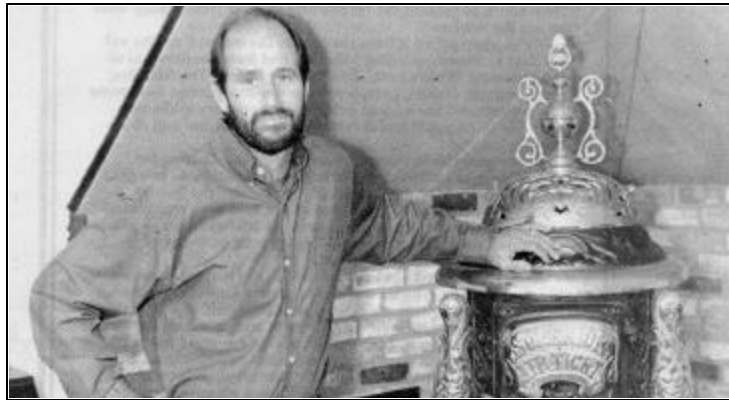


# BECKSTOFFER/Growers and vintners are in this together

by Andrew Beckstoffer

There is trouble in paradise in 1993. Crops are down, grape prices are falling, wine prices and winery profitability are sluggish, uncertain environmentalism and



urbanization pressure continue...

But then again, the Napa Valley and our lifestyles here are as close to paradise as it gets in this life. Living in the outdoors in this beautiful place, working in your own vineyards and being part of a dynamic wine adventure is as much as we could ask. We have problems in the 1990s but

they too will pass as they did in the 1970s and 1980s.

Can you remember 1974 when the per ton price of cabernet sauvignon dropped from \$810 (1973) to \$343? We hadn't yet recovered from the spring frost of 1970 or 1972 or the harvest rain of 1972. Remember the Pierce's Disease epidemic? People said the valley would be urbanized within ten years, so why fight it! Agriculture was on its way out! Major double digit inflation was just beginning...

But do you know how many of the now great Napa valley wineries were first begun in the 1970s? There were quite a few!

Can you remember 1983 when the price of both cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay grapes dropped almost 10 percent as the cabernet crop decreased 20 percent? Remember the forecast of the effects of the Eutypa fungus or whatever it was? People said the valley would be urbanized within ten years, so why fight it! Agriculture was on its way out! Our country was just over a major economic recession...

But do you long for the glorious days of the 1980s wine business that followed?

History is a great teacher! In the 1860s, Sonoma was the premier grape growing county but it was hit with phylloxera first and hard. Napa took over the top spot with increased grape and wine quality and Napa Valley promotion. We have never relinquished that position. John Pachett and George Crane and others were the grape growers and Charles Krug and George Yount were the early winemakers and promoters. Superior grape quality and persistent Napa Valley winery and vineyard promotion got us here and it is the only thing that will keep us on top. Napa Valley quality and Napa Valley promotion! Out-of-county grapes and tourist or processing profits can't be the primary focus. We must upgrade our grape quality and create national and international markets for our wine...not simply tourist trade.

Our 1993 mix of ills is different than in the past but no less or more serious. If you are of that mind, it is easy to breed "doom and gloom." I am not! Our grapegrowers are stronger today. Our vineyards have tremendous potential. Our wineries have seen the light! We have just got to stick with it!

Our grapegrowers are stronger: the Napa Valley Grape Growers Association and

several growers on their own have worked hard, have become more knowledgeable in industry and community affairs and have been somewhat fearless and vocal in presenting their concerns for the agriculture community and its place and rights. In many agricultural communities there is an unspoken class system that deems the processor (vintner) first, the producer (grower) second, and the farmworker third. The social, economic and political status of the Napa grapegrower is much improved in 1993. It is now okay to be "just a grapegrower." Our city and county governments now understand the part we play and the knowledge and experience we bring to Napa affairs. The vintners show increased interest and concern for the grower's view. We have shown ourselves to be good businessmen, effective politicians and concerned citizens and the entire community has responded. The grapegrower community has truly become an important resource for the valley and the wine business and we are all stronger for it.

Our vineyards have tremendous potential: no one in the world seriously doubts that our valley and our vineyards are among the top five in the wine world. The vineyards are the family jewels. We growers and vintners are just passing through. The phylloxera infestation, while very serious, will not be fatal—as past epidemics have not been.

We still have away to go to dig out of this one, but overall the future is bright. Sustainable (organic) agriculture practices and new shade (canopy) management techniques offer the real, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for simultaneously improving the quality and quantity of winegrapes. Sustainable agriculture practices, not necessarily *certified* organic farming, can bring renewed life to our soils and our vineyards. Proper light intrusion through modern canopy management can bring increased quality and tonnage. The worldwide status of our entire wine effort has never been higher relative to the rest of the world's producers. We have risen to those heights in major part on the back of new technologies in the vineyard and in the wineries. We are well into the next revolution of even greater wine quality that will come from the vineyards and we will be even stronger.

Our wineries have seen the light: there are more than 200 Napa county wineries and as a group they are the best in the world. They produce some of the finest wine in the world. They are the finest wine marketers in the world. The rule in many grape growing areas is that winery-owned vineyards are generally the most poorly maintained. There are many notable exceptions to that rule in Napa. There has been, however, too many non-Napa grapes coming into our valley. Further, in the past, not enough marketing emphasis has been given to the Napa Valley location of the vineyards. The Napa Winery Definition Ordinance of 1989 provides that winery expansions outside the existing "footprint" — and all new wineries — must crush at least 75 percent Napa grapes. Frank Prial, noted wine writer for the *New York Times*, wrote at the time, "At the heart of the controversy is nothing less than the future of the Valley as the country's most prestigious wine region." He was right...but we passed the test.

In the 1970s and 1980s we needed rapid new winery development. In the 1990s we still welcome new wineries but, more importantly, we need greater emphasis on Napa Valley wines from Napa Valley grapes. Most wineries have joined the growers in this sentiment. Further, a major shift in wine marketing emphasis is occurring. The wineries have importantly increased their emphasis on the contribution of the grape and vineyard to the quality of the wine. History has shown that the more premium the wine, the more it is sold based on where the grapes are grown! The wineries are increasing their emphasis on Napa Valley grapes and vineyards now and our val

