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DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF
ALCOHOL, TOBACCO &
FIREARMS

January 17, 2003

30725-00001

Bradley A. Buckles, Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Department of the Treasury
650 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20226

VIA FEDERAL EXPRESS

Re: Petition to Amend the Existing Boundary Lines of the Russian River Valley, and
American Viticultural Area, dated January 15, 2003

Dear Director Buckles:

Submitted herewith to you as the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms in accordance with 27 CFR 4.25, is the referenced Petition on behalf of Russian River Valley Winegrowers (including documents listed in the Petition as enclosures).

For ease of processing, we also are delivering a copy of the Petition and its enclosures to Nancy A. Sutton, Specialist, Regulations Division, in the Bureau's San Francisco office.

Please contact me if you need anything further.

Very truly yours,



William J.A. Weir
of
LUCE, FORWARD, HAMILTON & SCRIPPS LLP

WJW/vlh
Enclosures

cc: Nancy A. Sutton (w/enclosures) (via hand delivery)
Russian River Valley Winegrowers, Attention: Merry Edwards (w/enclosures)
(via Federal Express)

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DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF
ALCOHOL, TOBACCO &
FIREARMS

**PETITION TO AMEND THE BOUNDARIES OF RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY,
AN AMERICAN VITICULTURAL AREA**

**Submitted to
Department of the Treasury
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
Washington, DC 20226**

**by
Russian River Valley Winegrowers
875 River Road
Fulton, California 95439
(707) 546-3276**

January 15, 2003

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Subject: Petition to amend the existing boundary lines of the Russian River Valley, an American Viticultural Area, in accordance with 27 CFR 4.25, submitted to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.

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- Exhibit 1 – Metes and Bounds Description of the Existing Russian River Valley AVA
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List of Maps

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Enclosures

- USGS Topography Maps
- Large Scale Map of Proposed Amendment to Boundary
- Letters
- Articles

Advertisement

**Petition to Amend the Boundaries of
Russian River Valley, an American Viticultural Area**

I. Introduction

The Board of Directors of Russian River Valley Winegrowers ("RRVW")¹ respectfully submits for approval this petition to amend the existing boundary lines of the American viticultural area known as the Russian River Valley to include a certain area contiguous with the existing Russian River Valley AVA and sharing the same climate, soils, watershed and geology as the areas within the existing Russian River Valley AVA. In addition, the areas proposed to be added share with the contiguous areas within the existing Russian River Valley AVA, the coastal cool fog that predictably settles in the areas with historic regularity. The fog is an important element of the overall climate of the region and in turn helps to define the character of the grapes and the wine produced in this region.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms ("ATF") formally established the Russian River Valley as an AVA on November 21, 1983. For a ready reference to the existing boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA, see Map Number 1 attached hereto. At the time the existing boundaries were set, the establishment and use of AVA's was new. At that time the fact of the extent of certain of the adjacent areas to the south and east of the then proposed Russian River Valley boundary as being substantially similar in all critical wine grape growing elements and suitable for winegrape vineyards had not been explored. These areas have now been explored and have been found to be highly suitable in the critical grape growing elements, where the terrain permits. This petition seeks to add those areas, at this time, to the Russian River Valley AVA. For a ready reference to the proposed new boundaries for the Russian River Valley AVA, see Map Number 2 attached hereto. Furthermore, the addition of the proposed areas will incorporate the existing Green Valley-Sonoma AVA in its entirety into Russian River Valley AVA. This will eliminate the crossing of the boundaries of the Green Valley-Sonoma AVA over the boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA.

II. History

Soon after the Twenty-First Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, Congress enacted the Federal Alcohol Administration Act, 27 U.S.C. §201 et seq. ("FAA"), which, among other things, governs the bottling, packaging, and labeling of wine. In the FAA, the requirement is set forth that the Secretary of Treasury prescribe regulations which, among other things, prohibits interstate commerce in wine unless the bottles are labeled so as to prohibit deception of the consumer and statements likely to mislead the consumer. The Secretary of Treasury delegated its rule-making authority under the FAA to the ATF, which, in turn, promulgated a series of regulations. The ATF regulations require that labels on American wines state "the name of the bottler or packer and the address ... of the place where the wine was bottled or packed." 27 CFR §4.35a(a)

¹ As an organization, Russian River Valley Winegrowers is comprised of approximately one hundred fifty growers and fifty wineries. Of the more than ten thousand planted acres in the Russian River Valley AVA, RRVW represents more than ninety-five percent of the overall planted vineyard acreage within the AVA.

Of particular importance among these laws is the regulation that the ATF may establish an "American viticultural area" ("AVA") upon receipt of a qualifying petition from "any interested party." 27 C.F.R. §4.25a(e)(2). To qualify, a petition must include a variety of "evidence" relating to the region in question, including information demonstrating that the name in question "is locally and/or nationally known as referring to the area specified," that the boundaries indicated in the petition are accurate, and that the viticultural features of the area are distinct from those found in surrounding regions. See 27 C.F.R. §9.3(b). The ATF has explained why an approved AVA is desirable for wineries and others involved in interstate commerce in wine. Specifically, the ATF noted that "the regulations allow the name of an approved AVA to be used as an appellation of origin in the labeling and advertising of wine."

The regulations were originally issued in 1940 and the current version was issued in 1979. In 1983, the AVA system was in its infancy and the youthful California wine industry had yet to realize its potential. The Russian River Valley AVA was formally adopted by the ATF on November 21, 1983. Prior to 1983, the political boundaries of counties served as appellations. In addition to the Russian River Valley, several adjacent wine-growing areas were also in the process of submitting applications for approval as AVAs including Alexander Valley, Chalk Hill, and Dry Creek Valley.

Louis M. Foppiano of Foppiano Vineyards was a member of the first committee to establish the Russian River Valley as an AVA. The RRVW organization did not exist at that time. Mr. Foppiano was instrumental in the approval of the Russian River Valley as an AVA in 1983. Mr. Foppiano has indicated that he and the original committee used roads, rivers, and creeks to define boundaries. The work of this original committee resulted in the approval of the Russian River Valley as an AVA in 1983.

On February 27, 1987, an amendment to the Russian River Valley AVA was approved by the ATF making minor changes to the language of the metes and bounds description of the Russian River Valley AVA. The changes had no effect on the boundaries themselves.

On December 9, 1999, a Petition to amend the Russian River Valley AVA was submitted to the ATF by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association. On August 8, 2001, the ATF returned the petition to the Russian River Valley Winegrowers without action by the ATF.

In November, 2002, the Homeland Security Act was signed into law and merged 22 federal agencies. As a part of the reorganization, wine, beer and distilled spirits will now be under the control of a new agency, the Tax and Trade Bureau of the Treasury Department.

The Russian River Valley Winegrowers now submits this petition to amend the existing boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA.

III. Summary of the Proposed Amendments to the Boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA

The Russian River Valley Winegrowers seeks to amend the Russian River Valley AVA by extending the southern and eastern boundaries of the existing Russian River Valley AVA to include the additional area described approximately as follows:

- Extend south the eastern portion of the southern boundary of the Russian River Valley AVA, to include the area to the south of the existing Russian River Valley boundary line from the intersection of Highway 12 with the Bodega Highway to English Hill and beyond to Blucher Creek. This will result in the inclusion in the Russian River Valley AVA of the area lying within the same watershed, fog zone and soils, as exists in the existing Russian River Valley AVA. The new boundary would also incorporate the entirety of the Green Valley–Sonoma AVA into the Russian River Valley AVA and substantially eliminate the current bi-section of the geologically significant Santa Rosa plain.
- Extend east the southern portion of the eastern boundary of the Russian River Valley AVA, to a location so as to include that area to the east of Green Valley AVA and south of River Road, to a line coincident with the foot of the low hills east of Highway 101. This will result in the inclusion into the Russian River Valley AVA of an additional area with the same climate, watershed, and soils, and will accommodate the historic coastal cool fog line. Of course, the presence of Highway 101 and the city of Santa Rosa eliminates the use for viticulture purposes of a portion of this area where housing and businesses have taken precedence over vineyards.²

The existing Russian River Valley AVA, established in 1983, contains approximately 96,000 acres. This petition to expand the boundaries would increase the size of the AVA by approximately 30,200 acres.

In Section VII below, an expanded description of the boundaries proposed to be moved and the areas to be included is set forth.

IV. Name Recognition

The applicable regulation for the name recognition requirement is Section 9.3(b) wherein it states:

"(b) Information to establish an American viticultural area. A petition, made in writing shall contain the following information:

- (1) Evidence that the name of the viticultural area is locally and/or nationally known as referring to the area specified in the application; ...[emphasis added]"

² The fact that the area near the city of Santa Rosa is now developed into business and residential uses should not override the requirement that an area in an AVA be known by its viticultural area name. If the city of Santa Rosa was not located where it is today, the Russian River Valley name for the area proposed to be added is accurate for the viticultural area and the purpose of the regulation with or without the existence of the city of Santa Rosa in its current location. The proposed boundary would include much of the city of Santa Rosa, even though large scale vineyard development is unlikely to take place within the city limits of Santa Rosa.

The areas to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA are locally and nationally known to be within the Russian River Valley viticultural area.³ While the regulation only requires that the area be "... locally and/or nationally known as referring to the area ...," the evidence establishes that the area proposed to be added is known both locally and nationally to be in the Russian River Valley viticultural area.

For viticultural purposes, one of the first aspects of an area to be considered is the watershed in which the winegrapes are grown. The existing Russian River Valley AVA and the areas proposed to be added to the AVA by this petition are contained entirely within the area known as the Russian River Watershed. See Map 3, which is the Hydrologic Unit Map, State of California (1978). This government publication currently is, and has been, used locally and nationally for viticultural purposes since its issuance in 1978. This publication is submitted as evidence that the proposed area to be added is locally and nationally known as within the Russian River Valley viticultural area.

In addition, the following references provide further evidence that the area proposed to be added is known as being within the Russian River Valley viticultural area:

Reference A:

In the July 2002 issue of Wine Enthusiast in the article entitled "A Sonoma Sojourn," author Steve Heimoff, after explaining how complicated the Russian River Valley AVA is, states at page 31:

The real Russian River Valley is the box-shaped region that extends, broadly, from Healdsburg to Santa Rosa in the east, and from Occidental to Guerneville in the West. [at page 31]

The "box shaped region" Steve Heimoff calls the Russian River Valley includes the area to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA by this petition.

The Wine Enthusiast is a highly respected wine publication receiving wide distribution among the public at large both locally and nationally. The author, Mr. Heimoff, is a highly respected wine writer. The above quotation from the article is direct evidence of name recognition of Russian River Valley for the proposed areas to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA.

Reference B:

In an article entitled "Russian River Valley Pinot Noir's Promised Land," The Wine News, June/July 2002 issue, author Gerald D. Boyd states that a vineyard located in the southern

³ In its Petition To Amend Russian River Valley, An American Viticultural Area dated and submitted to the ATF on December 9, 1999 (returned and closed without action by the ATF on August 8, 2001), the RRVW identified five areas within the Russian River Valley Viticultural Area (namely: Middle Reach, Green Valley, Los Molinos, Santa Rosa Plain and Sebastopol Hills), which the Petition referred to as sub areas, within the Russian River Valley AVA. The names of these five sub-areas are not relevant to this petition. However, the area proposed to be added by this petition contains the omitted portion of the Santa Rosa plain.

part of the proposed area to be added by this petition, is in the "Russian River Valley." At page 60 the following appears:

The 24 acre Meredith Vineyard, located at the southern end of the Russian River Valley, is planted to a range of Pinot Noir clones, including some from Burgundy. [at page 60]

The Meredith Vineyard is located on Burnside Road in the area proposed to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA. The Wine News is published in Florida and has national distribution to the wine industry and wine consumers. This article by a writer identifying a vineyard in the proposed area to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA "as being located at the southern end of the Russian River Valley..." is further recent and direct evidence that the proposed area is known locally and nationally by the Russian River Valley name.

Reference C:

In a travel guide entitled Wine Country, recognized by one critic as "The most literate and elegant series of guides ever written about North America," author John Doerper states:

If you're driving north from San Francisco on US 101, you may wish to begin your touring with the Russian River appellation. To do this, turn west at Cotati on CA 116, the Gravenstein Highway (named for the apple which is the region's most famous product); or stay on US 101 through Santa Rosa, then turn west on River Road. To begin with the Dry Creek or Alexander Valley appellations, head straight north to Healdsburg. [at page 73]

The author also provides a map entitled the "Russian River Region." See Map 4. The quotation and the map clearly indicate that the area to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA are known to be within the Russian River Valley viticultural region. This is further evidence that the proposed area is known locally and naturally by the Russian River Valley name.

Reference D:

In a current magazine listing of real property for sale of a parcel including a vineyard located east of highway 101 near the Fountain Grove Parkway, the property was described as being in the "Russian River" Appellation. This vineyard property is in the area proposed to be added by this petition. This is further proof the proposed area to be added is known locally as being within the Russian River Valley viticultural area. A copy of the listing is included as an enclosure.

The foregoing evidence constitutes substantial and cogent proof that the area to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA is known locally and nationally as being located in the Russian River Valley viticultural area.

V. Climate

Climate has a major influence upon wine grapes and the wine made from those grapes. A major climatic influence in Sonoma County is determined by airflow moving inland from the Pacific Ocean and the effects of the geography in diverting that airflow. The Russian River Valley is classified as a "coastal cool" zone by the Sonoma County Farm Advisor from the

University of California. During an average summer, there are many days when fog maintains a band of cold air all along the coastline and breezes blow a fog bank inland along the Russian River. This fog is accompanied by a rapid decrease in temperature which can be as much as 50° Fahrenheit. The time of day when this occurs and the duration of the fog determines three distinct major climatic zones: Marine, Coastal Cool, and Coastal Warm. See Map Number 5 for the Mapping of Climate Types of Sonoma County.

Another important factor of an area's influence on wine grapes and the resulting wine is the amount of heat the grapes are subjected to during a typical growing year. In California, the conventional measure used is degree days and they are discussed in the Climatic Zones descriptions below.

The former Sonoma County Farm Advisor from the University of California defined the primary Sonoma County Climatic Zones as follows:

Marine

The marine zone is under direct ocean influence, lying west of the first mountain ridges of the coast below 1,000 feet and extending inland through river canyons and the Petaluma Gap to Sonoma Mountain. Degree days per year average 2185, but range from less than 1800 to 2800 depending on the year. This zone also has less than 800 hours between 70 degrees and 90 degrees F during the growing season. It is the coolest of the three local climatic zones. Average water use is 24 inches per acre from April to October.

Coastal Cool

The coastal cool zone includes a narrow band of ridge tops along the coast above 800 to 1000 feet, the areas east of the western hills of Sebastopol, areas bounded on the north by the Russian River, and the northern and southern portions of the Valley of the Moon. Cold foggy air is diverted by Sonoma Mountain and the Santa Rosa Plain in the south; western and eastern mountains contain it, and hills and distance (time) reduce its northern migration. This climatic zone averages 2582 degree days per year but can range from 1900 to 3600 depending on the year. It has 800 to 1100 hours between 70 and 90 degrees F per year. Average water use is 32 inches per acre from April to October.

Coastal Warm

The coastal warm zone is protected from the early fog bank by elevation, mountain ranges, and distance (time). It averages 2920 degree days per year but ranges from 2100 to 4200 depending on the year. This zone has over 1100 hours between 70 and 90 degrees F and very little fog during the growing season. It is the warmest of the three climatic zones. Average water use is 36 inches per acre from April to October.

(Sonoma County climatic data and Map Number 5 hereto were developed by Paul Vossen, Sonoma County Horticulture Farm Advisor, University of California, 1986.)

The "Coastal Cool" climate best describes most of the Russian River Valley AVA area. This "Coastal Cool" condition is also present in the area proposed to be added and is most heavily contributed to by the fog. Fog is the single most unifying influence throughout the Russian River Valley viticultural area. Coastal cool fog means cooler summertime temperatures and more moderate winters than in adjacent growing areas.

Broadly speaking, areas west of the existing Russian River Valley AVA boundary line are in the "marine" zone while the area in the Russian River Valley AVA exemplifies "coastal cool." Alexander Valley AVAs falls into the "coastal warm" category.

The coastal fog is the result of moist air being drawn inland to areas of low pressure caused by convectional uplift in the warmer interior valleys. As this air moves across colder up welling water along the coast, moisture in the air condenses creating a fog bank that can be spotted at or near the California coast for nearly the entire summer. The coastal mountains are often high enough to stop the fog's advance, though gaps in the mountains, such as the Russian River Valley, allow the fog to move further inland. This fog invades Sonoma County in three places: from San Pablo Bay to the south; through the Petaluma Wind Gap; and along the Russian River Valley. Midday solar radiation in the Santa Rosa Plain is usually strong enough to burn off this advancing fog bank by midday, but cooler temperatures in the late afternoon allow the fog to return. This fog usually does not burn off again until late in the morning.

The loss of the afternoon and early morning sun drastically reduces the amount of solar radiation available. So important is the fog to the climate of Sonoma County, that Robert Sisson [Sonoma County Director and Viticulture Farm Advisor Emeritus] spent more than three decades observing the fog intrusions into the County. Sisson used his observations to map the areas of long-term fog and the average area of maximum daytime fog intrusion. (See Map Number 6.) These observations have been centerpieces in several efforts to define the climatic variations of Sonoma County, including one by Sisson himself.

Sisson's model is an alternative to the historically used model established by A.J. Winkler and M.A. Amerine. The Winkler-Amerine model breaks the state into viticultural "regions" based on heat summations. These summations, referred to as "degree days" are defined as the total number of degrees for the mean daily temperature that is above 50 degrees Fahrenheit during the possible growing season. Hence, if the mean temperature for any given day is 70 degrees, then the total accumulation of degree days would be 20 for that day. Winkler and Amerine then used increments of 500 degree days to define five sets of regions based on heat summations, with Region I being the coolest and Region V being the warmest.

(Shabram, pages 38, 39)

Rainfall in a growing area has some influence on the grapes grown there and the wine made from the grapes. For the period 1961-1990, the Russian River Valley region received between forty and fifty inches of rain per year on average (Source: National Weather Service). The area to be added with this petition is almost entirely a part of the Santa Rosa plain. The rainfall for this area to be added will be the same as the rainfall for the Santa Rosa plain which is

already a part of the Russian River Valley AVA. The part of the area to be added which is technically not a part of the Santa Rosa plain will experience the same rainfall as the area contiguous to it which is already a part of the existing in the Russian River Valley AVA. Thus, rainfall in the area to be added is not a factor upon which a distinction exists with regard to the existing Russian River Valley AVA.

The southeastern portion of the foothills at the eastern edge of the Santa Rosa plain act as a barrier to much of the highly influential coastal fog. In addition, the Russian River Valley viticultural area lacks a ridgeline from which to easily define an eastern boundary. To determine a boundary, two steps were used. The first was visual observation of the fog intrusion line and the recognition of the extent of the Santa Rosa plain. The second was to determine specific boundaries of the viticultural area, based on features which can be found on United States Geological Survey maps of the largest applicable scale. These boundaries are described in Section VII below.

VI. Geographical Features

a. Physical Features

A general description of the physical features of the Russian River Valley located in west-central Sonoma County is captured by Dr. Terry Wright of Sonoma State University in "A Geologist Looks at Sonoma County Terroirs":

"To the east of the San Andreas fault there is a rich smorgasbord of rock types and a complicated geological history. This leads to high diversity of soil types, each a niche with its own conditions of texture, structure, and nutrients. . .

In west-central Sonoma County, the landscape opens up to rolling hills and relatively gentle slopes. This topography is typical of the Wilson Grove formation, a fine-grained shallow marine sandstone which formed in an embayment of the ocean 3-5 million years ago. It sits on top of Franciscan rocks and can be 1000 feet thick. Fossil clam shells show marine origin and show up in wells and outcrops along River Road just east of the Trenton-Healdsburg road intersection." (W. H. Terry Wright, Ph.D., Sonoma State University (www.sonoma.edu/geology/wright).)

To complete the description of the physical features of the area which includes the area proposed to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA, RRVW cites Patrick L. Shabram wherein he explains the terrain in his thesis at page 32:

"In order to assess climate and soil, local terrain must be introduced first. An understanding of the local terrain will help explain some of the variations in both climate and soil. An introduction to the physical features that are marked by changes in terrain will also provide a baseline for discussion of other components of the Russian River Valley AVA.

This region can be divided into three distinct districts: western highlands, a central plain, and eastern highlands. The western highlands are made up of sections of the Merced Hills and the Mendocino Highlands. The central plain is marked by the Santa Rosa Plain, which also includes the lower lying Laguna de Santa Rosa. The eastern highlands consist

of sections of the Mark West Springs Hills/Bald Hills area of the Mayacmas Mountains . . .)" (Shabram, page 32)

The proposed area to be added to the AVA is in the middle and northern section of the "central plain" described above by Shabram. (Shabram at page 34 and 37.) The existing Russian River Valley AVA boundary cuts the Santa Rosa plain in half, which plain is "a broad tectonic trough that has been filled with alluvium." (Shabram, at page 35.) This petition seeks to add the missing part of the Santa Rosa plain.

b. Watershed

A watershed is the region or area drained by a river, or a drainage area. The existing Russian River Valley AVA is drained by the Russian River and its headwaters. The area in the existing Russian River Valley AVA is entirely within the Russian River watershed and drained by the Russian River and its headwaters. See Map 3 which is the Hydrologic Unit Map for the State of California (1978). The area on Map 3 numbered 18010110 is the Russian River watershed. The area proposed to be added to the Russian River Valley AVA also is entirely within the Russian River watershed (Hydrologic Unit number 18010110) and is located just above the southern boundary of the Russian River watershed; namely, just north of Rohnert Park and Cotati. The southern boundary of the Russian River Valley AVA is proposed to be extended to the base of the low hills east of Highway 101. Because it shares the same soils as the adjacent portion of the existing Russian River Valley AVA and is in the same watershed, the impact of the watershed will be the same on the proposed area to be added as it is on the existing Russian River Valley AVA. While the size of the effect of the watershed on finished wine has not been determined, it will be the same on grapes/wine from the area proposed to be added as it is on grapes/wine from the adjacent area in the existing Russian River Valley AVA.

c. Soils

Soils in the Russian River Valley are very diverse in type, thickness and extent. A review of the Soils Survey map for the County of Sonoma reflects a range of soil types ranging from silt, sand, clay, and volcanic ash. The soils in the southeastern portion of the existing Russian River Valley AVA principally make up the Santa Rosa plain and are the same as those in the area proposed to be added to the existing Russian River Valley AVA. Most of the area proposed to be added is a part of the Santa Rosa plain.

VII. Description of the Proposed Amendments to Boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA (Narrative and Legal Description of Proposed Amendments)

a. Narrative Description of the Proposed Amendments to the Boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA:

- 1. Annex the area east of the southern part of the existing Russian River Valley AVA eastern boundary line to approximately the base of the foothills at the eastern edge of the Santa Rosa plain to accommodate the similar climate, coastal cool fog, soils and other grape growing factors.**

The proposed boundary would include substantially all of the Santa Rosa plain which is cut in half by the existing AVA boundary and move the eastern boundary to the foothills east of Highway 101, to roughly approximate the extent of the significant fog intrusion pattern.

The historic coastal cool fog line follows a pattern that moves farther east than does the existing boundary line of the Russian River Valley AVA. The Russian River Valley Winegrowers wish to approximate the eastern edge of the Santa Rosa Plain more closely. Therefore, the RRVW propose that the boundary line move eastward to coincide with the base of the foothills running north and south on the east side of Highway 101 at the eastern edge of the Santa Rosa plain.

- 2. Annex the area south of the existing eastern part of the Russian River Valley AVA southern boundary line to approximately English Hill and Blucher Creek to accommodate the similar grape growing factors including historic coastal cool fog line and soils.**

The Russian River Valley Winegrowers have determined that the area south of the present boundary line should be incorporated into the Russian River Valley AVA. From the existing boundary line at Bodega Highway and Barnett Valley Road, one may proceed in a southeasterly direction on Barnett Valley Road to Burnside Road and then northeast along Blucher Creek to approximately Todd Road. Especially along Barnett Valley and Burnside Roads, one may observe that the fog follows the road-bed at the crest of a series of hills. To the west, the vegetation, the wind, and the fog patterns are indicative of a Marine climate classification. However, to the east one may observe a pattern that is in keeping with the coastal cool climate of the Russian River Valley. Therefore, the RRVW propose that the eastern portion of the southern boundary move south (and east as above) to include English Hill and Blucher Creek.

b. Metes and Bounds Description of the Specific Boundaries of the Existing Russian River Valley AVA and the Proposed New Russian River Valley AVA.

Specific descriptions of the boundaries of the existing Russian River Valley AVA area and the Russian River Valley with the proposed area added are based on features which can be found on United States Geological Survey maps of the largest applicable scale. The appropriate maps for determining the boundaries of the Russian River Valley viticultural area are the U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series maps titled:

"Healdsburg Quadrangle, California"
"Guerneville Quadrangle, California"
"Cazadero Quadrangle, California"
"Duncans Mills Quadrangle, California"
"Camp Meeker Quadrangle, California"
"Valley Ford Quadrangle, California"
"Two Rock Quadrangle, California"
"Sebastopol Quadrangle, California"
"Santa Rosa Quadrangle, California"
"Mark West Springs Quadrangle, California"
"Jimtown Quadrangle, California"

Copies of each of these U.S.G.S. maps with the boundaries of the existing AVA and the area proposed to be added prominently marked are enclosed and submitted to you with this petition.

The specific metes and bounds descriptions are attached hereto as **Exhibit 1** for the existing Russian River Valley AVA and as **Exhibit 2** for the proposed new Russian River Valley AVA.

VIII. Benefit to the Consumer

One of the most important roles of an AVA is to provide clarity to consumers when making wine purchases. Writers have expressed their views on the role of AVA's, with the consumer:

"For an AVA to be of value, those using it must be able to show that its wines have a style and character consistently distinct from those of its neighbors" – Gerald Asher, Gourmet Magazine, June 1997

"The potential for excellence is so great among well-managed vineyards that it is almost a safe bet to buy Russian River Wines based on appellation alone." – Wine Spectator, March 1998

"We want AVAs to have extraordinary value, "Shelton concedes. "We want them to become the basis of differentiation. How much the consumer will rely on AVAs really depends on how good a job we do in defining them so they mean something." Tom Shelton, Napa Valley Vintner's Association President, in an interview with writer Janet Fletcher. San Francisco Chronicle, November 10, 1999. Page one.

In order for an AVA designation to benefit the consumer, there must be solid reasoning behind the development of the appellation itself. The consumer should be able to open a bottle of wine with the expectation that it will reflect its geographic origin. As the forgoing petition


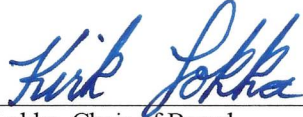
shows, the consumer can have confidence that wines made from grapes grown in the viticultural area proposed to be added to the existing Russian River Valley AVA will have this character.

IX. Conclusion

The granting of this petition to amend the boundaries of the Russian River Valley AVA will benefit the consumer by having proper information on the label of wines made from grapes grown in the area proposed to be added. The proposed area is part of the Russian River Valley viticulturally and the grapes grown in the proposed area are identical to those grapes grown in the adjacent areas within the Russian River Valley AVA. Thus, the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association respectfully requests that the Director grant this petition.

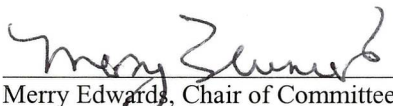
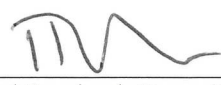
Respectfully submitted, Russian River Valley Winegrowers Board of Directors and the Appellation Boundary Committee of the Board of Directors

Board of Directors
Russian River Valley Winegrowers

 _____	1-16-03	 _____	1-16-03
Rod Berglund, Board Member	Date	Kirk Lokka, Chair of Board	Date

 _____	1-15-03
Merry Edwards, Board Member	Date

Appellation Boundary Committee of Board of Directors
Russian River Valley Winegrowers

 _____	1-15-03	 _____	1-16-03
Merry Edwards, Chair of Committee	Date	Rod Berglund, Committee Member	Date

Bibliography:

Doerper, John, Wine Country; California's Napa & Sonoma Valleys, Fodor's Travel Publications, Inc., 1996

Shabram, Patrick, Redefining Appellation Boundaries in the Russian River Valleys California, Masters Thesis, Department of Geography, San Jose State University, August, 1998

Sisson, Robert L. Letter to Robert Young. February 17, 1981, Santa Rosa, CA. Submitted as "Appendix A" in the petition to establish the Russian River Valley Viticultural Area, 1982

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Hydrolic Unit Map, State of California 1978, Russian River Watershed #18010110

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and Soil Conservation Service, Soil Survey, Sonoma County California, (Issued 1972)

Wright, Ph.D., W. H. Terry, *A Geologist Looks at Sonoma County Terriors*, (www.sonoma.edu/geology/wright), June, 1999

Enclosures:

U.S.G.S. TOPOGRAPHY MAPS:

- U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series maps titled:
- "Healdsburg Quadrangle, California"
- "Guerneville Quadrangle, California"
- "Cazadero Quadrangle, California"
- "Duncans Mills Quadrangle, California"
- "Camp Meeker Quadrangle, California"
- "Valley Ford Quadrangle, California"
- "Sebastopol Quadrangle, California"
- "Santa Rosa Quadrangle, California"
- "Jimtown Quadrangle, California"
- "Mark West Springs Quadrangle, California"
- "Two Rock Quadrangle, California"

Large Scale Map of Proposed Amendment to Boundary

Letters:

E. B. "Pete" Downs, Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates

Steve Dutton, Dutton Ranch Corp.

Rhonda J. Smith, Viticulture Farm Advisor, University of California, Cooperative Extension-Sonoma County

Articles:

A Sonoma Sojourn, by Steve Heimhoff, Wine Enthusiast, July, 2002

Russian River Valley, Pinot Noir's Promised Land, by Gerald D. Boyd, The Wine News, June/July, 2002

Wine Journal, Sonoma Chardonnay: Behind America's Most Distinguished White Wines, by Gerald Asher, Gourmet, June, 1997

Advertisement:

Homes & Land of the North Bay, 2002, Vol. 18, No. 7, (copy of cover and advertisement)

EXHIBIT 1

Metes and Bounds Description of the Existing Russian River Valley AVA

The formal metes and bounds description of the existing Russian River Valley AVA is found in 27 CFR(9)(c) §9.66 as follows:

CFR Sec. 9.66 Russian River Valley.

(a) Name. The name of the viticultural area described in this section is "Russian River Valley."

(b) Approved maps. The appropriate maps for determining the boundaries of the Russian River Valley viticultural area are the 1954 U. S.G.S. 7.5 minute series maps titled:

"Healdsburg Quadrangle, California"

"Guerneville Quadrangle, California"

"Cazadero Quadrangle, California"

"Duncans Mills Quadrangle, California"

"Camp Meeker Quadrangle, California"

"Valley Ford Quadrangle, California"

"Sebastopol Quadrangle, California"

"Santa Rosa Quadrangle, California"

"Mark West Springs Quadrangle, California"

"Jimtown Quadrangle, California"

(c) Boundaries: The Russian River Valley viticultural area is located in Sonoma County, California.

- (1) Starting point Healdsburg map-Healdsburg Avenue Bridge over the Russian River at Healdsburg. Proceed south along Russian River to the point where Russian River and Dry Creek converge, from this point proceed west in a straight line to Forman Lane.
- (2) Proceed west along Foreman Lane to where it crosses Westside Road and becomes Felta School Road.
- (3) Proceed west on Felta School Road to the point where it crosses Felta Creek.
- (4) Proceed 18000' up Felta Creek to its headwaters as shown on the Guerneville, map as "Springs."
- (5) Proceed southwest in a straight line 58 degrees W 27000' to an intersection with Hulbert Creek on the Cazadero map.
- (6) Proceed south and southeast along Hulbert Creek to the point where it intersects California Hwy 116 on the Duncan Mills map.
- (7) Proceed in a westerly direction along California Hwy 116 to Monte Rio where it intersects the Bohemian Hwy.
- (8) Proceed southeast along the Bohemian Hwy onto the Camp Meeker map and then the Valley Ford map to the town of Freestone where it intersects the Bodega Road.
- (9) Proceed northeast along the Bodega Road onto the Sebastopol map to the city of Sebastopol where it becomes California Hwy 12 then northeast along California Hwy 12 to its intersection with Wright Road.
- (10) Proceed north along Wright Road to where it becomes Fulton Road and into the town Fulton to where in intersects River Road.
- (11) Proceed east along River Road to its intersection with Mark West Springs Road.

- (12) Proceed northeast along Mark West Springs Road through the Santa Rosa map and onto the Mark West map to where it becomes Porter Creek Road and onto its intersection with Franz Valley Road.
- (13) Proceed in a northerly direction along Franz Valley Road to the northerly most crossing of Franz Creek.
- (14) Proceed west along Franz Creek until it intersects the line separating Section 21 and Section 22.
- (15) Proceed south on this line separating Section 21 and 22 to the corner common to Section 21 and 22 and Section 27 and 28.
- (16) Proceed west from the common corner of Section 21 and 22 and 27 and 28 and in a straight line to the peak of Chalk Hill on the Healdsburg map.
- (17) Proceed west from the peak of Chalk Hill in a straight line to the point where Brooks Creek joins the Russian River.
- (18) Proceed northwest in a straight line 8000' to a peak marked 772' elv. on the Jimtown map.
- (19) Proceed northwest in a straight line from hill top 772' elv. to hill top 596' elv.
- (20) Proceed northwest in a straight line from hill top 596' elv. to hill top 516' elv.
- (21) Proceed northwest in a straight line from hill top 516' elv. to hill top 530' elv.
- (22) Proceed west in a straight line from hill top 530' elv. to hill top 447' elv.
- (23) Proceed west in a straight line from hill top 447' elv. to the point where AlexanderValley Road meets Healdsburg Avenue.
- (24) Proceed south along Healdsburg Avenue through the city of Healdsburg on the Healdsburg map to the point where it crosses the Russian River at the point of beginning.

[T.D. ATF-159, 48 FR 48812, Oct. 21, 1983, as amended by T.D. ATF-249, 52 FR 5954, Feb. 27, 1987]

EXHIBIT 2

Metes and Bounds Description of the Proposed New Russian River Valley AVA (includes area proposed to be added by this petition; changes to boundaries are in bold type.)

The formal metes and bounds description of the Russian River Valley AVA are sought to be amended by this petition to the following:

CFR Sec. 9.66 Russian River Valley.

- (a) Name. The name of the viticultural area described in this section is "Russian River Valley."
- (b) Approved maps. The appropriate maps for determining the boundaries of the Russian River Valley viticultural area are the U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute series maps titled:
 - "Healdsburg Quadrangle, California"
 - "Guerneville Quadrangle, California"
 - "Cazadero Quadrangle, California"
 - "Duncans Mills Quadrangle, California"
 - "Camp Meeker Quadrangle, California"
 - "Valley Ford Quadrangle, California"
 - "Two Rock Quadrangle, California"**
 - "Sebastopol Quadrangle, California"
 - "Santa Rosa Quadrangle, California"
 - "Mark West Springs Quadrangle, California"
 - "Jimtown Quadrangle, California"
- (c) Boundaries: The Russian River Valley viticultural area is located in Sonoma County, California.
 - (1) Starting point Healdsburg map-Healdsburg Avenue Bridge over the Russian River at Healdsburg. Proceed south along Russian River to the point where Russian River and Dry Creek converge, from this point proceed west in a straight line to Forman Lane.
 - (2) Proceed west along Foreman Lane to where it crosses Westside Road and becomes Felta School Road.
 - (3) Proceed west on Felta School Road to the point where it crosses Felta Creek.
 - (4) Proceed 18000' up Felta Creek to its headwaters as shown on the Guerneville, map as "Springs."
 - (5) Proceed southwest in a straight line 58 degrees W 27000' to an intersection with Hulbert Creek on the Cazadero map.
 - (6) Proceed south and southeast along Hulbert Creek to the point where it intersects California Hwy 116 on the Duncan Mills map.
 - (7) Proceed in a westerly direction along California Hwy 116 to Monte Rio where it intersects the Bohemian Highway.
 - (8) Proceed southeast along the Bohemian Highway onto the Camp Meeker map and then the Valley Ford map to the town of Freestone where it intersects the Bodega Road.
 - (9) **Proceed northeast along the Bodega Road onto the Camp Meeker map to the point at which Bodega Road intersects with Barnett Valley Road on the Camp Meeker map.**
 - (10) **Proceed south and east along Barnett Valley Road approximately 11500' to the point where it intersects Burnside Road on the Two Rock map.**

- (11) Proceed southeast approximately 17000' along Burnside Road to the point at which it ends at the medium-duty road known as Bloomfield Road on the Two Rock map.
- (12) Proceed southeasterly approximately 2900' to an unnamed peak of 610' elv. on the Two Rock map.
- (13) Proceed southeasterly again approximately 3700' to another unnamed peak at 641' elv. on the Two Rock map.
- (14) Proceed east northeasterly approximately 2600' to an unnamed peak on the Two Rock map.
- (15) Proceed northeasterly on a line with the "windmill" landmark located approximately 1200' east of the section line that separates range 9w from range 8w, until intersecting that section line on the Two Rock map.
- (16) Proceed north on the section line until it intersects Blucher Creek on the Two Rock map.
- (17) Proceed northeasterly along Blucher Creek to the point it crosses Highway 116 on the Two Rock map.
- (18) Proceed 1000' southeast on Highway 116 to the point at which a fork in the road occurs with an unnamed road on the Two Rock map.
- (19) Proceed north about 700' to the point at which Todd Road connects into this unnamed road on the Two Rock map.
- (20) Proceed on Todd Road east 1500', north on Todd Road 5300' onto the Sebastopol map, and east on Todd Road 19000' to the point at which it connects with Santa Rosa Avenue on the Santa Rosa map.
- (21) Proceed north 31000' on Santa Rosa Avenue to the point at which it intersects the western boundary line of section 11 on the Santa Rosa map.
- (22) Proceed north 9500' in a straight line to a peak with an elevation of 906' on the Santa Rosa map.
- (23) Proceed 3282' northwest in a straight line onto the Mark West Springs map to a point marked "pumping station" in Section 16 to a point where the straight line intersects with Mark West Springs Road.
- (24) Proceed northeast along Mark West Springs Road on the Mark West Springs map to where it becomes Porter Creek Road and onto its intersection with Franz Valley Road.
- (25) Proceed in a northerly direction along Franz Valley Road to the northerly most crossing of Franz Creek.
- (26) Proceed west along Franz Creek until it intersects the line separating Section 21 and Section 22.
- (27) Proceed south on this line separating Section 21 and 22 to the corner common to Section 21 and 22 and Section 27 and 28.
- (28) Proceed west from the common corner of Section 21 and 22 and 27 and 28 and in a straight line to the peak of Chalk Hill on the Healdsburg map.
- (29) Proceed west from the peak of Chalk Hill in a straight line to the point where Brooks Creek joins the Russian River.
- (30) Proceed northwest in a straight line 8000' to a peak marked 772' elv. on the Jimtown map.
- (31) Proceed northwest in a straight line from hill top 772' elv. to hill top 596' elv.
- (32) Proceed northwest in a straight line from hill top 596' elv. to hill top 516' elv.
- (33) Proceed northwest in a straight line from hill top 516' elv. to hill top 530' elv.
- (34) Proceed west in a straight line from hill top 530' elv. to hill top 447' elv.

- (35) Proceed west in a straight line from hill top 447' elv. to the point where AlexanderValley Road meets Healdsburg Avenue.
- (36) Proceed south along Healdsburg Avenue through the city of Healdsburg on the Healdsburg map to the point where it crosses the Russian River at the point of beginning.

WILLIAM J.A. WEIR, PARTNER
DIRECT DIAL NUMBER 415.356.4632
DIRECT FAX NUMBER 415.356.3891
E-MAIL ADDRESS: wweir@luce.com

30725-00001

VIA FEDERAL EXPRESS

May 5, 2003

Department of the Treasury
Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau
221 Main Street, 11th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105

Attn: Nancy A. Sutton

Re: Petition to Amend the Existing Boundary Lines of the Russian River Valley, an American Viticultural Area, dated January 15, 2003

Dear Ms. Sutton:

As you know, we represent the Russian River Valley Winegrowers ("RRVW") in connection with its above described petition to amend the boundary lines of the Russian River Valley Appellation ("Petition").

Submitted herewith to you, as per the instructions of William H. Foster, Chief Regulations and Procedures Division, in his February 13, 2003 letter request for additional information addressed to Merry Edwards of RRVW ("Request Letter"), are the following submissions in the order requested in the Request Letter:

- USGS-published quadrangle maps for: Camp Meeker, Valley Ford, Two Rock, Sebastopol, Santa Rosa, and Mark West Springs are enclosed. (Per our discussion with Nancy Sutton, the existing and proposed boundary lines for the Russian River Valley Appellation ("RRVA") are not marked on these maps.)
- Your proposal for the small modification to boundary items number (14) and (15) affecting the south boundary is acceptable in principle and the RRVW changes its petition in that regard. However, the RRVW would prefer to use the following boundary lines in the boundary descriptions (renumbered, however) because elevation lines change so often:
 - (13) (Remains the same.)
 - (14) Proceed northeasterly approximately 6000 feet to the point of intersection with the section line that separates range 9w from range 8w, on the Two Rock map.
 - (15) (Delete)

Department of the Treasury

May 5, 2003

Page 2

(16) Proceed north on the section line approximately 9000 feet until it intersects Blucher Creek on the Two Rock map.

(17) (Remains the same.)

- The approximate acreage planted to grapes within the petitioned expansion area is 1,070 acres, with at least an additional 200 acres under development.
- We present the following viticultural history:

The history of the Santa Rosa plains area to the east of the current RRVA has previously been described in Vol. 68, No. 5, Federal Register, January 8, 2003, Proposed Rules (Repetition of Donald L. Carano of Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery) cited by your offices in the Request Letter. Accordingly, we refer to the Request Letter and the entry in the January 8, 2003, Federal Register, Vol. 68, No. 5 under Proposed Rules. We incorporate by this reference the statements concerning viticulture history set forth therein and point out that the area described is within the RRVA's proposed area.

The area to the south of the current RRVA (and east Sebastopol) has a diversified agricultural history. According to Lee Martinelli, his father, Leno, settled in the Russian River area in the 1880's and married Alma Bondi who had been a resident in the Sebastopol Hills region since 1912. As a child, Lee remembers cherry orchards along with apples, berries and even potatoes that were grown as commercial crops. Lee explained how his family made wine from a small patch of Palomino grapes on their Bondi Home Ranch, now planted to a commercial vineyard. Another lifetime resident Tom Henderson recalls his grandparents, the Le Ballisters, growing apples and establishing their own packing plant in the early 1900's. During the Second World War, his primary crop of apples was supplemented by berries, blueberries, corn, pumpkins & acorn squash in the Sanders Road area. David Bondelie and his wife Dena remember her father George Menini (1916-2003) talking about the Zinfandel wine his father made in the 1920's from grapes grown on Darby Lane. According to Dena, George Menini's father, Andrea, was an Italian immigrant who settled in the Sebastopol area in 1913. As the apple orchards have become unprofitable to farm, more and more acreage has been converted from vegetable, berries & apples to vineyards. Long time area resident and grape grower Merry Edwards recalls that the area was heavily planted to thriving apple orchards when she first moved to the area in 1977. Steve Dutton, whose family has resided in Green Valley since the mid 1960's, recalls that one of the first vineyards still existing in this area was planted by his father for the McCabe Family in 1992. Today the region supports numerous commercial vineyards.

Department of the Treasury
May 5, 2003
Page 3

Petition page 3

The Petition statement in the footnote that states "If the city of Santa Rosa was not located where it is today, the Russian River Valley name for the area proposed to be added is accurate for the viticultural area . . ." means that if the city had not been built up where it is, or if its use in growing wine grapes becomes so valuable (or for other reasons) that it results in the reduction or elimination of all or a part of the city, the area on which it is built, or was built, would be suitable for planting to wine grapes. In fact, there exists several vineyards currently within the Santa Rosa city limits.

Petition page 5

(a) Meredith Vineyard is located on USGS map entitled Sebastopol Quadrangle and is located in the southwest corner of said map. The vineyard has an address of 1265 Burnside Road. A copy of The Wine News article "Russian River Valley: Pinot Noir's Promised Land" is enclosed, wherein the Meredith Vineyard is referenced.

(b) The original Wine Country travel guide (Reference C in the original petition) is enclosed.

The 6/99 edition of The Gourmet magazine article by Asher was included as further evidence of the viticulture history of the Russian River Valley viticulture area, including the proposed expansion area.

(c) The entire original of the real estate magazine referred to in Reference D in the Petition is enclosed. The picture to be considered is the upper most picture in the very center of the full magazine page when the magazine is fully opened. The picture is located under the words "Stunning 'Russian River' Appellation Vineyard and Estate." This vineyard property is located on the east side of Highway 101, just north of the Bicentennial Way overpass over Highway 101, and is easily visible from Highway 101.

Petition page 7

(a) Temperature documentation:

We refer again to the Federal Register example cited in the Request Letter and the Treasury decision ATF-159 referred to therein, which originally established the RRVA viticultural area, and note it refers to the Winkler degree day (accumulated heat units) system in describing the region's climate. That decision and this Petition describe the RRVA as coastal cool, a climatic zone with a range of 1900 to 3600 heat units, depending upon the year, according to Paul Vossen (see pg 6 of our Petition).

Department of the Treasury
 May 5, 2003
 Page 4

Several members of the Russian River Valley Winegrowers collected temperature data during the 2001 growing season, from April through October, which coincides with Winkler's growing season. All four of these locations fall within the proposed expansion area.

Vineyard	Degree days 2001 accumulated heat units	Ownership	Location	Status
Le Carrefour	2636*	Don Carano Ferrari Carano	4350 Barnes Road, Santa Rosa	Existing
Osley East	2567	Brown Forman Sonoma Cutrer	2020 Sanders Road, Sebastopol	Existing
Osley West	2084	Brown Forman Sonoma Cutrer	2020 Sanders Road, Sebastopol	Existing
Bloomfield	2332	Jackson Family Investments	3225 Bloomfield Road, Sonoma Co.	Under development

* Data provided in the Federal Register, Vol. 68, No. 5, dated January 8, 2003 – Proposed Rules, cited above.

(b) A copy of the Patrick L. Shabram thesis is enclosed.

Petition page 9

(a) Watershed: The key to the State of California Hydrology map for units 1810109 through 1810111 is enclosed. A copy of the hydrology map which appears to have better definition of the boundaries between the units is also enclosed.

(b) Soils: Copies of the Index to Map Sheets, the Soil Legend and the Soil Survey maps from the Soil Survey for the County of Sonoma that identify the soils within the existing RRVA and the proposed expansion area are enclosed. The enclosed maps are maps numbered 65, 66, 73, 74, 80, 81, 88, 89, 96 and 97 in the Soil Survey. The soils maps and the Index and Legend provided show and identify the soils in the southeastern portion of the existing RRVA and the proposed expansion area. The similarities lie in the fact that it is the same range of soils in the existing RRVA and the proposed expansion area, as shown by the maps and keys to the maps.

LUCE FORWARD

ATTORNEYS AT LAW • FOUNDED 1873

LUCE, FORWARD, HAMILTON & SCRIPPS LLP

Department of the Treasury

May 5, 2003

Page 5

We believe this letter and its enclosures are fully responsive to the Request Letter. Please contact us if you require anything further.

Very truly yours,



William J.A. Weir

of

LUCE, FORWARD, HAMILTON & SCRIPPS LLP

WJW/jaz

Enclosures

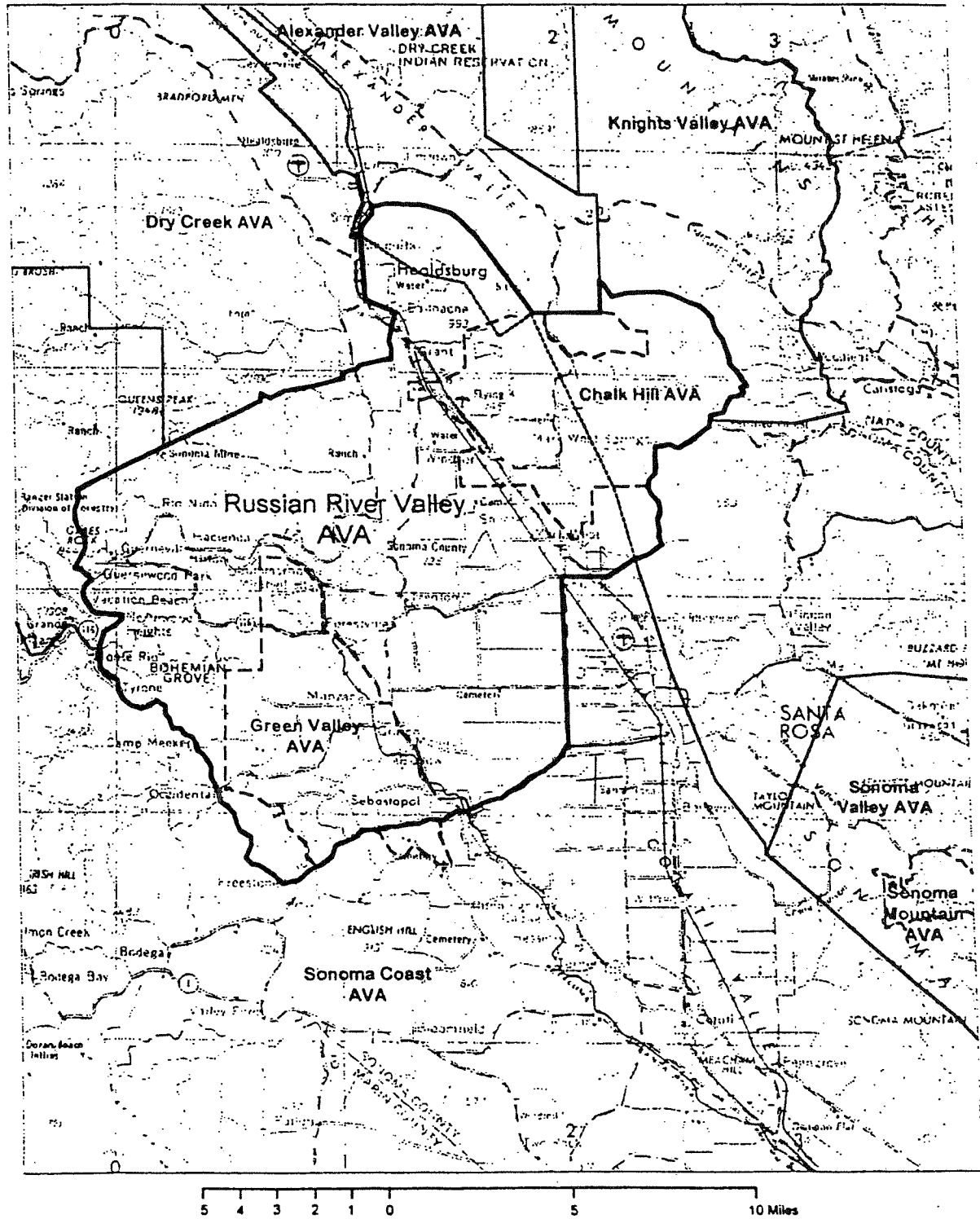
cc: Bradley A. Buckles, Director (w/o enclosures)
William H. Foster, Chief, Regulations and Procedures Division (w/o enclosures)
Russian River Valley Winegrowers, Attention: Merry Edwards (w/o enclosures)

Petition Exhibits

Russian River Valley AVA Expansion – TD #32

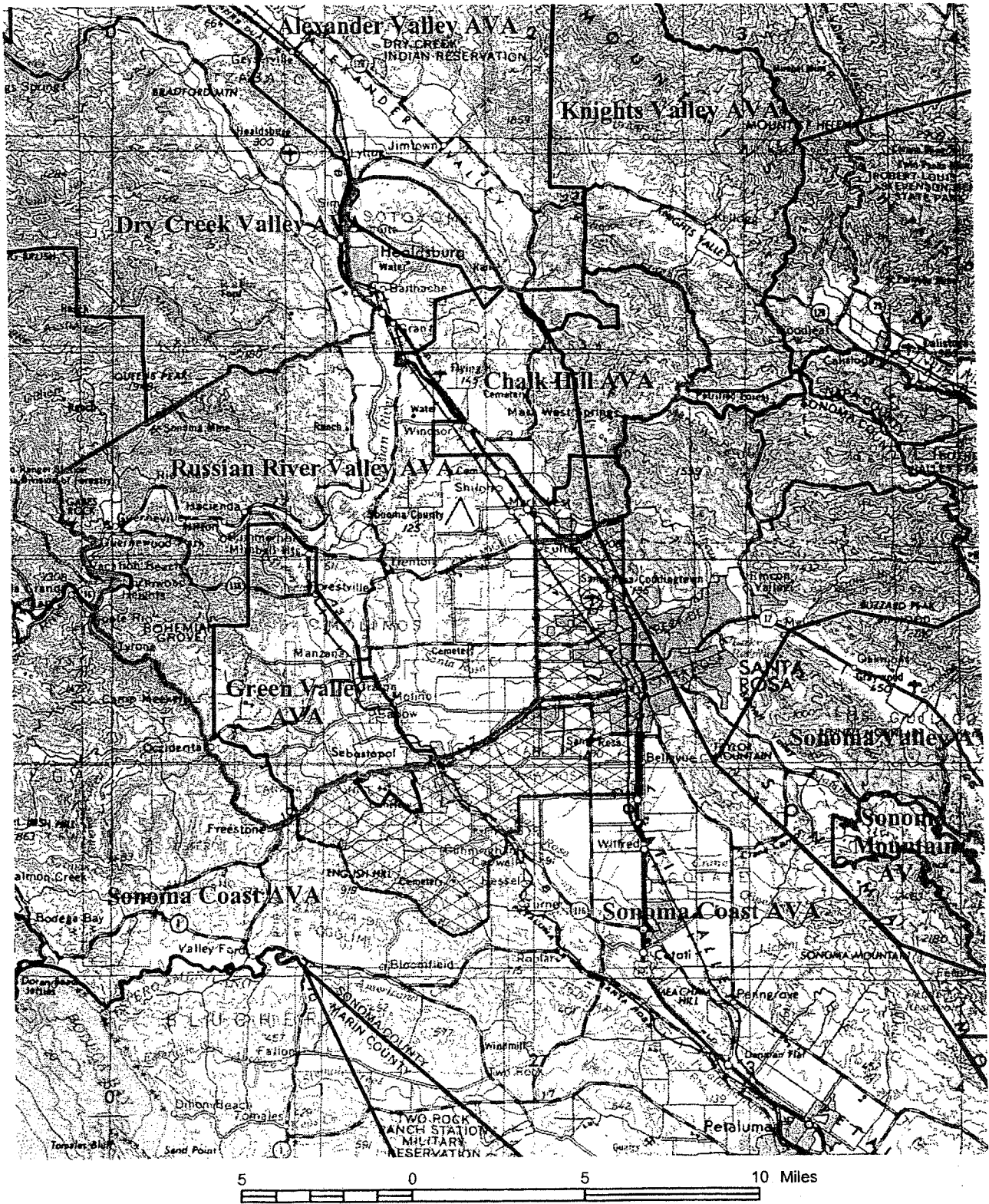
1. Maps (6) showing expansion region and some distinguishing features
2. Letters (3) expressing support of the petition
3. Wine Enthusiast, “A Sonoma Sojourn” article, July 2002
4. The Wine News, “Russian River Valley” article, June/July 2002
5. Gourmet Magazine, “Sonoma Chardonnay” article, June 1999
6. Home and Land of North Bay Summer 2002 real estate publication

Map 1 Russian River Valley AVA and Surrounding Sonoma Viticultural Areas



*Base Map taken from USGS 1:250,000 Santa Rosa map reduced 10%. Current scale is 1:277,778

Proposed Amendment to the Russian River Valley AVA



Base Map taken from USGS 1:250,000 California Map (Reduced) Current scale is 1:277,778

MAP 2



HYDROLOGIC UNIT MAP
 State of CA 1978
 1:500,000 1"=8 miles
 — Unit Boundaries
 - - - County Lines

18010111

18010110

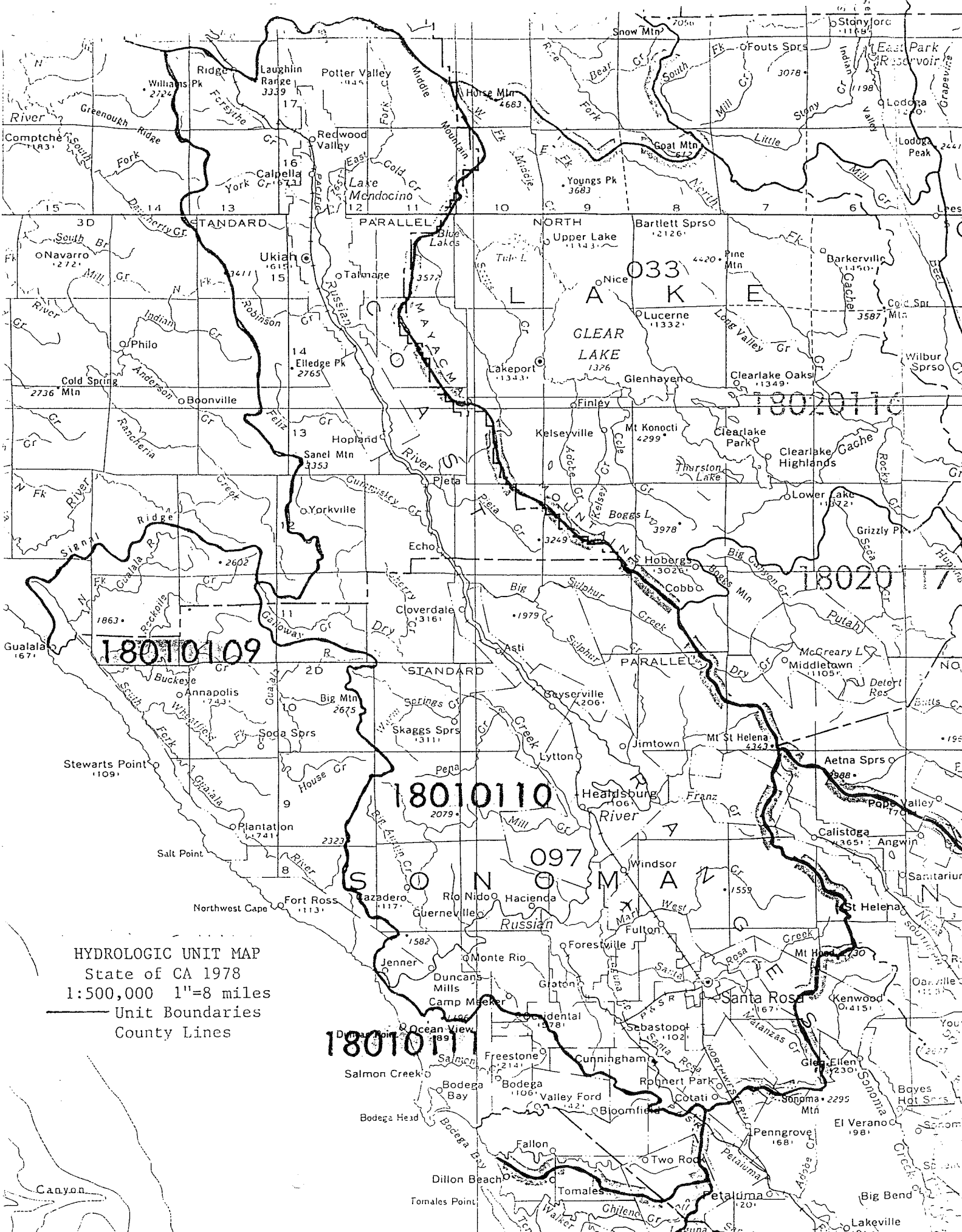
18010109

18020117

18020116

033

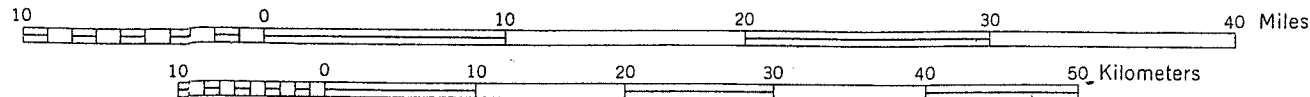
097



HYDROLOGIC UNIT MAP— 1978

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Scale 1:500,000
1 inch equals approximately 8 miles



Datum is mean sea level
Depth curves at 100-fathom interval
Datum is mean lower low water

Compiled, edited, and published by the Geological Survey. 1927 North American datum
Lambert conformal conic projection based on standard parallels 33° and 45°

LEGEND

- ⊛ State capital
- ⊙ County seat
- City, town, or village
- ✈ Scheduled service airport
- ▭ Built-up area shown for towns over 25,000 population

SOURCE DATA

- U. S. Dept. of the Interior-Geological Survey topographic maps
- U. S. Dept. of the Army-Corps of Engineers topographic maps
- Geological Society of America-Submarine topography of the Calif. coast, based in part on U. S. Coast & Geodetic Survey data
- State of California-Dept of Water Resources maps

POPULATION KEY

- LOS ANGELES more than 200,000
- PASADENA 100,000 to 200,000
- Concord 25,000 to 100,000
- Redding 5,000 to 25,000
- Bishop less than 5,000

Population indicated by size of letters

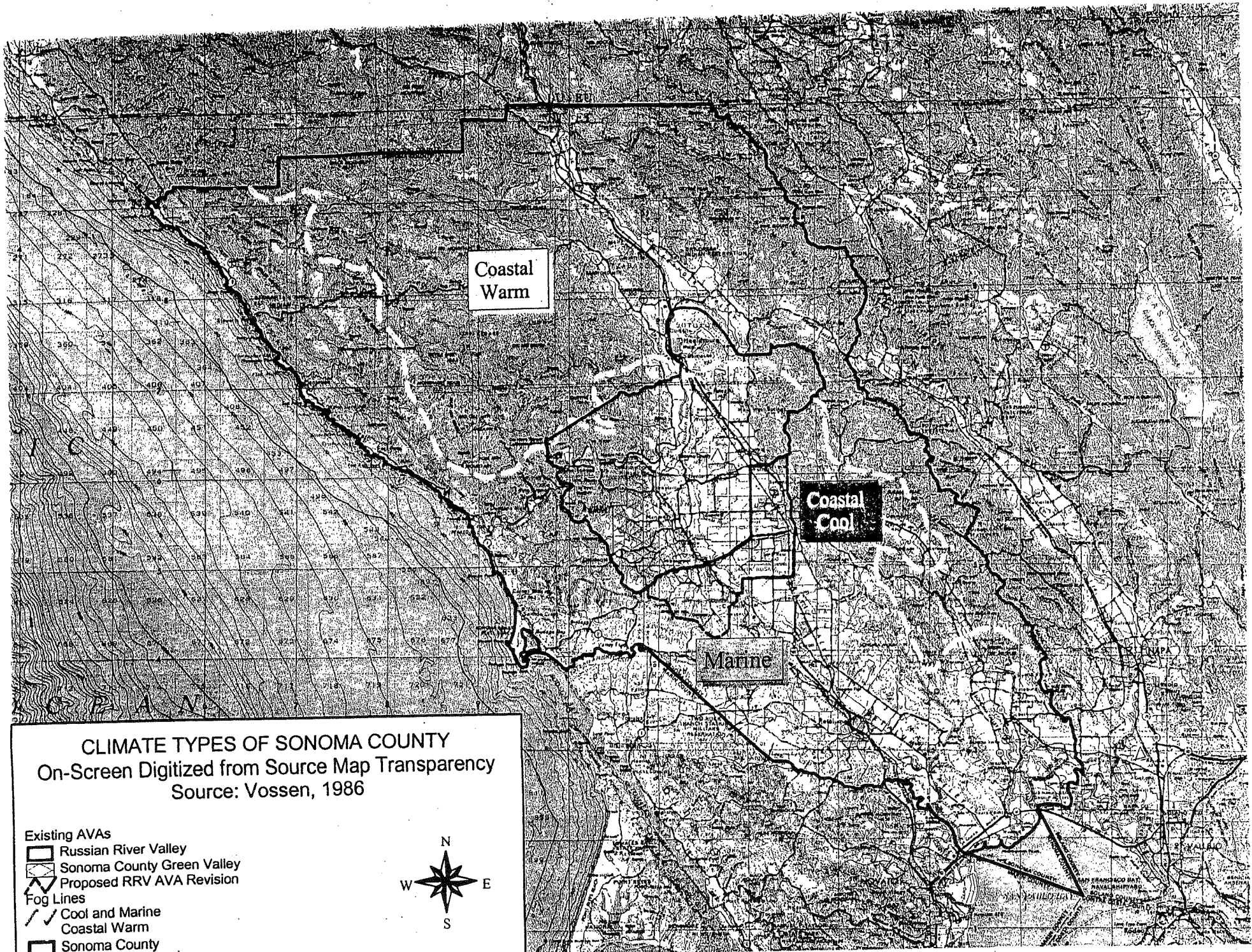
BASE MAP

COMPILED IN 1968
EDITION OF 1970
Drainage modified 1974

HYDROLOGIC UNIT CODE



MAP 4









Coastal Warm

Coastal Cool

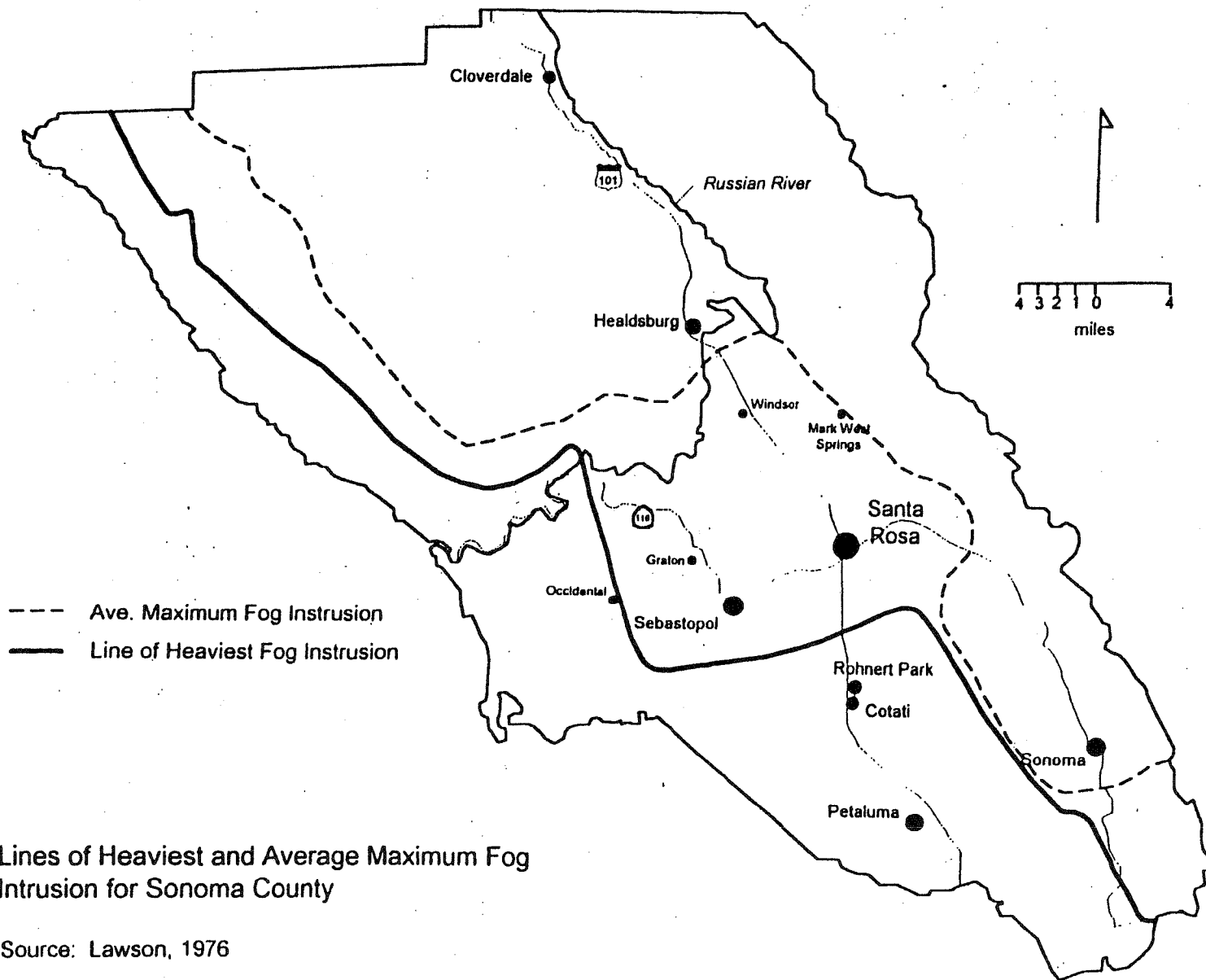
Marine

CLIMATE TYPES OF SONOMA COUNTY
 On-Screen Digitized from Source Map Transparency
 Source: Vossen, 1986

- Existing AVAs
-  Russian River Valley
 -  Sonoma County Green Valley
 -  Proposed RRV AVA Revision
- Fog Lines
-  Cool and Marine
 -  Coastal Warm
-  Sonoma County



MAP 5



MAP 6



425 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, California 95403 USA
Tel 707-544-4000 • Fax 707-569-0105 • www.kj.com

Director Bradley Buckles
Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms
650 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20226

January 15, 2003

Re: Revision of the Russian River Valley American Viticultural Area.

As a grower in the Russian River Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA) Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates supports the petition that will soon be submitted by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association to modify the existing AVA.

We have carefully reviewed the petition and believe that it most closely reflects the necessary criteria for an American Viticultural Area. The proximity of the revised area to the ocean highlights its single most importance climatic influence – the fog line. This is critical for the success of the region as a grape growing area.

On a personal note, I worked within the proposed AVA, as a winemaker, for 13 years and am very familiar with the Russian River area. This revision would include previously unplanted areas and potential future vineyard sites that experience the same growing conditions as the existing AVA. I request that you approve the revision presented by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association.

Sincerely,

E.B. "Pete" Downs
Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates



EDMEADES™



CAMELOT™

LA CREMA

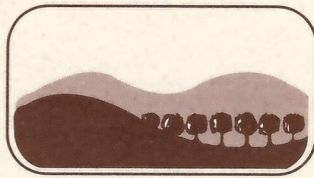


CALINA



VILLA ARCEÑO™





**DUTTON
RANCH CORP.**

January 9, 2003

Mr. Bradley Buckles, Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms
Dept. of Treasury
650 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20226

Dear Mr. Buckles:

Dutton Ranch is a fifth generation farming family in southwest Sonoma County. Prior to grapes, we farmed hops, prunes, pears, apples and row crops. In 1964, my father purchased his first vineyard. At present, we own or manage approximately 1,200 acres of vineyard and approximately 150 acres of apple orchard. Our vineyards are not contiguous. We farm 1.5 to 100 acre sites at 81 locations (averaging 15 acres per site) with Forestville to Windsor being our northern border and Freestone to the intersection of Highway 116 and Stony Point Road our southern border.

Dutton Ranch is familiar with the petition being submitted regarding the boundary changes of the Russian River Valley Appellation. Having the experience of farming and growing grapes within the proposed area, we believe there is merit in this proposal. The soil types, weather patterns, marine influences and watershed are relatively the same and supports granting the petition.

Should there be questions qualifying this petition, please give me a call at (707) 823-0448. Your consideration is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Steve Dutton



University of California
Cooperative Extension - Sonoma County

<http://cesonoma.ucdavis.edu>

2604 Ventura Ave., Rm 100
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-2810

707/565-2621: FAX 565-2623
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Master Gardener 565-2608

January 16, 2003

Mr. Bradley Buckles, Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms
Dept. of the Treasury
650 Massachusetts Avenue, NW.
Washington, DC 20226

Dear Mr. Buckles,

This letter is in support of the Petition to Amend the Boundaries of the Russian River Valley American Viticultural Area as submitted by the Russian River Valley Winegrowers.

I am the University of California Cooperative Extension Viticulture Farm Advisor in Sonoma County, California. I have held this position since November 1986. It is my responsibility to conduct a research based education program in the production of winegrapes. My target audiences are the owners and managers of commercial vineyards as well as allied industry personnel in the county, which includes the Russian River Valley AVA. In addition, I have a public service component of my program that allows me to spend a considerable amount of time on "farm calls" which are one-on-one meetings with growers in their vineyards to observe the site and address specific concerns. Due to the time I spend in the field, I have a very good understanding of the climatic diversity of the growing regions within Sonoma County.

I have read the Petition previously referenced, and I am familiar with the area of land that is proposed to be included in the Russian River Valley AVA. In my opinion, the proposed area to be added does not differ from the area within the current boundaries of the AVA in terms of climate or perception. Thus I fully support the addition of the area of land, as described in the Petition, to the Russian River Valley AVA and urge you to approve this addition to the current AVA.

Sincerely,

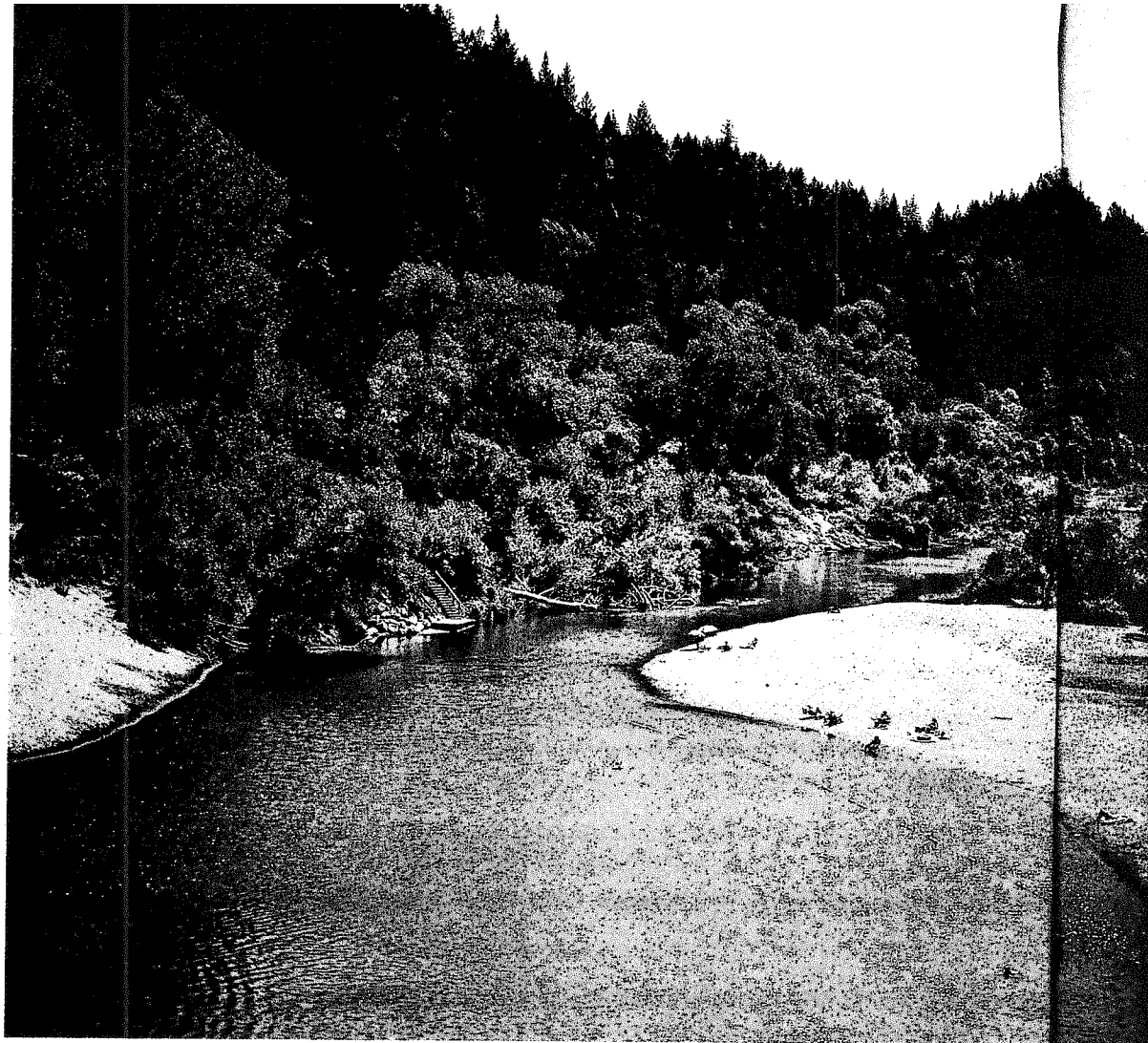
Rhonda J. Smith
Viticulture Farm Advisor

United States Department of Agriculture, University of California, and County of Sonoma Cooperating

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A SONOMA SOJOURN



Four days of spectacular scenery and terrific tastings in one of California's most diverse wine regions.

When it comes to getting Sonoma—really *getting it*—you have to jump in with both feet. All the maps and books in the world won't help you arrive at more than a skin-deep appreciation of this sprawling wine region, California's most diverse.

A month of intensive travel would do it, but who has a month? So here's the *Wine Enthusiast's* solution: A four-day sprint that might leave you gasping for breath at the finish line, but will saturate you in the county's realities.

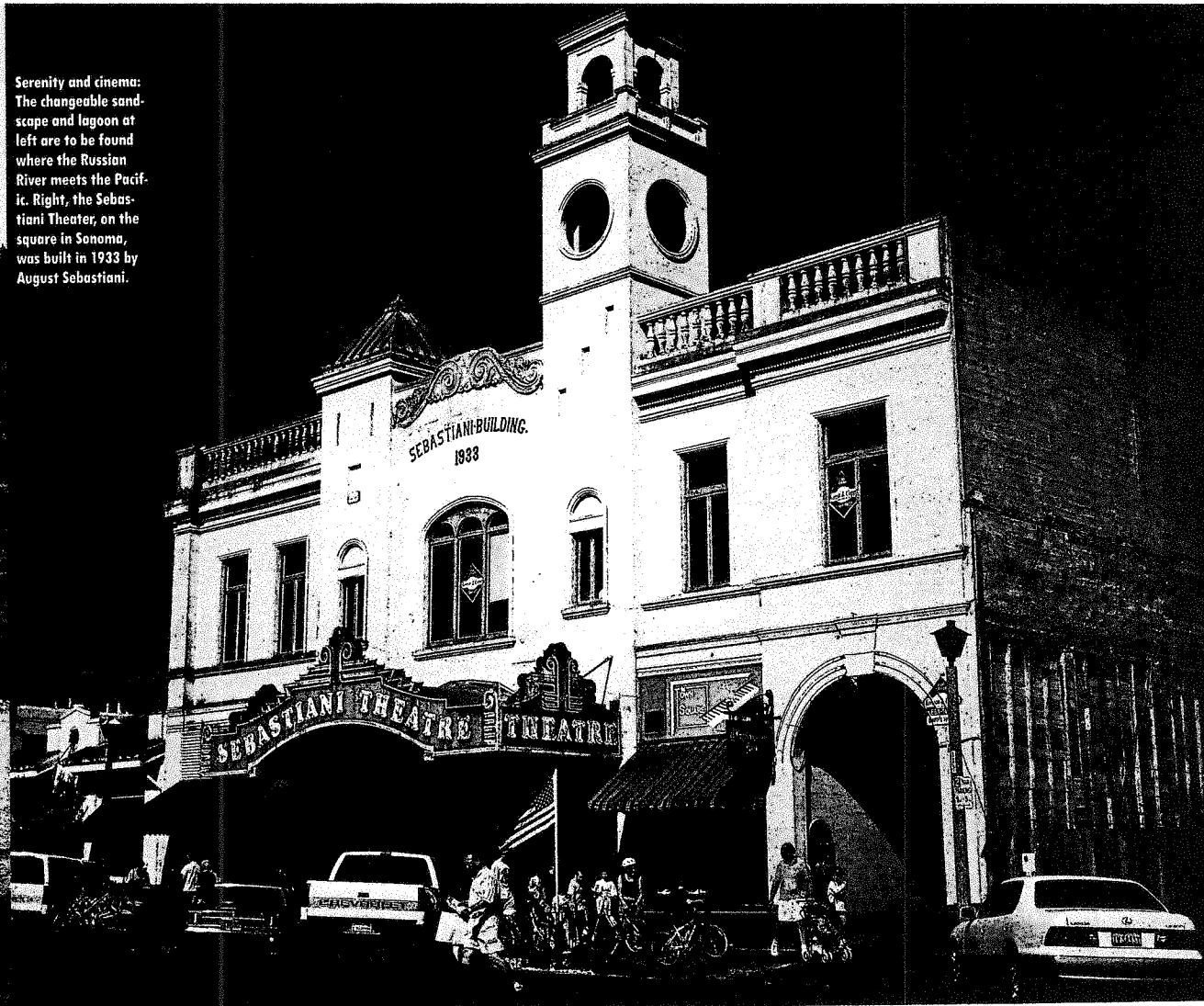
Mine is only a sample itinerary; I don't want to be a travel commandant. You don't have to visit the wineries I did, or eat at the restaurants I mention, or stay where I stayed for the night. But if you do, you'll have a heck of a great time.

Here's the concept. Assuming you're driving up from the Bay Area, Day One is in the south: Carneros and Sonoma Valley. Day Two gets up to the county's northernmost AVA, Alexander Valley, and adjacent Dry Creek Valley. Day Three explores the byways of the Russian River Valley. On Day Four, we travel out to the Sonoma coast, where there are few wineries, but some of the world's most spectacular scenery.

Ready? Let's go.

PHOTOS: TED STEFANSKI/CEPHAS

Serenity and cinema: The changeable landscape and lagoon at left are to be found where the Russian River meets the Pacific. Right, the Sebastiani Theater, on the square in Sonoma, was built in 1933 by August Sebastiani.



Day One: Sonoma Valley

Coming up from San Francisco, you'll first hit the Cameros, the cool region of rolling hills, once pastureland, that has proved so successful for Burgundian varietals and, surprisingly, Merlot. A nice place to stop is at Gloria Ferrer Champagne Cellars on Route 121. It's up to you: Sip some Champagne, take the winery tour, or both. Either way, the sweeping views from the winery's patio are inspiring.

Any visit to Sonoma Valley inevitably begins at the town of Sonoma, and the heart of Sonoma is the Town Square. There, the staff of the Sonoma Valley Visitor's Bureau will be glad to help you plan your touring.

Galleries, fine restaurants, bookstores, wine shops, hotels and boutique shops surround the square. When I drive up from the Bay Area—the trip takes about an hour—I like to settle down by taking a cappuccino and pastry at the

Basque Cafe, on First Street East. Downtown parking, by the way, is meter-free. Just up the street are the Wine Exchange of Sonoma and the Sonoma Wine Shop, two stores where it's fun to browse and see what's new. And then it's on to the real deal, visiting wineries.

There are several within a few minutes' drive of the Square. Sebastiani, with its historic old stone building and huge, beautifully carved wooden casks, offers guided tours, but it's fine to just walk through. The tasting bar is a good place to taste Sebastiani's wines, which are much improved lately.

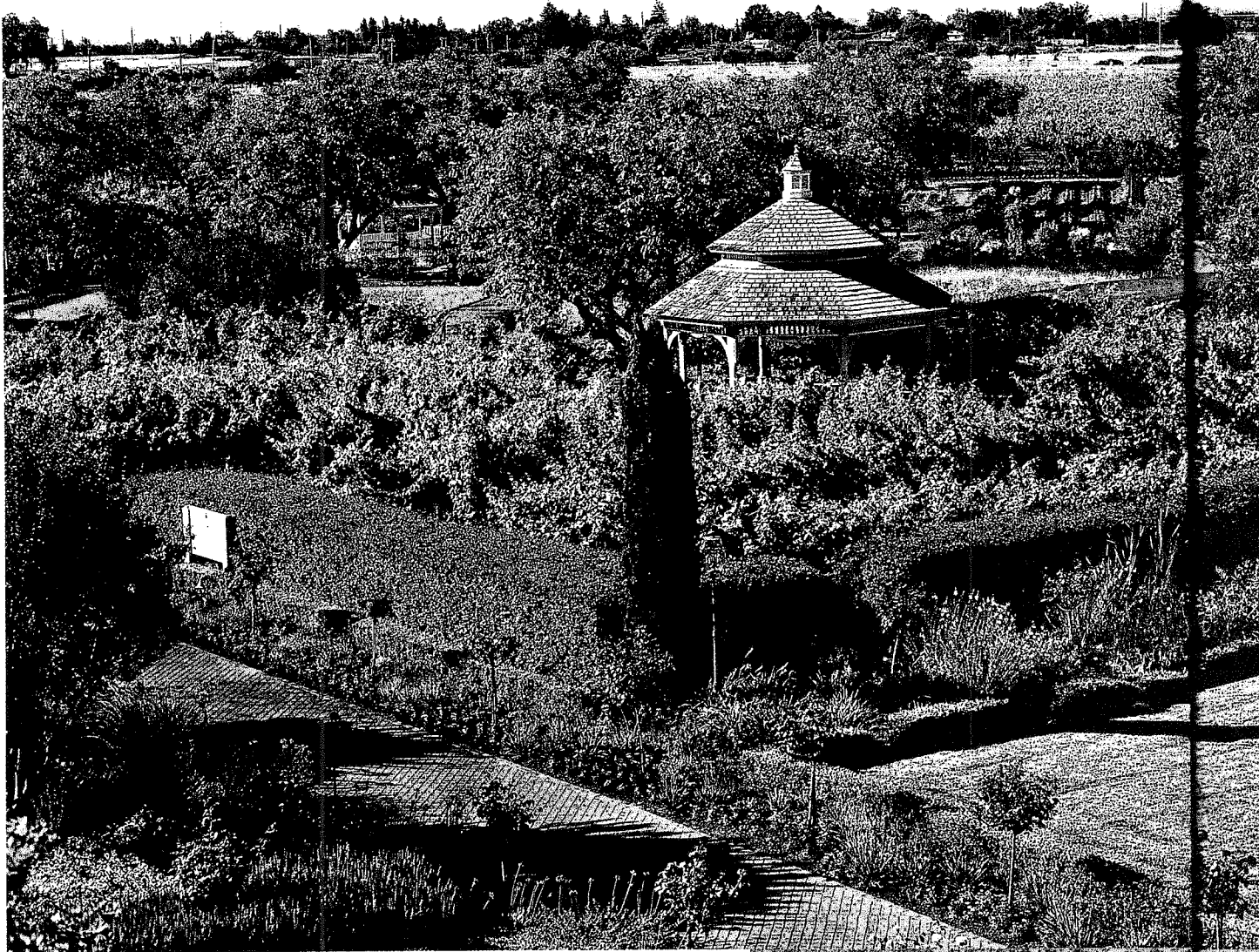
Just a few minutes away, down twisting, bucolic Old Winery Road, is Sonoma's, and California's, oldest winery, Buena Vista. This property—the name means "beautiful view"—preserves the magnificence of the majestic Sonoma countryside, and the old vineyards, surrounded by hills covered with gnarled oaks and evergreen madrone, are beautiful indeed. The old Press House, with its primitive wine-

making equipment, hand-hewn stone walls and dark, dank atmosphere, dates back to 1857, and you really get a sense of what a 19th-century winery was like. The wines, particularly the Cameros Estate line, are very good. Four tastes for free.

Zinfandel lovers won't want to miss the home of "no wimpy wines," Ravenswood, just a mile or so away. There's a fee of \$4 for tasting four regional selections, and while you usually won't be able to taste the famous single-vineyard rarities, you can buy them.

Lunchtime is a great time to be in Sonoma. People come into town from all over, and if the weather is nice, they sit outdoors. One of the best restaurants in town is The Girl and the Fig. The modern California-style cuisine is a favorite among vintners. Just across the street is the famous Piatti Restaurant and Bar, which was for a long time the fine-dining establishment of the area. Also scattered around the square are many affordable places to eat.

A Sonoma Sojourn



Most of the post-1970 wineries are located northwest of town on Route 12, in the Valley of the Moon, the name that the writer Jack London gave this lovely place. To get to the wineries, you have to drive through the little Latinized hamlets—they're hardly towns—of Boyes Hot Springs, Agua Caliente and Fetters Hot Springs, no easy task, as traffic can be terrible, but thankfully only for a few miles. The best, certainly the safest, way to visit wineries along Route 12 is to stop at the ones on your right as you drive out, leaving the wineries on your left for the return trip. That way, you won't have to dart across the highway, where speeding cars stop for nothing.

About five miles out of town comes

Arrowood, now owned by Robert Mondavi Winery. Its handsome, modern tasting room is perched on a knoll with a pretty view. As at Ravenswood, you won't usually get to taste the best stuff, but you never know when they'll pull out a few bottles of something special.

The Imagery Estate is just down the driveway. Owned by the Benziger family, its varietal wines can be very good; five tastes for \$5. But an equally impressive attraction is the gallery of modern art, the best in the valley.

Beyond the Glen Ellen turnoff is a gap in the wineries, although the vineyards come right down to the road. After a few miles you'll come to what I think of as Haut Sonoma Valley, around the town of Kenwood. Kunde, five



miles beyond Arrowood, has its handsome, zig-zag-shaped tasting room in the middle of its vineyards. All the wines are estate bottled, so Kunde is a good place to see what pure Sonoma Valley wine is like: an intense purity of varietal fruit, irresistible flavor and balance and refreshing acidity. Kunde also offers a tour of its caves, but only on weekends.

Just a mile farther is one of my favorite pit-stops. Every wine Landmark makes is available for tasting. The regular releases are free, but for \$10, you can taste four reserve bottlings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, all of them rare and special. That's a great deal.

Above Landmark, the mountains press in and the valley narrows. St. Francis's new tasting room, two miles beyond Landmark, has a Spanish Mission design, with a bell tower like Robert Mondavi's. They charge \$5 for a taste of

picnic on the mansion's grounds.

Then it's back toward Sonoma town. In the valley's warm "banana belt" is B.R. Cohn Winery. Owner Bruce Cohn, who still manages the Doobie Brothers, produces a single-vineyard Olive Hill Cabernet Sauvignon that is one of the most unique wines in the valley, and you can sample it in the rustic little tasting room.

Just beyond Cohn is Valley of the Moon Winery, which got a shot in the arm when it was taken over by Korbel. Set among lush vineyards at the foot of Sonoma Mountain, the wines are among the valley's best values.

For lodging, there's no more opulent place than the Sonoma Mission Inn. Although some locals prefer the newish MacArthur Place, for me, the pink stucco Sonoma Mission Inn is the ultimate in pampered luxury. From the four-poster beds and working fireplaces to the

looking for someplace inexpensive, some say the best Mexican food in the county is at Sonoma Taco Shop, at 18340 Sonoma Highway.

Sonoma is not a late-night town and there's not a whole lot to do after dinner. You're best off getting a good night's sleep, because you'll be up early tomorrow for the second big day of your Sonoma sojourn.

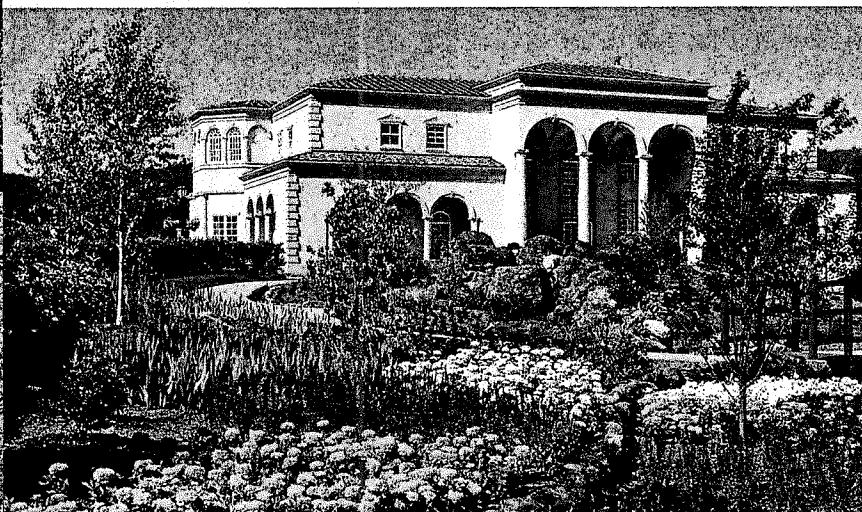
Day Two: Alexander Valley & Dry Creek Valley

The drive north from Sonoma town takes you through bustling Santa Rosa, the county seat, and then to the 101 Freeway, known in these parts as the Redwood Highway. Just outside of town is the Kendall-Jackson Wine Center. Summer is the best time to visit, when you can see 32 grape varieties growing on 16 trellis systems, but there's tasting and things to see year-round. Around Windsor, traffic lightens, and you enter serious wine country. Big, ugly billboards advertising wineries sprout like mushrooms beside the road; vineyards, too. Eight miles beyond is Healdsburg. Strategically located at the nexus of the Alexander, Dry Creek and Russian River Valleys, it's a great place to make your base camp for exploring these appellations.

But it's too early to make camp now, so, continuing north, you cross the Russian River then go up a little hill, round a bend, and suddenly, there it is, in all its picture-postcard glory: the Alexander Valley.

This long, river-gashed valley was declared an AVA in 1988, but was known for its soft, earthy red wines long before that. The valley's south flank is held down by Geyserville. Population 1,650, it's not much of a tourist town—a few cottages and a run-down downtown. My favorite store is the Geo. M. Bosworth & Son general store, where you can buy good Western wear. Southeast from Geyserville runs little, twisting Route 128 toward the Mayacamas Mountains—Calistoga is on the other side. Down this bucolic wine trail you'll find a clutch of small wineries, including Murphy-Goode, Sausal, Alexander Valley Vineyards, Hanna, Fieldstone, de Lorimier and others.

Part of the charm of a secondary road like



Above left: the Kendall Jackson Wine Center and Organic Culinary Gardens. Above right, the Tuscan-style Ferrari-Carano facilities. Left, Gloria Ferrer Champagne Cellars.

four wines, while three of the excellent Reserves will set you back \$15.

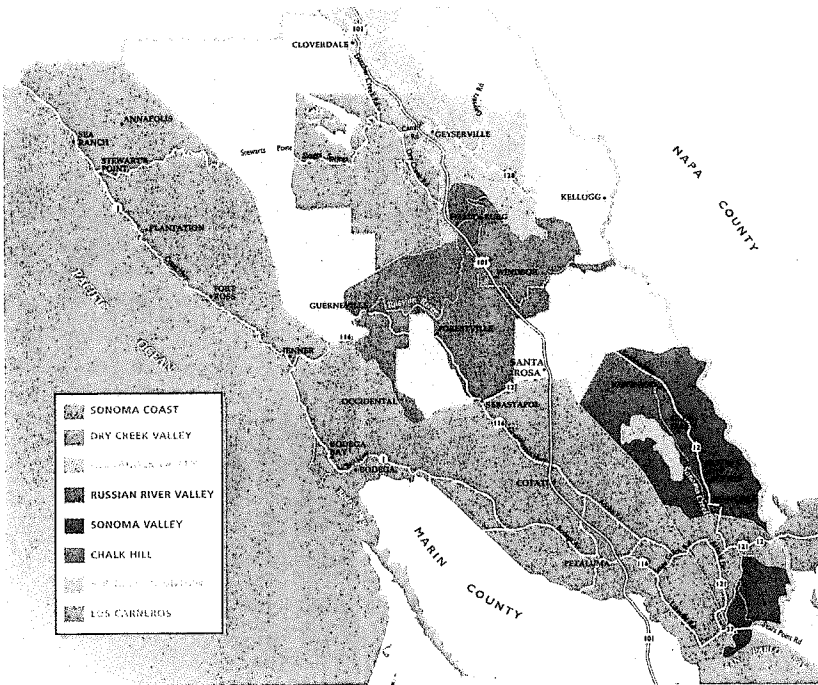
That's a lot, but the reserve tasting is in a private room, where they also serve you delicious hors d'oeuvres. And the wines are terrific.

Beyond St. Francis is the last winery before the suburbs of Santa Rosa. Ledson is housed in a huge stone structure that's a cross between a French chateau and Dr. Frankenstein's castle. The gourmet deli is well stocked, and if it's a nice day, you can

sunken jacuzzis in some rooms, it's what my father used to call "not too shabby." You can get a manicure or massage, play golf or swim and get a good workout in the gym.

When it comes to dinner, there are so many good restaurants in the valley, you won't know where to start. Cafe La Haye, just half a block off the square, is certainly one of the best. The sophisticated comfort food is deceptively simple and delicious, making it a favorite of wine-makers. Another terrific place is Carneros, a few blocks south of the Town Square. Chef Brian Whitmer used to oversee the kitchen at the famed Highlands Inn, in Carmel. The wine lists at both La Haye and Carneros offer a good selection of Sonoma County wines. If you're

A Sonoma Sojourn



128 is seeing how real people live. These agricultural neighborhoods have an atmosphere of impoverished gentility, until you realize that even a fixer-upper can cost \$500,000.

Nine miles north of Geyserville is the northern terminus of Alexander Valley (and Sonoma County), Cloverdale. On the way up, you'll see on your left extensive modern vineyards planted in rust-red earth. A must-stop is the Geysler Peak Winery, whose large stone and concrete edifice is a familiar sight. Now owned by Jim Beam, the distiller, Geysler Peak still offers some of the most consistent value wines in the country. Five regular releases can be tasted for free and there's a \$5 charge for three or four reserve wines.

Cloverdale doesn't offer much for the tourist. This is a hard-working farming community, although there is a small wine and visitors center. You can see how the hills close in here, pinching off the Alexander Valley and bringing it to a close. A few miles up is the Mendocino County line.

Just south of Geyserville is another cluster of wineries: Trentadue, Chateau Souverain, Canyon Road (owned by Geysler Peak) and Clos du Bois. All are worthy of a visit. Clos du Bois in particular, offers wines under winemaker Margaret Davenport. In the modern tasting room, five wines can be tasted for free.

Alexander Valley seems like a big appellation, but in fact, at 32,500 acres, it's less than half the size of the Dry Creek Valley AVA. If you follow a rigorous schedule, you can do it in a morning, then head back to Healdsburg, check into your lodging, have lunch and devote

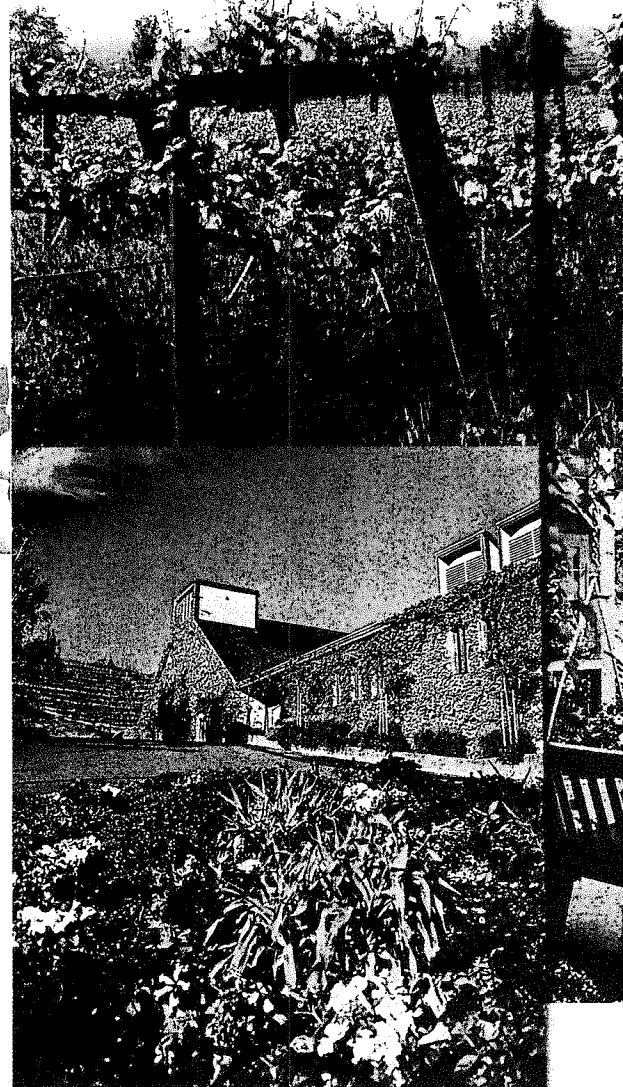
the afternoon to Dry Creek Valley.

It's impossible to overstate Healdsburg's charm. It's always been quaint, but the booming economy of the 1990s brought in lots of money, and this town of 10,000 is now in danger of becoming boutique to death. Still, the blocks surrounding the old town Plaza will prove irresistible to shoppers and those in search of good food.

There are tons of places for a casual lunch. The Healdsburg Coffee Company & Cafe, at 312 Center Street, is a local favorite. One place I always hit is the Oakville Grocery, an offshoot of the famous Napa gourmet shop, on the corner of Mathieson and Center streets. The take-out is fantastic. You can sit in the courtyard or the Plaza on a warm day, or take your food with you on your travels.

There are also many places to stay, ranging from inexpensive to posh. There's a Travelodge at 178 Dry Creek Road, with rates as low as \$79 a night, and, right across the street, the slightly fancier Dry Creek Inn. But the most luxurious place in town is the Madrona Manor, at 1001 Westside Road, about one mile from the Plaza. This spectacular country inn, a sprawling and intricately detailed Victorian mansion set amid English gardens, is expensive and dignified in an old-fashioned way; the little restaurant serves up four-star food equal to most anything in San Francisco.

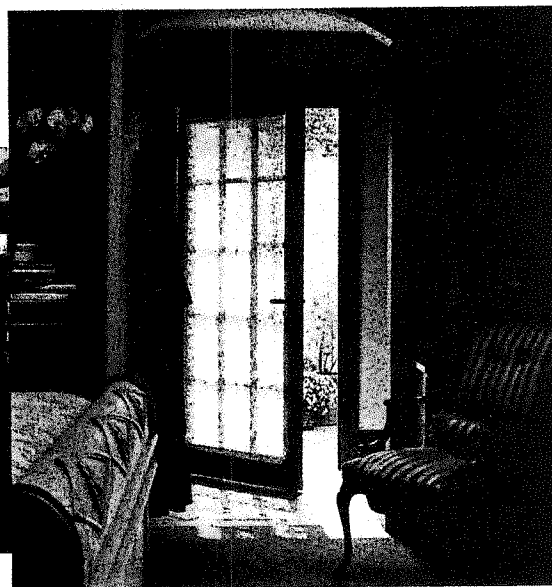
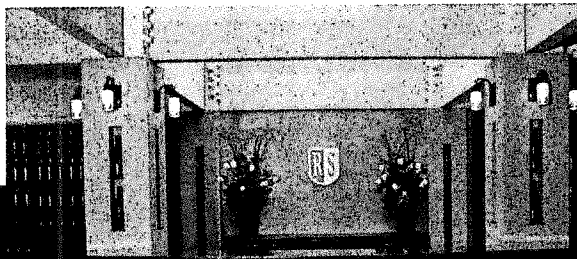
The Dry Creek Valley AVA dates back to 1983. Dry Creek Road runs through its heart, paralleled just a mile away on the valley's west side by West Dry Creek Road. The two are connected by several bridges that span the lit-



tle creek (all that remains of the torrent that carved the valley) and a transit of both roads will take you to most of the famous wineries.

This was originally Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc country, but Cabernet Sauvignon does well and so, increasingly, do Rhône varieties. About four miles up the valley, at the intersection of Dry Creek Road and Lambert Bridge Road, is the Dry Creek General Store (established 1881), where you can get munchies. Taking the left turn over the old bridge gets you to the west valley, in many ways its heart and soul. Here are Rafanelli, Deux Amis, Pezzi King, Preston and many others; tasting rooms tend to be rustic. Dry Creek Vineyard is a good start. Many of its reserve wines (\$5 to taste four) are estate grown, and show off the valley's vibrancy of fruit and the earthy tannins that

At left, Pinot Gris thrives for J Vineyards and Wine Company. Below left, Geyser Peak Winery is a familiar Sonoma landmark. Below, a charming nook at the Sebastopol Inn. Right, the hospitality center at Rodney Strong Vineyards. Far right, afternoon light dapples a room at the Applewood Inn & Restaurant.



The last of the valley's wineries is Lake Sonoma Winery, now owned by Korbel. Here, in its warmest northwest corner, the valley comes to an abrupt end at Lake Sonoma, held back by its earthen dam. The view from the ultra-modern tasting room is stunning. You can see all the way down to the Mayacamas range, and to the ridge where tomorrow's destination, the Russian River Valley, begins its westward bend.

Dinner in Healdsburg is no problem. Park by the square and choose: California fusion, Asian, Mexican, Italian, veggie; you name it.

Day Three: Russian River Valley

give the wines structure and depth.

A little farther up West Dry Creek Road—one of the most beautiful wine trails in California, for my money—is Quivira Vineyards. Everything they make is from Dry Creek Valley, and it's all available to taste for free. After a few more meandering miles, you come to Raymond Burr Vineyards. Tasting is free, and you get the added bonus of a mini-museum dedicated to the career of Burr, the late movie star and TV's Perry Mason.

Just past Burr is Yoakim Bridge Road, which leads half a mile back to Dry Creek Road. You'd better take it, because West Dry Creek continues on up into the hills, and has no outlet. Go left on Dry Creek, and you'll soon come to the valley's showstopper edifice, Ferrari-Carano. After all the humble little wineries, this Italianate pink palazzo comes as a shock. You'd swear you were in Tuscany, and the wines are excellent; \$3 for any four.

Much has changed in the Russian River Valley over the years—villages have become towns; towns, cities—but one thing remains the same: the river itself. Sometimes rampaging, more often it's just a lazy old thing winding its way down from the Mendocino highlands.

At 96,000 acres, the AVA, which dates to 1983, is less than half the size of Napa Valley. But it is endlessly more complicated. It's unfair to try to do it in just one day, but there it is—you just have to be selective.

The dog-ear that extends on the east side of the 101 Freeway is political spoilage that can be discounted; even locals concede its artificiality. The real Russian River Valley is the box-shaped region that extends, broadly, from Healdsburg to Santa Rosa in the east, and from Occidental to Guerneville in the west. Fog and a cool maritime influence are the coin of the realm, and that means early ripening varietals,

especially Pinot Noir. Only it's not that simple. (When is it ever?)

If you stayed in Healdsburg, you can begin the day in the valley's northeast quadrant, where the Russian River Valley, Dry Creek Valley and Chalk Hill come together. At the intersection of Eastside Road and Old Redwood Highway are two wineries that share a parking lot: J Wine Co. and Rodney Strong. Both have good tasting rooms and make good wine. Oded Shakked, J's winemaker (he also has his own small brand, Longboard) says this area, the Upper Reach of the Russian River, is its warmest part. Although people grow Pinot Noir, the region is increasingly known for its Rhône varietals.

The main east-west road in the valley's northern half is Westside Road. You can reach it by getting back on 101, or by following Eastside back into Healdsburg. One word of caution: If you're touring Russian River Valley, bring a good map and have a good general sense of the roads. It's very easy to get lost. (I've gotten lost on a regular basis here for the past 20 years.) It's also advisable, at any time of the year, to dress in layers. You can be hot one minute and shivering the next. Winters can bring inundating rains.

Westside is as close to a wine trail as the valley has. A few miles past Madrona Manor, you enter the holy of holies, the Middle Reach of the Russian River. As the road twists and turns, every now and then opening on magnificent views to the south, you go past Armida, Rabbit Ridge, Belvedere, Toad Hollow and Hop Kihn, arriving after six miles at one of the appellation's must-see wineries, Rochioli, where tasting is always free. The Rochioli family has



Synergy: Wine goes with food, and touring vineyards by bike promotes a good appetite, at left. Below, the spa and pool at the elegant Bodega Lodge and Spa.

grown grapes there pretty much forever, and once they started making their own wines, they joined the ranks of rock-star winemakers. Pinot lovers love Rochioli.

Just a little farther on is Davis Bynum, here since the early 1970s. Located in a tangle of madrone and bay laurel, this venerable winery, in an old stone hop kiln, offers a range of wines to taste, mostly for free. Hampton Bynum, the VP, says the Middle Reach extends about two miles to the west and three miles to the east. What's so intriguing about this stretch is how well Zinfandel can do, even though this is Pinot Noir country. "The fog funnels up from Bodega Bay," bringing cool nights and mornings, says Bynum, "but we have extremely long, warm days. It's that temperature variance that makes the Middle Reach special."

Just west of Bynum, you'll see the hillsides explode with conifers: redwood and fir. Since both grow only where the fog is, this is a clue to climate change. There aren't many wineries west of Bynum (although Gary Farrell is just beyond), so this is a good place to turn south, on Wohler Road, where you'll recross the Russian River over a dramatic red bridge.

You'll hit River Road, which to my mind divides the valley between its (relatively) warmer northern section, and the cooler south. Korbel lies a few miles to the west, in a chilly pocket of its own. Most of the winery action is to the east. About a mile eastward is a cluster of wineries in a very cool area that Hamp Bynum calls the Laguna region (named after a local road), but which others call the Gold Ridge district, named after a sandstone formation that is superb Pinot Noir terroir. Here are classic Pinot producers: Dehlinger (not open to the public), Joseph Swan and others. Dehlinger produces a successful Cabernet from vineyards just high enough to poke through the fog and allow grapes to ripen.

The main east-west road south of River Road is Guerneville Road. If you drive west, you'll feel the weather grow perceptibly cooler and more moist; you can taste the salt tang of



the Pacific, just 10 miles away. You're now entering the coldest part of the Russian River Valley, Green Valley, which is its own AVA. As you approach the little town of Graton, population 1,400, you'll come to one of the best wineries in Sonoma County, Marimar Torres.

The estate is an adobe yellow Catalan-style building, perched on a hill. It is not open to the public on a regular basis, but visitors who call in advance can make an appointment for a 90-minute tour (weather and business permitting) that is one of the best and most absorbing in California. The winemaker there, Tony Britton, calls Torres a "destination winery," and the view from the upper part of the Don Miguel Vineyard is spectacular.

By now, you're probably ready for lunch. This is a good time to head back east, to Sebastopol, the major town in the south (population 7,800) and a good place to spend the night. There are plenty of places for lunch. Locals recommend Cafe da Vero, at 7531 Healdsburg Avenue, or 101 Main Bistro and Wine Bar, at 101 South Main.

Sebastopol is an old town, named after the Crimean seaport in Russia, and a beautiful one, but like Sonoma and Healdsburg, it's in danger of choking on its success. Traffic can be awful, but it's a convenient place to start off on a tour of the Russian River Valley's southerly flank. You don't notice Sebastopol's

elevation until you head eastward on Occidental, the most southerly east-west road, and find yourself descending into the Russian River Valley's broad, flat southeast quadrant. In this ancient flood plain, Pinot remains king. Here is another Hanna tasting room, and, a little to the north, Sunce and Pellegrini. Here, too, is Martinelli, famed for single-vineyard Zins, Chards and Pinots. On Olivet Road is the standard-bearer in these parts, DeLoach.

Winery president Michael DeLoach colloquially calls this area the Piner-Olivet district, named after local roads. It's too cool to ripen Cabernet (although the eucalyptus and palm trees suggest otherwise). Instead, this is Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and Sauvignon Blanc country. The winery offers a broad range of wines to taste for free.

By now it might be a good time to head back to Sebastopol for the night and do some exploring. Sebastopol is a hip, alternative-lifestyle kind of town. Crystal shops, street musicians and natural food stores abound and the pungent aroma of incense (and sometimes certain other herbs) fills the downtown streets.

I stayed at the Sebastopol Inn, at 6751 Sebastopol Avenue, one of the newer places (\$112-\$152), which is downtown. A little further out is a very nice Holiday Inn Express, at 1101 Gravenstein Highway South (\$89-\$159). There are many good places to dine. The K&L Bistro (119 South Main) is wildly popular among local vintners. The food is California cuisine and portions are huge.

Another lodging place of note is the Applewood Inn and Restaurant, at 13555 Highway 6, in Guerneville, a luxurious place to stay or dine. The restaurant's wine list is one of the greatest in Sonoma County, with an in-depth listing of local wines.

Have a good night, and wake up for breakfast at the East West Cafe, 128 North Main Street, where the bohos munch braised tamari tofu in ginger sauce, served on toast. From here, it's a straight shot out the Bodega Road to the coast for the final day of your sojourn.

Day Four: Sonoma Coast

On any given day, driving out to the coast can be like entering a cave—a big white cave. A thousand-foot thick wall of fog blankets the

PHOTO RIGHT COURTESY SONOMA COUNTY TOURISM PROGRAM

Wine & debate all corners for you



Above, the visitors center at J Vineyards and Wine Company in the Russian River Valley. Right, when the fog lifts, the rugged Sonoma coast offers unspoiled vistas.



shore for a few miles inland. But the sky can also be brilliantly, preternaturally blue and sunny. It's only 14 miles from Sebastopol to Bodega Bay along the twisty, scenic Bodega Road, which is also Highway 12. The farther west you get, the denser become the stands of redwood, fir and spruce. About five miles out, the road begins a rapid, steep ascent up and over the final range of coastal hills separating Russian River Valley from the sea.

This is wine country only in the most extreme sense. Until a few years ago, no one in his right mind would have thought of planting grapes here. Today, gamblers, mostly Burgundian in outlook, roll the dice. They believe that, in a warm vintage, the coast will produce California's greatest Pinot Noirs. Others think it's too cold. Time will tell.

Near the Bohemian Grove, you enter high pastureland. After 10 miles you come to the little village of Bodega (different from Bodega Bay). With its trim, shingled frame houses and tall, steepled white church, it could be in New England. Just outside of town, you'll hit Highway 1, the old coast road, the "PCH" (Pacific Coast Highway) of Southern California, which runs the entire length of California's 644 miles. Turn north and enjoy the roller-coaster ride. Cows and sheep graze the steep slopes, and hawks and falcons ride the thermals as the road loop-de-loops until you enter Bodega Bay, population 950.

The blue jewel of Bodega Bay and, over the bluffs just beyond the inlet, the Pacific Ocean, take you by surprise. The town itself is a mile-long stretch of restaurants, inns, bed-and-breakfasts, galleries and kitschy shops, not terribly pedestrian-friendly. Before it became a tourist town, Bodega Bay was a fishing village, and it is still home to a fleet of

300 working boats. The coast is a place to relax and unwind, after three frenetic wine-filled days. Bodega Bay may not be wine country, but it's quintessentially Sonoma.

frigid day, the lodge's jacuzzi offers outdoor warmth with glimpses of the bay, the dunes and headlands.

Whenever I come, I head down to the Sonoma Coast beach and walk over the dunes to the sea. The ocean here is cold, the color an almost alarming cobalt blue marbled with emerald green. The beaches are almost always deserted, or nearly so, and a pleasure to walk. Flocks of hungry gulls and cormorants careen low above the sand; harbor seals live here, too, waddling in the surf or sunbathing in the sand.

Most of the coast, from Bodega Bay to Jenner, is a chain of state beaches: Salmon Creek, Marshall Gulch and Portuguese Beach, each little more than a sandy cove. This is

You can stay in an inexpensive motel, modestly priced B&B or expensive inn, or you can rent a cottage on the beach. I stayed at the Bodega Bay Lodge & Spa, at 103 Coast Highway One, a luxurious, 84-room resort with killer views and a fine restaurant. Even on a

San Andreas Fault country, and the land is tortured. Just offshore, isolated, jagged towers of rock rise from the sea, where breakers hit them in huge explosions of spray. This 13-mile stretch of road includes campsites, picnic areas and hiking trails.

As you enter the town of Jenner, with fewer than 400 people, there's a little wood-shingled Indian restaurant with a tiny parking lot. It abuts a long, narrow steel bridge, the final span across the Russian River before the ocean. Below, the river widens to an estuarial lagoon, brackish in summer, clear and deep in rainy winter. From here, you can get a sense of the geological factors that impact almost all of Sonoma's viticulture, and a good part of Mendocino's. Here, the river has found one of the only outlets to the sea through the natural barrier of the thousand-foot-high wall of coastal hills. Conversely, here also the cold northwesterlies find an open window inland, carrying with them the fogs and mists that meteorologists call "the maritime influence." This natural air conditioning follows the river along its entire course; without it, inland Sonoma would be a summertime furnace.

If you were to kayak from this spot inland, you would come to Guerneville, Healdsburg, Geyserville, Cloverdale, recreating your journey. And what a journey it's been: a rush of sights, sounds, scents and flavors that are all Sonoma. ☞

Sonoma Touring Resources

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sonoma County Tourism Program: 800/576-6662. www.sonomacounty.com

Sonoma County Wineries Association: 707/586-3795. www.sonomawine.com

Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau: 707/996-1090. www.sonomavalley.com

Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance: 707/935-0803.

Sebastopol Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center: 707/823-3032. www.sebastopol.org

Russian River Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center: 800/253-8800. www.russian-river.com

Russian River Valley Winegrowers Association: 707/521-2534.

Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley: 707/433-3031. www.wdvc.com

Alexander Valley Winegrowers: 707/431-2894. www.alexandervalley.org

Bodega Bay Visitors Center: 707/875-3866. www.bodegabay.com

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RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

pinot noir's promised land

By Gerold D. Boyd

The quest for the Pinot Noir Holy Grail in California has been pursued relentlessly by determined winemakers for decades now. Is their undertaking inherently flawed? Is the concept of perfect California Pinot merely a pipe dream? The Francophiles among us would answer with an emphatic "Yes," yet for fans of Sonoma's Russian River Valley bottlings, they will tell you the region's *terroir* is rife with Pinot promise. Indeed, its proponents, myself among them, argue that it's the best site in the Golden State, bar none, for growing pinot noir. Granted, advocates of Cameros and Santa Barbara County may disagree, but Russian River Valley Pinots possess that certain elusive character sought by so many.

The region's Pinots are even winning converts among skeptical Cabernet cultists, and for good reason. The wines are characteristically chock-full of sumptuous black fruit aromas, such as ripe black cherry and dark-skin plum, and plush fruit flavors are framed by ample yet refined tannins. The sum of these parts forms a total package with great structure and length, qualities that are desirable in great Pinot Noir.

Designated as an American Viticultural Area (AVA) in 1983, the Russian River Valley appellation is one of the largest in Sonoma County, measuring 150 square miles and extending south and west of Healdsburg to the coastal hills at Guerneville. Adjoining AVAs include Alexander Valley, Chalk Hill and Dry Creek Valley; Green Valley lies within the Russian River Valley (RRV) appellation. Soils are very diverse, but mainly composed of well-drained sandstone and shale with gravel underlays beneath the top soil. Fog during the growing season is the region's most defining climatic feature, tempering the warm days and cool nights.

Other prominent Pinot pockets (yes, Cameros and Santa Barbara County) share similar traits, so putting one's finger on what makes the Russian River Valley so well suited to the petulant variety is difficult. Even RRV Pinot guru Gary Farrell, owner of Gary Farrell

Wines, hedges, "I don't know that I have the answer, other than to say that while I have enjoyed some incredible wines made by Ken Wright (Oregon), Lane Tanner (Santa Barbara County), Acacia (Cameros) and others, the most memorable American Pinot Noirs I have tasted over the past decade have been produced from grapes grown within a relatively small geographical area surrounding the town of Forestville, perhaps extending three to four miles south and east and six miles to the north."

Russian River bottlings generally stand in stark contrast to what Farrell calls the "commercial Pinot Noirs" that favor "overripe fruit in the quest to craft 'bigger and better' wines." He points out that it is "rare to find the generous extraction of flavoring components like strawberry, raspberry and black cherry, without sacrificing that elegant, silky, supple nature and wonderful, refreshing balancing acidity of Russian River Pinots." A balancing act such as that "defines classic Pinot Noir" for Farrell.

Although he buys grapes from a number of RRV growers, he places an elite trio at the top of the list for consistently high-quality pinot noir fruit. "It has taken 20 years of experimentation with dozens of growers to discover the handful of pinot noir vineyards — including Rochioli, Allen and Olivet

This page: Gary Farrell succeeds in extracting strawberry and raspberry flavors from Russian River Valley fruit while achieving an elegant silkiness, resulting in Pinot Noirs that are almost Burgundian in their restraint.

Opposite page: The Russian River Valley is home to the distinguished, 161-acre Rochioli Vineyard, 65 of which are dedicated to the highly sought-after pinot noir on which the Rochiolis have built their estimable reputation.

Lane — within our region that I would consider world class. The cultivation of these relationships may be my finest and most important accomplishment as a winemaker," he says. Farrell is also sold on grapes from Stiling Vineyard, not to mention his own estate vineyards at Starr Ridge.

"Wines from these particular vineyards seem to share personalities," he explains. "Their fruit profiles often favor strawberry, raspberry and black cherry over the more typical Bing cherry, plum or less desirable tomato aromas and flavors often found in California Pinot Noirs." These favorable attributes are noticeable in varying amounts, depending on where the grapes are grown and who is making the wine. For as anyone who drinks California Pinot Noir knows, wine styles vary greatly — from the spicy, berry styles of Cameros to the richer, dark fruit Pinots of Russian River Valley and everything in between — a nagging fact for those who continue to hold up the more insular region of Burgundy as a neat template for California.

In reality, California is home to a half-dozen Burgundy wannabe regions, each of which possesses potential and limitations. Some of their shortcomings are inherent; some, such as boundaries, man-made. For instance, the borders for the Russian River Valley AVA were drawn 20 years ago by simply following



Accompanied by their pal "Sage," second- and third-generation winegrowers Joe and Tom Rochioli cultivate Russian River pinot noir that makes its way into the appellation's finest bottlings, including an outstanding eponymous rendition that the two craft themselves.

roadways, political borders and county lines. In 1999, the Russian River Valley Winegrowers (RRVW) proposed a boundary change to the BATF that will follow more accurately the historically identifiable borders of cool coastal fog, the single most important feature that sets the RRV apart from adjacent regions. According to the RRVW, the purpose of the proposed change is multifaceted: It will eliminate unnecessary overlaps with adjacent AVAs; it will remove areas that are not within the fog line, and annex adjacent areas that lie within the characteristic coastal cool fog line. A ruling on the petition is still pending.

Rod Berglund, president and winemaker for Joseph Swan Vineyards, and a former president of the RRVW, says the proposal to change the boundaries of the appellation "is one of the best things we've [the RRVW] ever done. It will mean that there is a real commonality in the wines."

Berglund cites climate as the key factor that separates the RRV from other pinot regions in California. "Because of our proximity to the ocean, we experience a long, gentle, mild growing season," he explains. "That means longer hang time for more flavor development without overripeness. Our long

growing season imparts desirable levels of natural acidity, softer and rounder tannins, and excellent texture, which is very important to Pinot Noir."

Pinpointing the contributions made by RRV's contrasting soils is more difficult. "We don't have the limestone soils, like in Burgundy," Berglund admits. "Instead, our soils are all over the board [from alluvial and erosion deposits, to decomposed volcanic ash and sandstone], so I'm not convinced that any one soil makes the best Pinot Noir. We have pure, Colodridge loamy soils with good drainage in our vineyards [at Joseph Swan], while Sarakee's Vineyard, which grows some wonderful RRV fruit, sits on a high water table," he says.

The *terroir* factors seem rosy enough, but what of the inevitable pitfalls associated with the variety? Berglund fears only the possibility of succumbing to a false sense of security. "Carmens has to deal with high winds, Burgundy has heavy rain and hail during harvest, but the Russian River Valley is free of these harsh conditions," he relates. "Because the growing conditions here are so good, we could become complacent," Berglund cautions, so the winemaker and grower must be in constant touch with the grapes and wines.

The pinot noir grape is famously finicky, both in the vineyard and the winery. And with the increasingly popular practice in California of striving for more flavor, resulting in higher alcohol in nearly all varietals, but especially in reds, we may be seeing another side of Pinot Noir — one that can't handle pushing the flavor envelope and alcohol levels the way, say, Zinfandel can. The practice is not universal, thus the wine buyer should decide if the extra measure of flavor intensity is worth the additional heat.

Farrell bemoans the current passion for more alcohol and extract. "Many California winemakers are falling into the same 'bigger is better' trap with Pinot Noir as many of us did in the '80s with Zinfandel and in the '90s with Chardonnay," he says. "I believe winemakers here can craft fully colored, flavored and textured wines without relying on overripe fruit or excessive extract. And I further believe that such wines will outlive wines made in the riper, more aggressive style."

RRV Pinot pioneer Davis Bynum emphasizes the grape more than the oak in his eponymous Pinots. "Rather than trying to make a full-bodied, high-alcohol wine that must be appreciated on its own



Left: Accolades are conferred upon Merry Edwards for her deft handling of pinot noir, both in the vineyard and the winery, where her exceedingly elegant Meredith Vineyard Estates Russian River Valley bottlings take their shape. Right: Joseph Swan Vineyards' Rod Berglund turns out brilliant, ruby-hued Pinots that showcase cherry-berry fruits from preferred Russian River vineyards.

because it would dominate a meal, we like to make a wine with a meal in mind," says Bynum, who, as long ago as 1973, was among the region's Pinot proponents.

It would appear that in the RRV, with its optimal set of conditions, the secret to producing a great bottle of Pinot Noir is literally right in front of your nose. Like Farrell, Bynum relies on multiple vineyards with a history of growing top-drawer pinot noir. Among his favorite sites are Lindleys' Knoll estate vineyard, the new joint agreement with Dutton Ranch in the Dutton-Thomas Road Vineyard and select blocks from the 161-acre Rochioli Vineyard, including East Block and Three Corner Vineyard.

The distinguished Rochioli Vineyard is a site whose name crops up frequently when discussing favored pinot sources with RRV winemakers.

In 1938, Joe Rochioli, Sr. purchased 130 acres of land along the Russian River and set about establishing one of the most prestigious vineyards in Sonoma County. Over the years, the Rochiolis expanded to 161 acres under vine, with 65 planted to pinot noir. In time, the land passed on to Joe Jr., who now shares responsibilities with his winemaking

son, Tom. Under the latter's stewardship, the name Rochioli has become as famous for its finished Pinot Noirs as for its prime fruit.

Merry Edwards is another name closely linked to the RRV. A Pinot Noir virtuoso with 25 years of winemaking experience, she favors the region's fruit for her "rooted-in-the-vineyard" style of winemaking. Aside from drawing from her own Meredith Vineyard, she sources RRV grapes from Windsor Garden and Klopp Ranch.

Known primarily as a consulting winemaker for such esteemed properties as Pellegrini and the Olivet Lane brand, Edwards founded Meredith Vineyard Estate in 1997 and has since devoted a great deal of time to developing her vineyard and polishing her already elegant Pinots. "These are exciting years for the variety," she says, "because we have the opportunity to raise Pinot Noir to a new level, particularly in the Russian River Valley where pinot noir excels."

The 24-acre Meredith Vineyard, located at the southern end of the RRV, is planted to a range of pinot noir clones, including some from Burgundy. The site offered the factors she deems necessary for growing exceptional pinot noir: good drainage,

proper exposure, orientation to the sun, microclimate and the classic Goldridge soils.

Once a site is staked out, selecting the best clones, a daunting task, provides the foundation for making great Pinot Noir. "While the Russian River Valley is highly regarded for its Pinot Noir, most vineyards within the appellation planted to the variety will never achieve greatness," Farrell contends, because of mismatches and misjudgments. And while this is true of any growing region and almost any variety, Farrell feels compelled to point out that the RRV appellation name on a bottle should not be perceived as a rubber stamp for fantastic Pinot Noir.

"Although some pinot noir growers go to great extremes to educate themselves on farming techniques and clones, it is difficult, indeed, to predict with any certainty if greatness will be achieved," he explains. "I can think of several growers within a mile or two of Rochioli, along Westside Road, who have planted excellent pinot noir clones on appropriate rootstocks who have nothing more than average pinot noir fruit to show for their efforts."

Although every last cluster of RRV pinot fruit may not be up to Farrell's standards, the variety has

made significant inroads here. And while the RRVW boasts that pinot noir is one of the region's most important varieties, the organization has no estimate of the total number of acres planted to pinot noir. At present, there are more than 10,000 acres of grapevines planted within the RRV boundaries under the auspices of 50 wineries and 200 growers. But in a recent release, MKF, the wine business advisory firm, stated that Napa-Cameros pinot noir is losing out to Sonoma pinot noir, most of which comes from the Russian River Valley: "Napa's principal, high-end pinot noir-growing region is Cameros, which has not had the success in recent years of Sonoma's Russian River Valley appellation."

Further evidence that the demand for Russian River Pinot Noir continues unabated is found in a recent poll of the nation's restaurants. In its 13th annual Restaurant Poll, *Wine & Spirits* magazine reported: "Restaurant diners discovered Russian River Pinot Noir this year, sending it to an 18.5 percent share of the variety's popularity points, that's up from 8.6 last year." Of the 13 most popular Pinot Noirs mentioned by those polled, three (La Crema, Merry Edwards and Frei Brothers) are from the Russian River Valley.

Those interested in conducting their own poll should look for Russian River Valley Pinot Noir from specialists such as Davis Bynum, De Loach, Dry Creek Vineyard, Dutton-Goldfield, Gary Farrell, Foppiano, Hartford Court, Iron Horse, Joseph Swan, Keegan Cellars, Kistler, La Crema, Marimar Torres Estate, Merry Edwards, Rochioli, Rodney Strong, Rutz Cellars and Williams-Selyem. Because some of these wineries are small, securing their highly coveted bottlings may present a challenge in some markets, especially for the range of single vineyard Pinot Noirs, but all are worth a search.

If you nurture a passion for Pinot Noir and are willing to cast off the dubious notion of replicating Burgundy in California, there is much drinking pleasure to be had in an impressive range of bottlings bearing the Russian River Valley appellation. ☞

TASTING BAR

The wealth of Russian River Valley Pinot Noir bottlings makes any tasting both easy and difficult: easy because the wines are such a pleasure to taste; difficult because selecting the requisite number for review leaves out many worth trying.

Because I do not endorse numerical scores for wines, I've used a *BuyLine*-based "word score" that indicates a range of quality.

The eleven wines that follow were not tasted blind. Their alcohol strengths range from 13.3 to 14.2 percent. Prices reflect current retail for the newly released wines, while those affixed to the older vintages were suggested retail at the time of release.

Davis Bynum, 2000 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley — \$30: Brilliant medium-ruby color. Upfront aromas of smoky oak and subtle cherry-berry fruit. Lovely silky texture with flavors of Bing cherry,

vanilla, spice and steeped tea notes. *Very Good*

Davis Bynum, 1998 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley — \$30: Bright medium-ruby color with faint violet edges. Developed aromas of bright black cherry and spice. Full black fruit flavors accented by notes of spice and vanilla. Rich texture, good length and balanced acidity. *Outstanding*

Gary Farrell, 1999 Pinot Noir, Rochioli Vineyard, Russian River Valley — \$60: Deep ruby color. Forward nose of violets and black cherry with a whisp of black tea. Intense, well-defined ripe flavors of plum and cherry with hints of spice. Silky texture; good length. *Outstanding*

Gary Farrell, 1997 Pinot Noir, Rochioli Vineyard, Russian River Valley — \$60: Bright, deeply hued ruby color. Upfront black cherry aromas with wisps of smoky oak. Complex flavors of black cherry, steeped tea and spice box. Smooth texture; lingering nuances of spice and fruit. *Superb*

Joseph Swan Vineyards, 1999 Pinot Noir, Trenton Estate Vineyard, Russian River Valley — \$42: Brilliant medium-ruby color. Bright cherry-berry aromas with a vanillin back note and zesty bursts of fruit. Silky texture with black cherry fruit and hints of spice and vanilla. Long, silky finish. *Outstanding*

Joseph Swan Vineyards, 1996 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley — \$35: Medium-deep ruby color. Lovely bouquet of violets and black cherry with whiffs of sweet spice. Deeply set flavors of black cherry, boiled beet and spice. Soft, supple texture; long, complex finish. *Superb*

Merry Edwards, 1999 Pinot Noir, Olivet Lane, Russian River Valley — \$46: Deep ruby color. Inviting aromas of dark cherry with wisps of clove. Supple flavors of sweet, dark plum and cherry accented with notes of anise. Great texture; great length. *Outstanding*

Merry Edwards, 1998 Pinot Noir, Olivet Lane, Russian River Valley — \$46: Medium-deep ruby color. Attractive cherry-berry aromas mingle with black tea scents. Big, concentrated flavors of dark-skinned fruit imbued with upfront tannins. Medium texture; tannins linger over sufficient fruit. *Very Good*

Rochioli, 2000 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley — \$40: Medium-deep ruby color. Elegant aromas of black cherry and plum with whiffs of smoky oak and spice. Forward, ripe, cherry-berry flavors with enticing notes of smoked bacon and vanilla. Smooth texture; good length. *Outstanding*

Williams-Selyem, 2000 Pinot Noir, Allen Vineyard, Russian River Valley — \$68: Medium-deep ruby color. Deep-set, dark fruit aromas. Richly textured flavors of black cherry, anise, berry and spice with a hint of roasted coffee. Smooth texture; long, balanced finish. *Outstanding*

Williams-Selyem, 1998 Pinot Noir, Allen Vineyard, Russian River Valley — \$60: Medium-deep ruby color. Complex flavors of fresh black cherry, coffee-toffee notes, smoky oak, anise and vanilla. Great length and texture. *Outstanding*

Contributing Editor Gerald D. Boyd is the staff wine writer for The San Francisco Chronicle.

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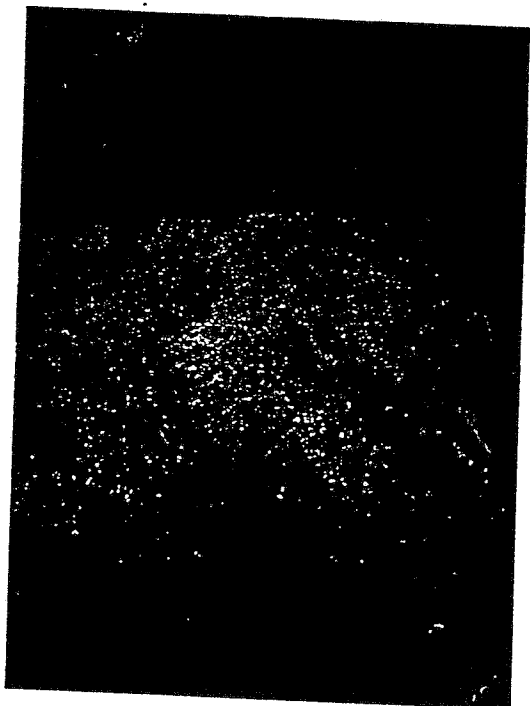
BEHIND AMERICA'S MOST DISTINGUISHED WHITE WINES

BY GERALD ASHER

Even when disguised by an overlay of oak and residual sugar, it's difficult to hide completely the elegantly lean structure of a Carneros Chardonnay, the suave power of Chardonnay from the Westside Road area of the Russian River Valley, or the fruity exuberance of one from the Alexander Valley. The acreage of Chardonnay in Sonoma County was surpassed by that in Monterey a year ago, but no other California area is producing wines from this grape with anything like the same diversity and distinction. Incursions of the ocean in ages past, volcanic eruptions, and a massive tremor that probably diverted the course of the Russian River left Sonoma with an abrupt topography, a tangle of soils, and a shifting marine influence that affect its wines in ways that growers are only now beginning to appreciate and master.

Sonoma is where winegrowing in northern California began, but Chardonnay has a short history there. Until the 1980s this was still predominantly red-wine country. One could say the turning point was in 1976, the year in which Chateau St. Jean released its first single-vineyard bottling of the 1975 Robert Young Vineyard Chardonnay. The county had little more than nine hundred acres of the variety actually bearing fruit in 1975; by 1997 there were well over fourteen thousand. Chardonnay is now as emblematic of Sonoma County as Cabernet Sauvignon is of Napa.

An early impetus for Chardonnay's ascension in the region came in 1953, when James D. Zellerbach, a former U.S. ambassador to Italy and an ardent admirer of the wines of Burgundy, established a vineyard and winery—Hanzell—on the south flank of the Mayacamas Mountains just a few miles from the Sonoma town plaza. He wanted to produce wines that could be poured without embarrass-



ment alongside the great growths, red and white, of the Côte d'Or.

Zellerbach had deep pockets and though his winery was modest in scale it was expensively equipped. Its Burgundian demeanor extended to a cellar filled with French oak barrels. Everyone uses French oak now, but at that time California winemakers used cooperage made of redwood, and, to a lesser extent, of American oak. The locals thought the imported barrels an unwarranted extravagance. But Zellerbach was a man who understood that perfection in all things, and especially in wine, depends on taking pains over details.

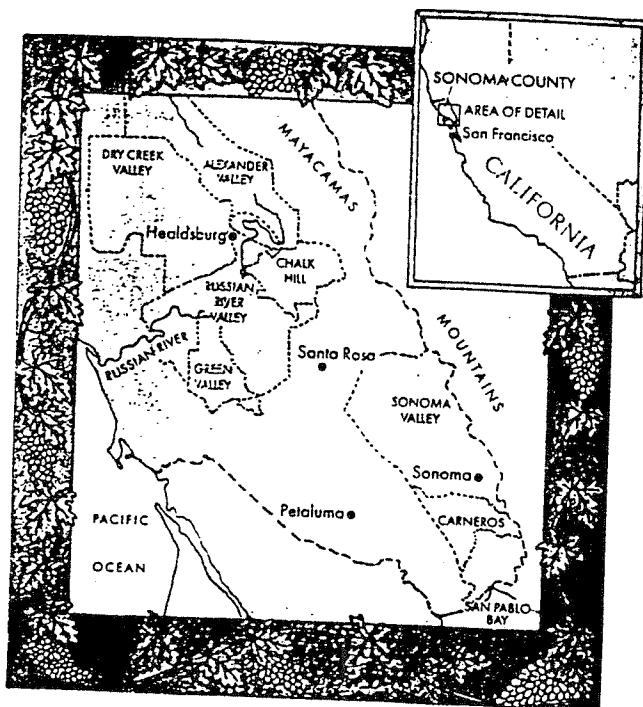
His first vines, both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, were washed away in a storm. The first crop of those planted to replace them was harvested in 1957, and when the Chardonnay began to trickle out a couple of years later the response was sheer astonishment. For the first time, it seemed, California had produced a wine with characteristics reminiscent of the white

wines of the Côte de Beaune. The role of those French oak barrels became a matter of much speculation. Eventually, as we all know, Zellerbach's innovation was widely emulated, and the result was a sea change in our perception of Chardonnay in California.

Zellerbach died in 1963, just as the winery was hitting its stride. But his achievements encouraged others. Throughout the sixties, the University of California's county farm advisor, Bob Sisson, urged growers in northern Sonoma to plant Chardonnay. Charles Bacigalupi—whose vines in the Westside Road area of the Russian River Valley contributed grapes to the 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay that placed first in the notorious Franco-California taste-off in 1976—remembers how Sisson approached him. "At the time I'd never heard of Chardonnay," he revealed to me a couple of years ago. "When I went to Karl Wente [of Wente Bros.] looking for budwood, I had a hard time remembering the name of the variety I was supposed to be asking for."

Robert Young was growing prunes in the Alexander Valley when Sisson persuaded him to turn a hayfield into a vineyard. "I got my first grapes from it in 1966," he told me in 1994. "Two tons to the acre—very good for a first crop. You get that much fruit from prune trees only when they're mature, and at the time both grapes and prunes were selling for \$300 to \$350 a ton. Then when we started to have some problems with the aging prune trees on the valley floor, I didn't hesitate. I pulled them out, and in 1967 I planted Chardonnay in their place."

It was from those vines that Richard Arrowood, then winemaker at Chateau St. Jean, produced that 1975, a wine so voluptuous it turned the world on its ear. "Our 1974 Alexander Valley had been made from a blend of Robert Young grapes and grapes grown at Belle Terre,



a vineyard about a mile and half down the valley toward Healdsburg," he told me. "Belle Terre had been planted with cuttings taken from Robert Young's vines, so they were genetically similar if not identical. They were cultivated in the same fashion and at the winery there was no difference in the way we handled their fruit. Yet the wines we produced from these two vineyards had characteristics that made them totally distinct. In particular, there was a remarkably lush quality about the fruit in the Robert Young wine. When the French have vineyards with unique qualities like that, they protect them. They wouldn't blend Meursault-Charmes with Chevalier-Montrachet. That's why we decided to make a single-vineyard bottling."

The impact of the Robert Young wine, and, doubtless, the success of Chateau Montelena in Paris at about the same time, led to the release of other single-vineyard Sonoma Chardonnays. The status of the variety went up. And so did the prices, providing a greater incentive for growers to plant more of it.

In an effort to get behind the stylistic wraps to some of the essential differences among Sonoma Chardonnays, I made a series of visits to the area. I wanted to compare, for example, wines grown in Green Valley, close to the ocean and one of the county's coolest areas, with those from the upper Dry Creek Valley, one of the warmest. I hoped to get a better grip on characteristics imposed by red volcanic clay on the Sonoma Valley hill-

freshly lively, a discreet acidity giving it a lift while reinforcing its long, mature flavor.

Gundlach-Bundschu's Chardonnay vineyard was planted thirty years ago and lies right up against a boundary that separates Sonoma Valley from Carneros. Not far from the Rhinefarm the Sonoma and Carneros AVAs (American Viticultural Areas) actually overlap. Several growers inside the area included in both appellations have the right to choose either or both of them for their wines—a rather clear indication that no one is sure exactly where the division between them should be. Soils rarely change abruptly; they merge. And the microclimates that affect vine growth and grape flavor are seldom in exact step with soil changes anyway.

Jim Bundschu, however, knows where he stands on the issue. "We simply don't belong in Carneros," he told me. "Instead of their clay hardpan, we have clay loam here mixed with limestone scree carried down from the Mayacamas. It's soil with a light texture that drains well and warms up early in the spring. The vineyard can be breezy, but it's sheltered from the kind of winds that blow across Carneros every afternoon. That's why our Chardonnay, though just as delicate, is different from theirs. It's low-key when young and we're careful to do as little as possible to it at that stage beyond seeing it safely through fermentation. But it ages well. These days, that's not what's expected. Most Chardonnay

sides, sandy loam on the Santa Rosa plain, gravel beds in the Alexander Valley, and white volcanic ash—it's not chalk at all—on Chalk Hill.

I began at lunch with Jim Bundschu of the Gundlach-Bundschu winery. Sea bass on a bed of black beans and braised collard greens was delicious with Gundlach-Bundschu's 1990 Sonoma Valley Rhinefarm Chardonnay. Though some would argue for 1994, 1990 was probably the best vintage for Chardonnay in the county in the last decade, and the Rhinefarm wine was both soft and re-

is made to be consumer-friendly as soon as it's bottled rather than consumer-interesting later. As a result, you get a wine that's put together in the winery rather than produced in the vineyard."

David Noyes, the winemaker at Kunde Estate Winery, farther up Sonoma Valley, had arranged an extensive tasting to show me how Kunde shifts emphasis from style to character as it moves from its estate wines to its single-vineyard selections. "We try to preserve character in all our wines," he told me. "But in the estate wines we introduce more of those elements of style—oak, malolactic fermentation, and so on—that many consumers like. In the single-vineyard wines we take a more purist approach. There wouldn't otherwise be much point in taking the trouble to bottle a wine from a unique site. But even then, we introduce, with discretion, some malolactic fermentation [a secondary fermentation that softens the wine and reduces its acidity]. We're lucky in this valley: We have good acidity and we always have full fruit flavor. So we can afford to temper our wines with malolactic to some degree and make them more subtle, more mysterious."

Kunde's wines also have good structure, though they are always soft and approachable. The vineyards in this part of the valley are warmer than those closer to Carneros. The wines have impeccable balance: They are silky, harmonious, and complete.

Sonoma-Cutrer, a winery that produces only Sonoma Chardonnay, has one of its two most distinguished vineyards in the lower part of the valley. Les Pierres is on the lowest part of the slope of Sonoma Mountain, just across the valley from Gundlach-Bundschu. The other important vineyard, The Cutrer, surrounds the winery west of Santa Rosa in the Russian River Valley.

"The vines at Les Pierres are planted on a rocky, gravelly mix that drains well and allows the roots to go down," Brice Cutrer Jones, Sonoma-Cutrer's president, told me. "Weather arrives there from the Pacific through gaps in the Sonoma Mountains. The Cutrer vineyard, in the way of that same flow of marine air but less protected from the fog, is cooler."

Both of these vineyards give wines that are—like those of Gundlach-Bundschu—rather reserved when young. When I tasted a series of them with Sonoma-Cutrer's winemaker, Terry Adams, they had me thinking of stones rather than fruits and

flowers. Les Pierres presents itself immediately: it's all about structure and balance—very much Sonoma Valley characteristics. The Cutrer wines have more depth and more power, but less refinement. Tasting several lots from the two sites, I saw how choice of clone—subvarieties of Chardonnay—age of vines, and date of picking also affect the wine, sometimes to so great an extent that it was difficult to believe that all the lots from a single vineyard had indeed originated in the same place.

"Fog flows up the Russian River Valley just as it spreads over the water of San Francisco Bay," Jones said, "and burns off quickly in June and July. But it hangs around longer each day as the equinox approaches and the sun recedes to the south. It's a marine layer that stays close to the ground and never rises above eight hundred feet. That's why we made that contour the limit of the Sonoma Coast AVA, an appellation that exists parallel to and encompassing others in the county. It's intended to define the zone within which fog keeps us cool at night, whatever the day's temperatures might have been."

Sonoma's marine fog begins to make an impact in August at about the time the grapes turn color. That's also when the crucial phase of ripening begins. The grapes accumulate sugar, flavor develops in the skins, and the vine breaks down acids, using them as a source of energy. At low temperatures—usually below 50 degrees Fahrenheit—the vine functions minimally, so sites with low night temperatures tend to retain high acidity. Warm days combined with cool nights therefore usually give fruit with ripe flavors, high sugar, and a refreshing acidity. It's what every winegrower hopes for. Cool days and cold nights give low sugars, pinched flavor, and high acidity—the typical result of a poor vintage. Warm days and warm nights, on the other hand, give high sugars, a generous flavor, and low acidity: a prescription for forward, even seductive, wines that do not usually age very well.

Marcello Monticelli, director of winemaking, and Bob Bertheau, winemaker, at Gallo of Sonoma set up a tasting that began with a range of 1998 Sonoma Chardonnays to illustrate some of the basic differences among them. First there was the lean structure and low profile of a 1998 Carneros, followed, in sharp contrast, by the big aroma and creamy—almost viscous—texture of a blend from the warm

upper sections of the Dry Creek and Alexander valleys. Next we tasted a Dry Creek Chardonnay that had been fermented in an old and well-used barrel. Though not nearly as full-blown as the blend had been, it had a ripe flavor and displayed an edge of good, clean acidity. Then came a sample of the same wine fermented in new oak. What a surprise that was. The wood itself was no more in evidence than that of the old barrel had been, but everything else about the wine was both intensified and integrated. The flavor was enhanced and the character of the wine was buttressed. Neither was overwhelmed.

Like Sonoma-Cutrer, Gallo of Sonoma has two Chardonnay vineyards of particular distinction: Laguna Ranch, in a cool area of the Russian River Valley ("In a site like that," I was told, "we're farming sunlight. Everything depends on getting the trellising right, the canopy in balance"), and Stefani, in the much warmer upper Dry Creek Valley. The Stefani Chardonnay makes a big impression but leaves little to remember. The Laguna Ranch (the best of which goes into the Estate Chardonnay), on the other hand, is brighter and fresher and leaves a typically Russian River impression of power and elegance.

Chalk Hill Estates's vineyard is in a section of the Russian River Valley as distinct for its soils as it is for its climate. It was thereabouts that some mighty cataclysm turned the region topsy-turvy, creating hills and canyons that marine fog rarely penetrates. So, though cooler than the Alexander Valley, it's warmer than the rest of the Russian River Valley and the wines have a character all their own.

Bill Knuttel, Chalk Hill's winemaker, and Mark Lingenfelder, the vineyard manager, offered me a vertical selection of the winery's Chardonnays from the years 1990 to 1997 so that I could see how the vineyard—the area—comes through no matter the weather. Recent vintages in California have presented winemakers with extremes: It was cold in 1995; there was rain on the bloom in 1996, followed by heat spikes late in the season; and rain just before harvest in 1997.

Brice Jones had said to me earlier that Chardonnay is particularly responsive to a winemaker's technique. "It's easy to overwhelm the wine's character with your own style," he said. "The winemaker's contribution should be no more than a personal thumbprint."

Knuttel went further. "There's pressure on a winemaker to let style take

precedence over both character and vintage," he said. "Certain styles will make a quick impression, grab the ratings, and get the sales. The wine could have come from anywhere." Which is why many Chardonnays are so predictable, of course. But the imprint of vintage and the particular character of Chalk Hill—plump and smooth, a hint of lime, an effusiveness—came through in every one of Knuttel's wines.

That same effusiveness and creamy texture mark the Chalk Hill wines of Rodney Strong. "Lemon-cream" is the way winemaker Rick Sayre described it. Sayre put together a horizontal tasting of 1998s with samples that ranged from the winery's vineyards on Chalk Hill and on both sides of the Russian River to wines made from grapes from one of the Murphy Ranch vineyards in the Alexander Valley.

The way in which acidity dropped as one went east from the lower sections of the Russian River Valley to Chalk Hill and on to the Alexander Valley was obvious. But other factors also affected the differences among those wines, some originating in the vineyards (again, the selection of clones had a noticeable effect) and some in the cellar (particularly the age of the barrels and the use of malolactic fermentation).

The question of clones—and of density of planting, management of leaf canopy, and yield—came up again when I tasted with Marimar Torres the 1996 and 1997 Chardonnays from her Don Miguel vineyard in Green Valley. The wines had all the delicacy one would expect from the vineyard's cool proximity to the Pacific, but they were also impressively intense. "It's all a matter of the clones you plant, the arrangement of the vineyard, how you prune, when you pick," Torres said. "More than half of what's in a glass of wine is viticulture."

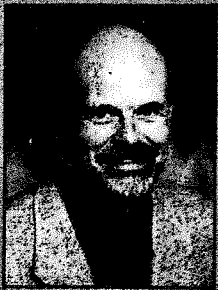
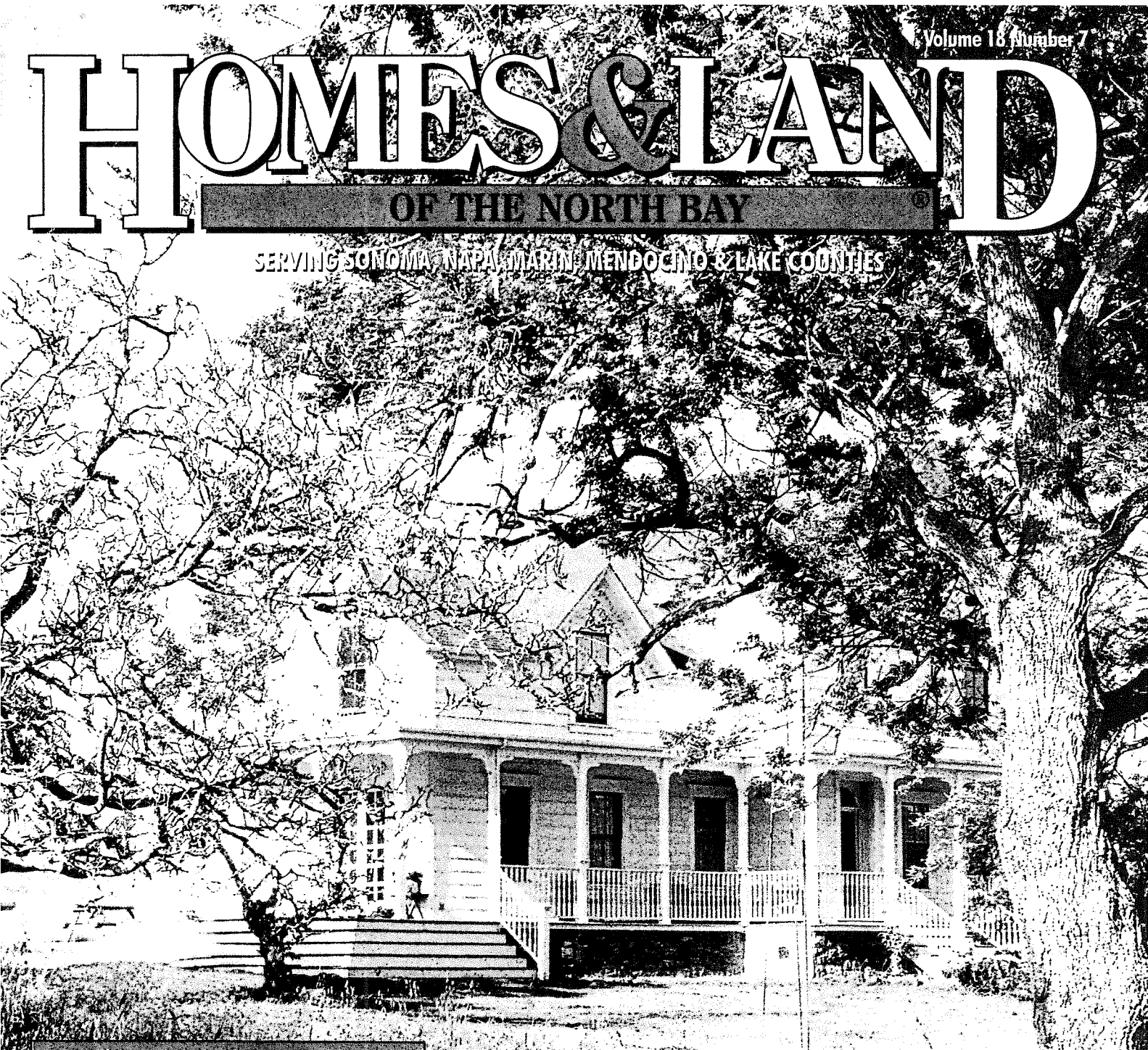
"Theories and formulas don't count for much: You must constantly respond to the vine and the conditions of the growing season. In the cellar everything must be done with moderation. If you can actually taste oak, or malolactic, or anything else, it's too much. Winemaking is like cooking: You must enhance the raw materials, not overwhelm them."

I asked her to define for me the *character* of her wine, as opposed to its style and its quality. That, after all, was the basis of my quest. She paused for a moment. "First," she said thoughtfully, "you'll have to tell me exactly where you think one ends and the others begin." □

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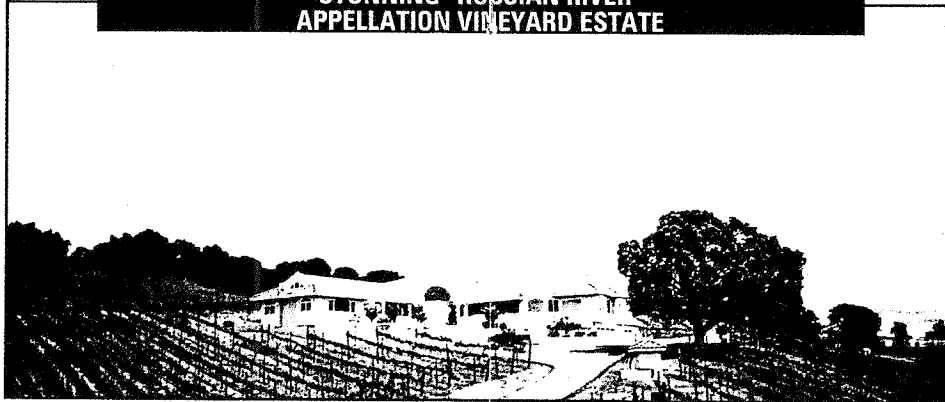
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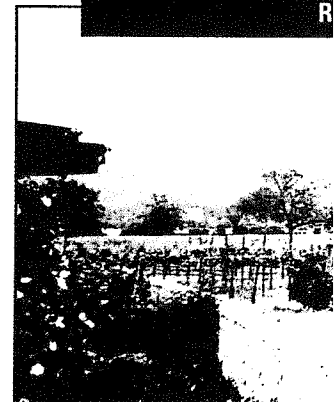
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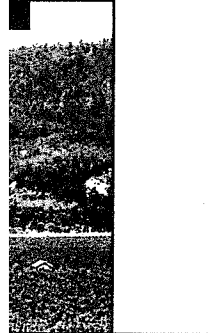
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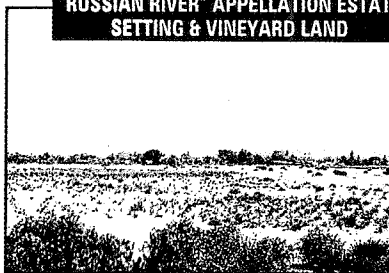
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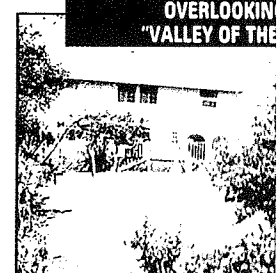
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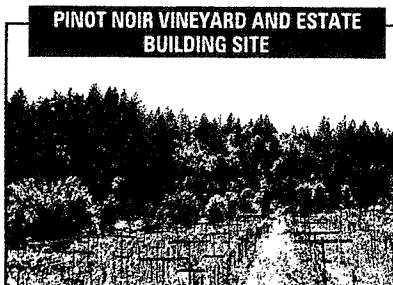


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