

THE WINE PAGE

BEHIND THE WINES

Napa land deal to develop single vineyard wines

Beckstoffer and Jackson families to preserve historic acreage in Valley

By Jim Wood
EXAMINER FOOD AND WINE CRITIC

The families of two of California's top vintners have concluded a deal to preserve and develop some of the most historic land in the Napa Valley.

The deal was made by Andy Beckstoffer, who owns more than 1,000 acres of grape land in the Napa Valley and another 1,000 in Mendocino County, and Jess Jackson, founder and proprietor of burgeoning Kendall-Jackson Vineyards & Winery.

Two pieces of land are involved. One is an 89-acre vineyard, next to Robert Mondavi in Oakville. When Beckstoffer bought it in 1993 it was heavily infested with phylloxera, which Beckstoffer characterized as the "bug of the month."

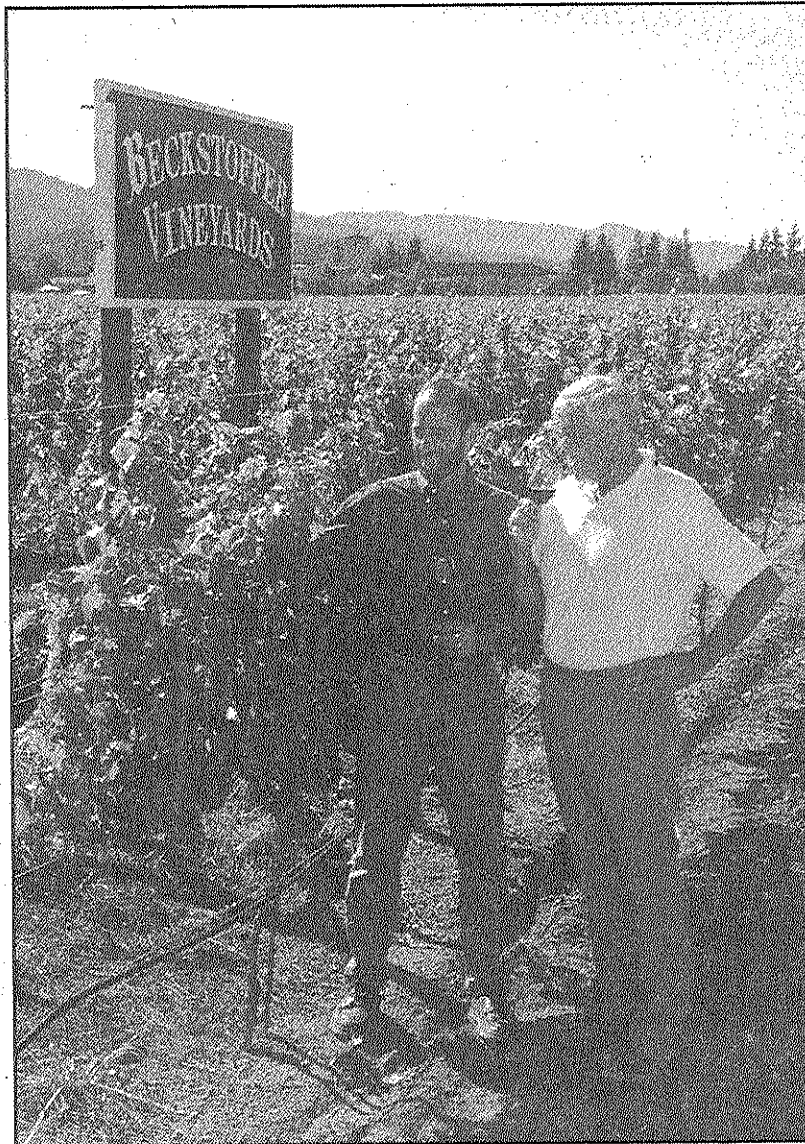
"The long-term value is there," he said. He explained that the phylloxera was a disadvantage that could be remedied and set about rehabilitating what he realized was basically excellent land. Part of the repair was tearing out the phylloxera-ridden vines.

The 89 acres will be replanted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. The project is scheduled to be completed next spring.

The other property is one that Beckstoffer has owned since 1988, some 250 acres in Rutherford planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. Like the Oakville property, it was purchased by Beckstoffer from Beaulieu Vineyards.

Jackson said he plans to use grapes from the two vineyards in a new series of single vineyard designated wines.

"These are not only two of the most historic vineyards in all of California, but also two of the finest in the world," Jackson said. "I admire and eagerly look forward to working with this fruit and (I) look forward to working with someone like Andy, who has consistently



CHUCK STEFANETTI

Andy Beckstoffer, left, shows Jess Jackson his replanted vines.

been on the cutting edge of viticulture quality."

Calling the agreement with Jackson a partnership of two families dedicated to quality, Beckstoffer said the vineyards "have been in the hands of some of the finest winemakers in the world and have produced some of the very best Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon wines, but they've generally been blended with grapes from other vineyards.

"Historically, some of the world's finest vines have expressed the character and *terroir* (soil) of single vineyard sites and, with the help of Jess and his winemaking team, I am proud and excited to think we will finally see what these great vineyards are really about."

One of the most valuable tools for wine enthusiasts is the Wine Spectator's "Wine Country Guide to California." It features the addresses and telephone numbers of nearly 600 wineries and information on picnic sites, gift shops, visiting hours and the like. The 1996 edition is just out, available at wine shops and newsstands, or by phone, 1-800-752-7799.