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## Andy Beckstoffer, Napa's Newest Land Baron

Andy Beckstoffer is a Napa Valley grape grower on the move, and he has big ambitions. With his recent acquisition of the famed Beaulieu Vineyard No. 4, Beckstoffer has solidified his reputation as Napa's newest land baron. The 54-year-old native Virginian now owns more than 1,000 acres of vineyard in the valley, which makes him its third largest grapegrower after Robert Mondavi Winery and Beaulieu's parent company, Heublein.



Beckstoffer reportedly paid \$3.9 million for the 89 acres that comprise BV No. 4, nearly \$44,000 an acre. Grapes from that vineyard, which sits just across from Opus One on Highway 29 in Oakville, Calif., are used for BV Private Reserve. It was also part of the original To-Kalon Vineyard, and was first planted in 1859. Beaulieu purchased the vineyard in 1943. To-Kalon is now divided into two parcels; the other parcel belongs to Mondavi and is the source of its Reserve Cabernet.

"You can't just own land here," Beckstoffer explained. "You have to get into quality land."

Beckstoffer has been doing just that since 1988. He bought Beaulieu Vineyard No. 3 that year, 250 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, from Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance, which had bought it from Beaulieu years earlier. In 1992, Beckstoffer acquired Charles Krug's Cabral Ranch, 200 acres of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Carneros District, for an estimated \$3.8 million. And last year he purchased Louis Martini's Las Amigas Vineyard, another 120 acres of Carneros Pinot and Chardonnay, for \$2.5 million.

"Most of these kinds of properties never come on the market, or they come at a high price," said Beckstoffer. "After we bought all that property in Carneros last year, I wasn't even thinking about buying anything else. But when BV No. 4 came up, I had to do it."

Beckstoffer will need to replant the BV vines due to infestation by the phylloxera root louse, which has killed thousands of acres of grapes in California. That replanting, to several clones of Cabernet Sauvignon, will begin in the fall.

Beckstoffer's acquisition of the vineyard is part of a long relationship with Heublein. Beckstoffer came to Napa Valley in 1969 as a Heublein employee, and was part of the team that developed vineyards for Beaulieu and sister company Inglenook. He also ran a farm management company for Heublein, which he took over in 1973 after Heublein loaned him the money to buy it. In 1978, however, Beckstoffer had to return some of the vineyards he had acquired from BV as part of the deal to pay off the loan.

Beckstoffer was undeterred by the setback. "Every time we got a couple more nickels, we'd buy another vineyard," he said. "Our strategy was that we'd always buy the best, even though we were always considered to be paying too much at the time." Beckstoffer said he's paid for his acquisitions solely through profits generated by his grape-growing business, which he owns outright. He also said he didn't receive any preferential treatment when he bought BV No. 4.

Though the vineyard is located in Oakville, Beckstoffer has concentrated most of his purchases in the Rutherford and Carneros regions. His grapes have created some well-known wines, including Guenoc's 1990 Beckstoffer Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon and Warren Winiarski's Beckstoffer Chardonnay at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars.

Beckstoffer's philosophy for his prime vineyards, including BV No. 4, is to share the wealth. "Since Prohibition, that vineyard has only produced for two wineries and we'd like to see if we can spread that out a little bit." Some of its grapes will still be sold to Beaulieu, but Beckstoffer is interested in selling more to smaller vintners such as Rasmussen and Signorello.

Beckstoffer has made some wines on his own, under the Fremont Creek label. However, with the exception of the 1986 vintage, the wines have only been of average quality. He said he has no interest in owning a winery.

"From a grower's point of view, owning a winery and selling wine is not a logical extension of growing grapes," said Beckstoffer. He said he learned a lot from producing Fremont Creek. "I found that I enjoy vintners much more than I enjoy distributors."

*-Robyn Bullard*

## With Sale of Historic Vineyard, BV President Looks to the Future

While Andy Beckstoffer is now in control of some of the prime acreage once owned by Beaulieu Vineyards, Beaulieu's new president and general manager, Richard Walton, is claiming the recent sale of the 89-acre BV No. 4 tract is actually good for the winery. BV No. 4 is one source for Beaulieu's flagship Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.

"We expect to continue to receive the grapes from BV No. 4," said Walton, 56, although Beckstoffer said he'll also sell to other wineries. "It is preferable for us to have a grape contract, as opposed to the capital investment of keeping up vineyards, especially with the phylloxera problem. We're, better off investing that money into the winery, taking the money and putting it into things like new cooperage."

Walton's appointment in January follows the resignation of Anthony Bell, who had been with Beaulieu since 1979, and comes amid a prolonged restructuring of parent company Heublein's assets in Napa Valley. Bell's strength and contribution were mainly in the viticultural realm and running the winery's day-to-day operations; Walton, a lawyer, has worked 22 years on the management and financial side of the wine business.

Since 1991, Heublein has concentrated more on brands than vineyards. It has sold the historic Christian Brothers Greystone wine cellars north of St. Helena and the production facility for both Inglenook and Christian Brothers. Late last year, Heublein purchased the fighting varietal Glen Ellen Winery brand for an estimated \$40 million.

Still, Heublein remains Napa Valley's largest vineyard owner, with more than 1,800 acres of grapes. According to spokesman Jack Shea, Heublein actually owns more acreage than it did five years ago and has bought vineyards over the past few years, including about 90 acres that surround the winery, as well as property in Carneros. Beaulieu has also completed an extensive renovation of its winery in Rutherford.

*-Robyn Bullard*