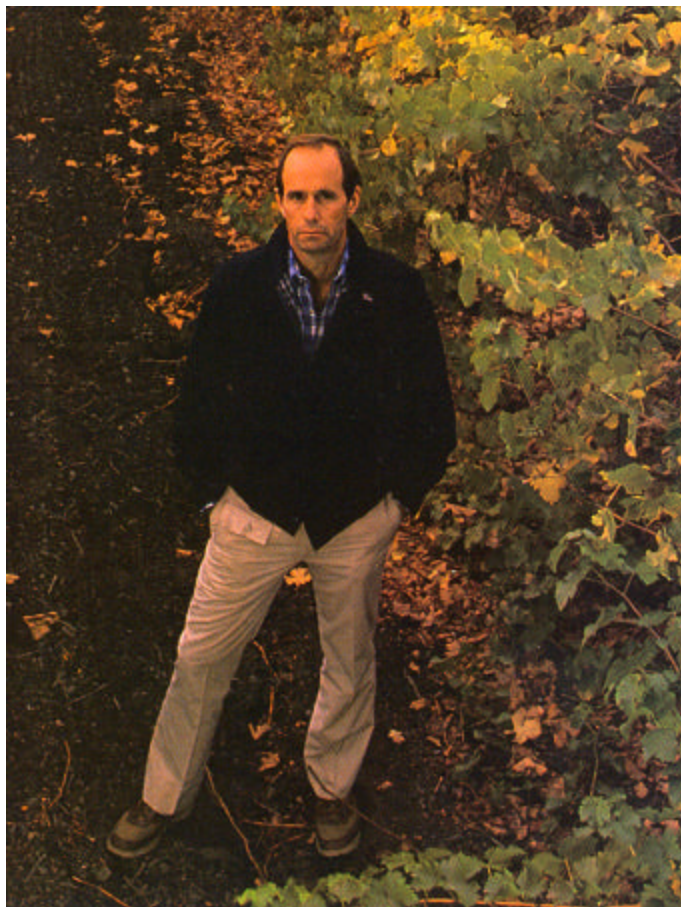


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A Very CIVIL WAR

After conquering Europe, the new nobility of Napa returned to a valley divided against itself. At stake: the future of the world's premier winegrowing region.

By Moira Johnston



Paris, October 14, 1988. Black-tied Robert Mondavi, founder of Napa Valley's Mondavi Winery, and his wife, Margrit, are greeted by photographers as they step from their limousine at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The occasion is a gala seventieth-birthday concert for conductor Leonard Bernstein, a benefit for Paris's American Center. It is a celebration for Mondavi, too. Tonight, his \$50-a-bottle cabernet, Opus One—the product of a historic joint venture between Mondavi and the late Baron Philippe de Rothschild—makes its French debut. Earlier that week, the wine had been introduced to the wine community and press at a dinner in the cellar at Mouton-Rothschild. Now society turns out to applaud. It seems that not just *le tout* Paris but *le tout* Napa Valley is here to celebrate. Emerging from accompanying limos are Mondavi's sons, Tim and Michael, and their wives. Inside, the Mondavis wave to Napa friends Erica and Austin Hills of Grgich Hills, vineyardist Michael Marston and his wife, Sande, and Newton

Vineyard's Peter Newton with his daughter, over from London. Crossing paths in Paris is almost routine for the globe-girdling Napa wine people. After the concert, they all move on to a supper for Bernstein at the Hotel Plaza Athène where, with the *filets de loup* and *noisettes d'agneau*, only Mondavi wines are served.

London, October 18 Mondavi is in black tie again, in the members' dining room of the House of Commons. This time the occasion is the International Wine and Spirits Competition; Mondavi is presenting the Robert Mondavi Award for Winemaker of the Year. He shares the head table with Warren Winiarski, the Napa Valley vintner whose Stag's Leap Wine Cellars cabernet beat Mouton Rothschild in the now-legendary 1976 Bicentennial tasting in Paris. Just back from an expedition to Pakistan in search of primordial grapevines, Winiarski is receiving the Harry Waugh Trophy for his ambitious 1986 Reserve chardonnay. Thousands of miles from their little valley, the two winemakers savor the moment of triumph: in less than two decades, they have helped create wines that rank, as Mondavi had dreamed, "in the company of the finest in the world."

Napa, October 26 Mondavi and Winiarski have returned from Europe to a valley in tumult.

Two weeks before the general election, Mondavi is part of an extraordinary political meeting at the Clarion Inn. More than 600 winery workers from the valley's 200 wineries—secretaries, cellar rats, viticulturalists, tour guides, winemakers and winery owners—overflow the chairs; Mondavi finds himself sitting cross-legged on the floor. There are balloons, hot dogs and a Dixieland band.

But the mood is hostile, not festive. The winemakers are bitterly divided over the positions of Board of Supervisors candidates seated on the podium. Two of the candidates, John Mikolajcik and Fred Negri, are running on platforms that would permit virtually untrammled growth and development for the wineries. The other two, Kathleen McCullough and Jay Goetting, are moderates and slow-growthers.

What makes the meeting unprecedented is that the Napa Valley Vintners—the powerful body of winery owners that dominates the valley's economy and culture—have broken with their tradition of political neutrality and endorsed the pro-growth candidates. This would be shocking in itself; adding insult to injury—at least according to some members of the Clarion Inn crowd—is that the endorsement has been made without approval of the Vintners' board. (The Vintners' president, Reverdy Johnson of Turnbull-Johnson Winery claims his mandate to recommend candidates did not require board approval.) In choosing Mikolajcik and Negri, Johnson had applied only one criterion: support for the laissez-faire policies proposed in a Vintners' position paper on winery freedoms and restraints. This had alienated fellow winemakers such as Winiarski, Jay Corley of Monticello Winery and Michael Martini of Louis Martini Winery. "My worry is that this is pretty short-range thinking," Martini told the Napa Register. "I know this is not unanimous."

In fact, the reaction is so urgent and immediate that Johnson changed the agenda from an endorsement of Mikolajcik and Negri to an open forum for the four candidates. But the damage has been done. As the meeting makes clear, Napa Valley is caught in a crisis of its own success, in which the issues—freedom versus restraint, quality versus quantity, production versus marketing, elitism versus egalitarianism—are as complex and subtle as any of the valley's premium vintages. But unlike the famous wine, this spirit is bitter and fractious. This time, the fertile valley is harvesting a civil war, a war whose outcome will determine the future of the world's premier winegrowing region.

With 31,000 acres planted to grapes, the Napa Valley ranks only fifth among California's winegrowing counties. (The Central Valley, where E&J Gallo headquarters its gigantic operation, is the statistical leader.) But in terms of quality—premium varietal wines named for grapes such as Cabernet and Chardonnay—Napa Valley's stature far outstrips its size. Situated 50 miles north of San Francisco in the northern half of Napa County, the 30-mile-long valley is a lush and gentle Eden that has attracted not only such huge corporations as Seagram's and Nestle, which are buying large wineries, but small wineries founded by families lured by the satisfactions of rural life. The valley is also a magnet for the Bay Area's social trendsetters, who have taken to spending their weekends and celebrating their significant life events in its green and golden landscape.

Forty-five years ago, when the original Napa Valley Vintners formed the fellowship, neither civil war nor international acclaim would have seemed imaginable. Competitors united by their love of the land and of the good life that winemaking represented, the Vintners met in the little red schoolhouse on Lodi Lane in St. Helena for friendly monthly lunches where they traded advice, equipment and stories. Gradually, as their fame and numbers swelled, they outgrew the schoolhouse. In 1983 they moved their meetings to St. Helena's stylish Meadowood Country Club and Resort, where the casual get-togethers were replaced by formal meetings in the plush auditorium, followed by catered meals in the Vintners Room overlooking the golf course. More and more often, the winery owners themselves could not even attend in person, so busy were they with travels in the global marketplace. The valley's success meant profits, but it also brought division.

The first battles were fought in 1968, over the creation of the nation's first Agricultural Preserve. The accord established a 40-acre zoning minimum, embedded in the county's General Plan, to protect the ag land on the valley floor from subdivision. But the arrangement was tenuous and reversible, no more secure than next Tuesday's vote of the Board of Supervisors.

The late sixties also saw the rise of the "boutique" wineries and the beginnings of Napa Valley chic. By 1978 there were 60 wineries in the valley; over the next decade, an average of one new winery a month was approved by the county. Today there are 204 wineries in all, 110 of them members of the Napa Valley Vintners, still the valley's most influential fraternity. The Vintners control two-thirds of the county's vineyards and 30 percent of the valley's total employment; in 1987 their wines generated \$669 million in "gross economic output."

But with the boom has come dissension and controversy. Napa Valley is an agricultural anomaly situated at the outskirts of the expanding San Francisco Bay Area. The critical year will be 1991, when the Napa Valley will be prodded by the state and the Association of Bay Area Governments to raise its controlled 1 percent yearly growth to the state average of 2 ½ percent. As land values increase, the "highest and best use of the land is subdivision," says a worried Volker Eisele, the conservationist president of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association. "In economic terms, agriculture will lose if it has to compete with houses."

Napa Valley agriculture, however, is not Iowa agriculture; there is more to winemaking than growing grapes and processing them. Indeed, "there's been a shift in emphasis from the production of wine to the marketing of it," says Barbara Winiarski, co-owner of Stag's Leap Cellars. She deplors the proliferation of souvenir stores, museums, shopping and entertainment centers and other nonwine uses that diminish the precious agricultural land and threaten to turn the valley into Disneyland north. "There is the recognition that the wineries themselves are a threat to agriculture—that we don't have any principles of limitations," says June Foote, who, through the Land Trust, has saved "5,000 acres of Napa Valley land nobody can screw up."

Meanwhile, a growing "neo-prohibitionist" movement threatens the wine community from without. The World Health Organization has set a goal of reducing all alcohol consumption by 25 percent by the year 2000, and organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving have picked up the banner in the strongest temperance movement since the 1930s. Signs at the entrances to winery tasting rooms now warn pregnant women of the risk of birth defects from drinking. The new mood is reflected in sales figures: wine sales and per capita consumption that had climbed steadily since World War II have plateaued, and even declined by 1.6 percent over the last two years.

An angry Bob Mondavi has taken up the defense; he is spending half a million dollars to mount a public relations campaign called the Mission Program that gathers sociologists, physicians and historians to celebrate wine's ancient social role. Ever since he broke from his family's winery, Charles Krug, in 1966, he has messianically and single-mindedly pursued his goals of promoting table wine as a healthy, daily part of the American lifestyle and achieving the quality that has gained world recognition for the valley's wines. Now, at an age when most men would be resting on their laurels, he feels compelled to lead the counterattack on the neoprohibitionists.

The most heated clash, however, is an internecine one, between the vintners and the independent growers, who control 15 percent of the grape acreage. The opening salvo was fired in 1985, when outgoing Planning Commission chairman Jay Corley mandated the commission to answer the question, "What is a winery?" Until then, the county had relied on wineries to use "reasonable restraint and common sense" in conforming to the county's official vision of its future, the General Plan, which names preservation of agricultural land as its highest obligation. The county had already gone much further than Webster's definition—"a winemaking establishment"—but it has not dealt with all the wineries' new marketing activities. The current county definition, last refined in 1981, "says nothing about cooking schools or concerts," says James Hickey director of Napa County's planning department. An Agricultural Advisory Council was formed and later disbanded for lack of consensus. At a public hearing in Yountville in mid-1987, Hickey made a forceful plea: "If we do nothing we are jeopardizing the future of the valley."

"But the vintners didn't hear," says Barbara Winiarski, who was at the meeting. "We failed to express our thoughts," says Corley. "We're not sure what those thoughts are." Besides, the big wineries may have felt themselves superior to such petty dilemmas. "They feel they *already* control the valley," he

adds. The county's planning staff was preparing to insert its own ordinance into the vacuum. But then, on November 18, 1987, grower Andrew Beckstoffer dropped a bombshell. Beckstoffer, who arrived in the valley in 1969 as vice president of planning for the United Vintners-owned vineyards that supplied the Inglenook and Beaulieu wineries, now owns or manages nearly 1,500 acres of the valley's vineyards making him the county's largest independent grower.

No stranger to corporate politics, he is a member of Northern California's Young Presidents, a former Napa County Planning Commissioner and a former president of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association. Beckstoffer's proposal was a radical one: a requirement that 75 percent of the wine produced in the Agricultural Preserve be from local Napa grapes. Vintners' president Johnson branded it an "extreme" measure that ignored the complexities of the wine industry. As he would later explain, "Our needs are in excess of what's grown here." Big wineries such as Louis Martini, Hans Kornell and Sutter Home have "imported" grapes from the Central and Sonoma valleys for years. But Beckstoffer would not be deterred. On February 8, 1988, his independent Napa Valley Grapegrowers submitted a full-draft definition of "What Is a Winery?" that included the controversial "75 percent solution."

Beckstoffer had touched on an issue that was both economic and emotional. The independent growers have seen their vineyards preempted by the wineries, which now tell growers how to farm and when to pick the grapes; vineyard management is the hot new tool for improving wine quality. Beckstoffer has fought back by demanding long-term contracts from wineries that guarantee "\$1,500 a ton if that's what we need to make money" as land and development costs climb. But he faces formidable opposition. As one vintner scoffs, "He doesn't represent the growers. *We* control two-thirds of the valley's grapes; the independents control just 15 percent." Adds Corley: "Suddenly, the minority opinion of growers was becoming the majority voice of agriculture." When Beckstoffer turned up at a county hearing last August and stood to argue for a moratorium on new winery permits until "What Is a Winery?" is resolved, he inspired a whispered aside: "Here comes the bullshit."

Yet the moratorium passed, and new winery permits are now on hold until a Master Environmental Assessment (MEA) can be completed. Last fall the growers' definition of a winery became the working draft for the Planning Commission. Just one month before the November election, as both the Farm Bureau and the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association endorsed the slow-growth incumbents in the Supervisors' race, the Vintners finally issued a two-page position statement on "What Is a Winery?" It accepted certain limits on growth and promotional activities, but it punched back at the growers' proposals. "We object to the attempt to graft on extraneous issues relating to where grapes come from, parcel size, limits on winery growth and the like," the statement argued. Position statement in hand, the Vintners went hunting for candidates to support. They found them in Negri and Mikolajcik.

What is a winery? To Lebanese publisher Jan Shrem, it is a cathedral, "a temple to wine." His Etruscan-style monument to Pegasus, the winged horse said in myth to be the founder of the first vineyard, is the result of an international design competition sponsored by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Postmodernist architect Michael Graves first envisioned a ziggurat topped by a statue of Pegasus, a sculpture garden and a museum for Shrem's remarkable art collection. Shrem's Calistoga neighbors, who didn't want a winery in the first place and especially objected to the plans, threatened lawsuits. Shrem dropped the ziggurat and sculpture garden and brought the art inside his home.

But the spectacular terra-cotta winery, completed in 1987, is itself a work of art. Shrem is so obsessed with the purity of its aesthetic that, as soon as the harvest is over, he whisks away the modular stainless-steel crushing equipment: necessary it may be, but discordant. Indeed, Clos Pegase is so dazzling even the vineyards surrounding it seem somehow irrelevant. More to the point are the lavish benefit parties Shrem hosts at the winery. "He's going for it right now," says a Napa society caterer. "He's trying to build the image." In the new Napa Valley, image is king and marketing is its handmaiden. It is said that Napa bottles no bad wine; quality is a given. "Our job is to *sell* wine," says Monticello Winery's Corley. "And to do that, you've got to find a way to stand out from the crowd." For him, the "point-of-difference" marketing angle comes from his own Colonial American roots; his label and his promotion are built around Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and Jefferson's credo, "Good wine is a necessity of

life."

Marketing is no newcomer in the valley. Hospitality has been Napa's secret marketing weapon for a century, and no one has exploited it more fruitfully than Bob Mondavi. The mission-style Mondavi winery in Oakville is the valley's social and cultural center, home of summer jazz concerts, art shows and the Great Chefs cooking schools. "Some men build a label," says *Wine Spectator* senior writer James Laube. "Mondavi built a valley."

And therein lies the rub. "In terms of attracting tourists, Mondavi's the worst," says one critic. The 500,000-case Mondavi winery—fifth in the valley—wields enormous influence. If the Mondavis wanted to temper the valley's mounting crisis, says one observer, "All it would take would be Bob Mondavi standing and saying, I'm cutting my concerts."

But marketing pressures are so strong that no winery, big or small, is immune. They all must seek a marketing edge. To Warren Winiarski, whose winery is one-tenth the size of Mondavi's, the point of difference is quality. At Stag's Leap Cellars off Silverado Trail, Winiarski pursues a daring experiment that will set his wines definitively apart from the pack. His crew is withholding sulphur from the crushed Chardonnay grapes at harvest, the long-accepted way of protecting them from oxidation. He is allowing the wine to oxidize and turn brown during fermentation—the color of destroyed wine. If the experiment works, he will have a wine that is finer, with fewer sulfites—another marketing edge. If it fails, he will have ruined his entire chardonnay vintage. The technique, with its genesis in Germany, is still in its infancy in the Napa Valley. Winiarski first tried it for three years with a small part of his vintage; it resulted in the 1986 Reserve chardonnay that earned him the Harry Waugh Trophy in London as well as a coveted gold medal at the Orange County Fair. This year, he has committed his entire harvest.

As the grapes are crushed, the juice is already turning brown. Winiarski goes to the white Formica office of John Gibson, in charge of production, to examine tiny bottles Gibson has drained off the fermenting chardonnay. The wine is the color of apple cider, murky with oxidized particles.

But within the fermentation tanks, a miracle is occurring: the wine is healing itself. "The oxygen scavenges the oxidized impurities," explains Winiarski, elated. The particles precipitate to the bottom of the tank as sediment. Just before shifting the wine to French oak barrels for secondary fermentation, Gibson taps more samples from the tanks, pours them into glasses, holds them against the white counter. The chardonnay is still cloudy. But it has returned to the classic pale straw gold.

It is a triumph of science and art. But Winiarski has other motives as well. He believes quality and prestige will force the U.S. government to designate Napa's grapes as a national treasure, giving them the permanent protection the Agricultural Preserve does not.

Meanwhile, Winiarski is caught in a classic double bind. His Reserve chardonnays, at \$26 a bottle, have a limited market. To finance his experiments, he must produce a secondary label. Hawk Crest, a \$6.50-\$7 wine made with non-Napa Valley grapes that contends in the battle of the "fighting varietals," where the bulk of the market is. He sells tractor caps and T-shirts in his retail room. And he wrestles with the implications. "We've all been free-enterprisers," he says of himself and his fellow vintners. "It's what brought us our prosperity. Now we have to rethink all that."

But marketing fever has a momentum of its own, one that may prove hard to reverse. In 1981 the Vintners devised the ultimate promotional tool: the annual Napa Valley Wine Auction, a weeklong celebration of the valley's wines and hospitality. In 1982 the first case of Mondavi/Rothschild Opus One sold for \$23,000. Last June a single outsize, hand-etched bottle of Far Niente 1985 cabernet sold for \$12,000.

The auction has been wildly successful in its seven years, pouring \$1.6 million into valley hospitals and spreading Napa Valley's fame around the world. But in the eyes of writer Laube, among others, the incredible prices and the fancy packages "give off an image of wine as something for the elite." The

valley's famed master winemaker, Andre Tchelistcheff, laments, "The joy, the simple joy of drinking wine is being lost." And grower Eisele, whose wife is landscaping the grand chateau being built by the French champagne house Taittinger, comments cynically, "We don't have nobility. So how do you distinguish yourself? With a château. With a name on a label!" It is an ironic fate for the valley's old egalitarian goal of a bottle of well-made wine on every table, no matter how humble.

As the valley took on polish, the cachet became irresistible for socially prominent residents of other parts of the Bay Area. Many of them now make Napa Valley their second, third or fourth home, and have put their elegant stamp on the once rural lifestyle. Their parties have become the stuff of legend. Writer Danielle Steel and John Traina were married in 1981 at society decorator Richard Tam's Napa Valley home. He hosted a "Teahouse of the August Moon" party for several hundred guests, "with women in wigs and gorgeous kimonos, white Japanese paper lanterns, a 120-foot-long pergola. . . ." Last summer Tam helped San Francisco plastic surgeon Bruno Ristow and his wife, Urania, stage a debutante ball for their daughter in the weekend home whose interior Tam had transformed into an Italian villa. A formally dressed crowd of 250 danced to a twenty-piece orchestra, with Peter Minton at one of the twin pianos.

Longtime residents have also climbed aboard the social bandwagon. After Evalyn and Bob Trinchero, both age nineteen, were married in 1956, Evalyn kept the books for the family's Sutter Home winery. Today, thanks to the phenomenal success of Sutter Home's white zinfandel, they are richer than they'd ever dreamed. When they travel around the world to promote their winery, marketing advisers counsel Evalyn on the proper wardrobe. "We used to furnish from Sears," she recalls, somewhat bemused. "Then we moved up to Macy's." Now, in her contemporary hilltop home off the Silverado Trail in the north valley, Evalyn has miles of custom-woven carpet from Thailand. The family dog has a custom-designed run to protect his paws from the shards of obsidian glass that still cover the mountain, an old Wappo Indian arrowhead quarry.

The blush-colored picnic wine that paid for all this luxury is the wine sensation of the late 1980s. Bob Trinchero started making the white zinfandel in 1972, while the rest of the valley concentrated on classier cabernet and chardonnay; since then, its sales have doubled each year to a current volume of five million gallons. The small old winery just south of St. Helena has been transformed into a Victorian extravaganza with a tasting room, bed-and-breakfast, corporate headquarters and hospitality center. Recently, the Trincheros have been seeking approval for an expansion that would make Sutter Home a nine-million-gallon winery requiring 35 trucks a day to bring in grapes, wine and glass on the winding, two-lane Silverado Trail.

Although the Trincheros are considered heroes for their bootstrap success and their revival of a languishing grape variety, the glory has not been unmixed. Some see the semitrailers, emblazoned with the stars and stripes and banners reading AMERICA'S FAVORITE, that turn into little Zinfandel Lane as Trojan horses bringing in "foreign" grapes from outside the valley to produce the popular wine. And many critics are horrified by the blatant commercialization of the winery, charging that it's responsible for turning Highway 29 into "Winery Row." Evalyn turns defensive when she's reminded of the criticism. "Bob saved zinfandel," she says proudly. "How can they tell us what to do? We've been here 40 years."

But the valley's real venom is reserved for Beringer, which scored a much more dramatic marketing coup with the creation of its Napa Ridge label. Beringer is regarded as a symbol of the new, aggressive, market-driven valley, while Sutter Home is still a family-owned winery. Napa Ridge is a wine made with 60 percent non-Napa grapes, yet it exploits the magic aura of Napa on its label. The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had sole approval powers; the name had never been claimed, so it was free to use. "It's legal, but it's a hoax," says Eisele, expressing the anger among growers and some vintners that the label exploits and dilutes the Napa Valley's hard-won image of quality.

So, what is a winery? Is it a tourist destination? Thirty-seven thousand cars drive up highway 29 through the valley each day, and one St. Helenan complains, "We can no longer cross the highway on Saturday mornings." Yet an informal Vintners' study showed that 70 percent of the traffic was local,

not tourist. Indeed, some wineries claim the flow of tourists has fallen 10 to 15 percent since a \$2 tasting fee was imposed.

That may change dramatically with the advent of the Wine Train. Scheduled to begin regular wine and food trips through the valley this March, the train was conceived by Napa physician Alvin Lee Block in 1981 as an elegant, romantic notion: leisurely tours of the valley in vintage railway cars. Today, the meticulously restored train is 76.5 percent owned by Vincent DeDomenico, heir to the Rice-a-Roni fortune, and it is shadowed by rancor as much as romance. The train has already overcome major obstacles; the federal Interstate Commerce Commission overruled California's Public Utilities Commission for jurisdiction in matters such as environmental impact. The Friends of Napa Valley, a consortium of wineries and St. Helena townfolk, oppose the train on grounds it will bring 422,000 passengers each year to St. Helena, a town of 5,000. And vintner Winiarski joined a committee trying to force the Wine Train to submit an Environmental Impact Report, "like any winery or other commercial enterprise."

A shakedown run November 1 vividly illustrates the controversy. As the train pulls out of the Napa train yard, the townfolk wave and gawk. But in Yountville—long the Mason-Dixon line between the winery "upvalley" and the more working-class county seat—a huge sign confronts the train: PRESERVE OUR VALLEY. DEMAND AN EIR FOR WINE. The red surveyor's tape flying from grapestakes, trees and smudge pots along the tracks is, for this conservative valley, violent protest. Another opponent has converted his cattle trailer into the "Swine Train," painted the sides with pigs sipping wine in train windows and is driving up and down the highway, honking his horn at every Wine Train crossing. The local radio station plays "The Wine Train Blues."

Yet, insists Napa resident and writer Laube, "The Wine Train didn't bring the tourists. The wineries must shoulder the burden of overpromoting. Even if the press didn't say another word about Napa Valley, you couldn't stop the flow of people for ten or fifteen years." The Wine Train, says Laube, "will succeed or fail on its own merits."

"Napa Valley wanted to be famous," says best-selling author Arthur Hailey, who lived in the valley in the mid-1960s and visits there with his family every summer. "Now it is. And, as usual, the last one in wants to pull up the drawbridge and keep people out." He defends the Wine Train from a conservationist point of view. "Many communities in North America regret having let their right-of-way become abandoned. Somewhere in the future, there might even be a commuter line from Napa Valley to San Francisco. And 50 years from now, there will probably be a bronze plaque commemorating the person who saved the rail line for posterity, while the people who opposed the train will be long forgotten."

The candidates' meeting October 26 leaves the valley's wine community shaken and sobered. Mikolajcik and Negri have appealed to the winery workers' self-interest by assuring them jobs. Mikolajcik, a nurseryman from the blue-collar American Canyon district at the valley's south end, proclaims, "I believe in free enterprise. We're all here to make a living." About winery-based promotional events, he tosses off, "You've got to wine 'em and dine 'em." As for traffic, "I love my truck," he tells a cheering crowd. "People love their cars. The wine industry has to treat the public right." And when Silver Oaks's Justin Meyer whose superb cabernets are made mostly from non-Napa grapes, asks about whether existing wineries would be "grandfathered" as exempt from the 75 percent solution, Mikolajcik's reply is swift. "Grandfather clauses are *great!*" he says. "If Mother Nature turns a mean hand and there's a freeze, and we had the 75 percent rule, what would happen to the small wineries?"

By contrast, slow-growthers Kathleen McCullough and Jay Goetting, with their measured and thoughtful responses, come across as indecisive wimps. The meeting is a triumph for Negri and Mikolajcik. Rutherford Hill managing partner Bill Jaeger huddles with Mikolajcik and fellow vintner Bill Harlan afterward. "This whole meeting is a referendum on Beckstoffer," he confides. "He's a real snake. Protect the grapes, hell! He's trying to control grape prices. There's not much land left to plant. He's trying to force the prices by supply and demand. With the 75 percent thing, there's a real question

of monopoly.” But Warren Winiarski worries aloud: “They’d never attack the Ag Preserve directly. It would be done at the fringes, letting urban uses leather into it, rezoning it, bleeding the watershed lands to developers.”

The following Monday, the Vintners hold a board meeting at the Meadowood. All week, there have been private discussions about compromise—about backing down from the endorsement. “It’s more important to bring us together than to worry about reputation,” insists Winiarski. And at the general meeting the following day, after a prolonged struggle over wording, the Vintners vote to withdraw the endorsement and allow each member to vote for his or her preferred candidate.

The relief is short-lived. By dawn November 9, local radio station KVON reports the closely fought Negri-McCullough race will go to Negri by 172 votes. Mikolajcik has swept Goetting off the board by a 56 percent mandate. When the new board meets in January, it will be dominated by pro-growth supervisors, 5 to 2.

A disheartened Barbara Winiarski tries to make sense of it the morning after. “Negri’s from an old valley family,” she reflects. “Maybe older voters thought they were voting for the Napa Valley they used to know. Ironically, they’ve elected the man most likely to let it change and grow.”

Last November’s election leaves the valley’s future cloudy. Last August’s moratorium still has new winery permits pending until the MEA is completed. The assessment will be followed by more public hearings in the spring. By summer, the Planning Commission will probably have its definition of a winery. The definition will then go to the Board of Supervisors, which will accept, reject or change it. Whatever emerges will be the clearest available vision of Napa Valley in the year 2000.

One thing is certain: there will be growth. Increasingly, the upvalley folks are looking south, to the city of Napa and beyond, where the room is. The county’s southern flank may be where new tasting rooms, tourist hotels, warehouses—even crushing facilities for out-of-valley grapes—are established. Mondavi is thinking of setting up a cultural center for food and wine in Napa; Trincherro has joined the board of the Napa Opera House. “The upper valley is at gridlock,” observes vineyardist and urban economist Michael Marston, who is helping to develop a downtown Napa shopping mall. “There is an important role for downtown Napa and the Napa River. If we fail,” he warns, “the Napa Valley may become a second-rate Lake Tahoe.” James Hickey, for one, harbors mixed hopes. Looking back at two decades of the valley’s struggle—the landmark achievement of the Ag Preserve, the infighting of the last three years—he says: “It is definitely an engaged valley concerned with its future. My concern would be when nobody cares.” But switching his gaze to the future, he says with the shrug of a realist, “It’s a T-shirt world we live in.”