in Rutherford, is owned by the Huneeus family, and like a growing number of up-valley vintners, they have developed holdings in Coombsville. Pott acknowledges that his part in driving the new AVA had a lot to do with creating an appellation for the Lewis vineyard, a former dairy, which the Huneeus's planted in 1999. The proposed Tulocay AVA, which takes its name from the original Rancho Tulocay land grant, touches the Carneros AVA to the South, Trancas Street to the north, the top of Mt. George to the east and the Napa River to the west. Pott says the group chose the Tulocay name because Coombsville sounded too, well, hick. "We wanted to avoid the Green Acres, screaming banjos thing."

Regardless of the name, Coombsville, Tulocay, or "that cold spot at the end of the valley," growers continue to plant the once dairy-dominated region in droves. As Caldwell points out, "Right now, everybody with a backyard around here has a vineyard."

STAKING CLAIM

Despite the relatively recent "discovery" of Coombsville, there aren't a lot of Napa Valley winemakers who believe another Rutherford or Pritchard Hill is hiding in plain sight. In one of the densest wine-growing regions—40,000 acres of vineyards along some 27 miles of land in the Napa Valley—nearly every possible piece of valley floor suitable for growing grapes has long been spoken for.

On the hillsides, the last great land grab, development has slowed after years of strict regulation (the result of some rather notorious ambition—namely blowing up hillsides—that resulted in serious erosion and sediment troubles). And while those restrictions are beginning to ease slightly, the cost of development continues to keep these prestigious addresses in the realm of only the most deep-pocketed buyers.

"I get calls from people looking for fruit or land just about every day," says Ladera's Pat Stotesbery on Howell Mountain. "There is a lot more urgency, given the available land left. People would like to be in the hills."

It's one thing to dream about high elevations, but Coombsville's less rugged terrain and comparatively inexpensive land make it considerably more accessible.

Vineyard manager Pete Richmond has planted several acres of cabernet for Kathryn Hall in Coombsville and hopes to use the long growing season to produce low-yield, highly concentrated fruit. Far Niente's director of winemaking Dirk Hampson is experimenting with a property in the area around Third Street, east of Napa, a small cabernet vineyard that he says can produce exceptional fruit in warm years. In cooler years, he finds the biggest problem is achieving even ripeness. Couching his enthusiasm, Hampson says, "It just shows a lot of vintage-to-vintage variation as opposed to Oakville and St. Helena. I think a number of winemakers and viticulturists are finding techniques to express the strength of the area. But the variability of the vintages makes it hard to get the consumers quite as excited."

Stay tuned, in other words. So where else are winemakers looking toward Napa Valley's cabernet-growing future? One answer is right at their feet.

THE DIRT GAZERS

Pampered well past the point of obsession, Pete Richmond's vines are as over-indulged as any starlet on the red carpet. Picking, plucking and pruning with the zeal of a Hollywood aesthetician, he meticulously grooms and regrooms his clients' Napa Valley vineyards—costs and man-hours be damned. "It's about making incredible, high-end wines. I say, 'If you want left-handed penguins here, I'll find



"It's about making incredible, high-end wines. I say, 'If you want left-handed penguins here, I'll find them. But it's going to cost you,'" says Pete Richmond of Silverado Farming.

them. But it's going to cost you." And, apparently, most of his clients don't flinch. "People want that kind of dedication," says Richmond.

Perfection has become a buzzword in the valley. Pouring over tiny plots of land, small armies of workers head into the rows armed with GPS tracking systems, aerial moisture analyses and hand-clippers to coax out highly concentrated fruit in very small quantities. Approaching a sort of middle-aged thoughtfulness in their winemaking, many winemakers and growers say that instead of looking outward toward bigger plots of land, they're looking inward—working more closely with the dirt and spending more time among the vines.

Richmond and his staff at Silverado Farming oversee 230 acres of vines for some of the most exacting winemakers and owners in the valley—hopeful contenders in the race for top-cab status. "What we're doing is micro-managing through water, fertilizing and watching the grapes," he says. And by micro-managing, he's talking about three or four times the number of hours (and, therefore, the cost) spent in traditional vineyards. In his Napa office, Richmond pulls out a series of aerial photographs he's commissioned that are overlaid with hues of red, orange, yellow, green and blue. This aerial moisture-mapping shows the drier and wetter areas of a single vineyard with precision. Marrying that information with GPS technology fed into PDAs used in the field, his team can alter irrigation not merely for an entire block or even a row,

but in increments of a few feet. The information tells the crew exactly where to pick and prune, and it allows nervous winemakers and owners to see exactly what's happening in their vineyards at any given moment on Richmond's website.

Far Niente's Hampson echoes Richmond's comments. "We're in a period of refinement. More of the work is aimed at the vineyard side of things than the winery side," he says, extending quality control into the field. "We measure what we've done and we measure again. That's a big step from the old days of farming when things were done just by experience and gut."

Not everyone is convinced, however, and some wonder if the obsession with technology

may obliterate common sense. "We went too far," says viticultural consultant Mike Wolf. "Things don't need to be as tidy as we've made them." Technology can help us. It has its place, but to rely on it is bad judgment. Part of great wine is great farming. We're allowing technology to get between us and being good old farmers. There's just no substitute for walking in the rocks."

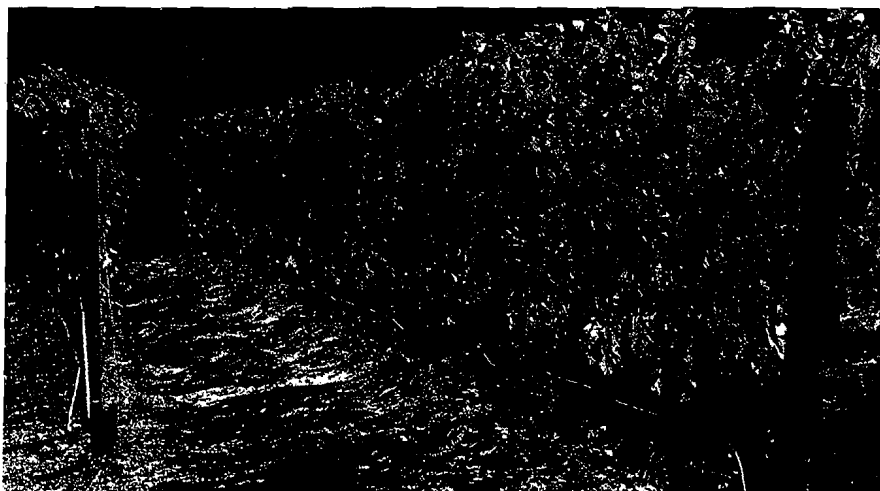
Andy Beckstoffer, whose family has some of the most extensive vineyard holdings in the valley, primarily in the warmer Rutherford and Oakville regions, is an advocate of what he calls, "just good old farming." That doesn't mean abandoning technology, but not accepting it blindly either.

"Now we're doing things a little more woolly," he says of some of his vineyards. As opposed to meticulous, tidy trellises, the sort that came into vogue in the 1990s, with vine shoots positioned vertically to allow sunlight to ripen fruit, Beckstoffer is experimenting with modified shoot positioning and changing row patterns. He considers it an evolution of strict European trellising that he says was probably better adapted to a cooler climate. Unlike that of the Napa Valley.

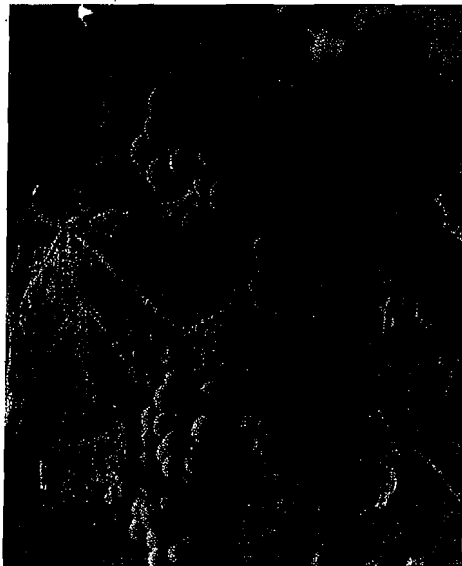
Using what he describes as "modified vertical shoot positioning," he allows his vines to spread out at the top, giving grapes a bit more natural shade. He is also working with row positioning to keep grapes from being overly ripened on one side or another. "We want the light to go right down the middle," he says. And he's willing to sacrifice efficiency and yield to diminish sunburn and over-ripeness in his grapes.

Why the change? For Beckstoffer, it's a combination of evolution and what Hampson and others call refinement, as well as something a bit more concerning: the very real possibility that the valley is heating up.

"For me, global warming is a great concern," says Beckstoffer. Though, like many in the valley, he stops well short of saying he's actively



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**“Part of great wine is great farming,”
says viticultural consultant Mike Wolf. “We’re allowing technology
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There’s just no substitute for walking in the rocks.”**

making changes in response to warmer growing cycles, he’s not discounting them either.

THE PREDICITONISTS

Jonathan Swinchatt, author of *The Winemaker’s Dance: Exploring Terroir in the Napa Valley*, points to the possibility of a one- to two-degree Fahrenheit temperature increase on the valley floor as perhaps the most defining factor as to where and how Napa cabernets will be grown in the future.

A recent study by the National Academy of Sciences found that by the end of the century, the number of high-heat days could rise significantly, warming the valley floor beyond cabernet’s tolerance. After spending a considerable amount of time studying the Napa Valley’s climate and topography, Swinchatt believes that may happen sooner: Within the next 20 years, much of the valley may verge on being entirely too hot for cabernet.

“A significant portion (of Napa Valley) will become too hot to produce cabernet sauvignon that has any sense of balance, because there is too much heat and sun to get the sugars in balance with the acids,” Swinchatt says. With the current taste for very concentrated, ripe wines, the heat may not pose a problem. If the valley heats up, Swinchatt believes it will rake “a significant effort to produce wines that are not of that style,” and that Napa Valley may be in trouble if style preferences change.

“There seems to be a growing opinion that certainly the southern part of the valley is

more conducive to cab than it was,” Swinchatt says. “The best cabernet will be coming from the coolest places in the valley, parts of Carneros, Coombsville and higher elevations on the slopes. Or, in other places where you get cooling afternoon breezes: Stags Leap, Diamond Mountain, Pickett Road, Simmons Creek.”

Greg Jones, Associate Professor of Geography at Southern Oregon State University, who has dedicated his career to studying climate change in wine regions, is the source for much of Swinchatt’s climate information. Jones expresses similar concerns. “I honestly think that global warming is a problem,” he says, but the change is so incremental that people may not recognize it. “It’s hard enough to predict what’s going to happen a week from now, let alone thirty years from now. But we have some pretty good data showing the climates of tomorrow will be very different than they are today. We’ve already seen the growing seasons in Napa three to four degrees Fahrenheit warmer than they were sixty years ago, and cab production has benefited from that. But I think there is a threshold that will be passed.”

Growers, for the most part, express less concern, at least on the record. “They’re afraid of it. They’re trying to avoid thinking about it,” Swinchatt says of many of the growers and vineyard consultants who aren’t buying into the theory that Napa Valley will heat up past the point of being a cabernet contender.

Case in point, Phil Skinner, PhD, president of TerraSpace, a Napa-based company that

analyzes soil, water and climate: “We’ve looked at the temperature data since the sixties. We have one hundred weather stations collecting data across the valley, and we’ve been seeing the same temperature variations all along.”

Few growers have made contingency plans for a valley-wide heat-up, but they are aware of the possible threats.

“There is a real concern on everyone’s part as to whether the predictions will come true,” says Storesbery of Ladera. “The vintners are getting involved with people behind the data, and certainly in the next five to ten years we’ll have better prognostication. At this point, no one is dismissing it out of hand. But I think we should all be a little skeptical too.”

In Napa Valley, people are more likely to spend their time—and money—gazing into the bottom of a wine bottle rather than a crystal ball. As for directions the future might take, when winemakers consider the question, their answers curl in as many directions as a spring shoot on a hot day. Still, new vineyards may be the best, near-term predictor of what’s to come.

Sitting in his battered, freshly waxed truck, John Caldwell points out across the valley floor toward Mount St. Helena. “That’s Napa,” he says. Pointing closer in to wooded dells and rolling hills that have yet to be planted, along with nearby rows of vineyards that reach for acres to where we sit, he says, “This is Coombsville. This is the next great Rutherford Bench.” ■