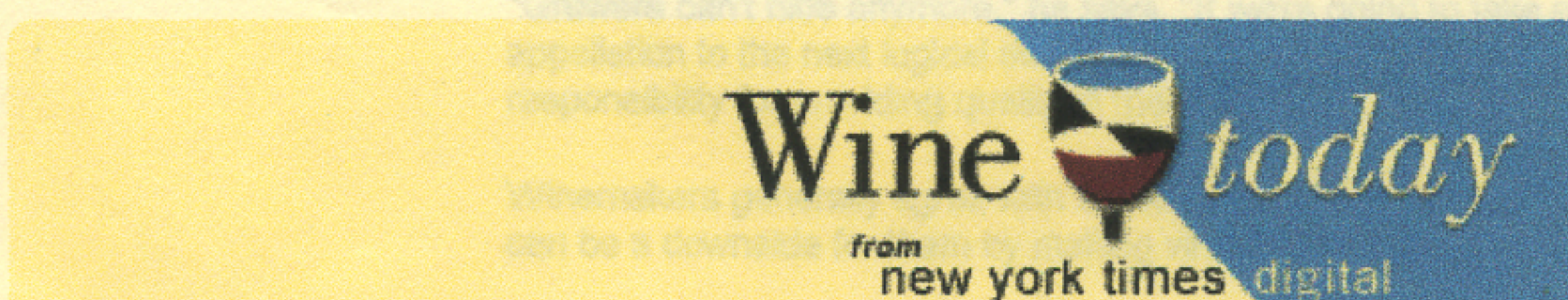


Aug 2000

The Beckstoffer name appears on bottles of wine from several Napa Valley, Mendocino and Lake county wineries, including [Acacia Winery](#), [Clos Du Val](#), [Merryvale Vineyards](#), [Signorello](#), [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](#) and [Guenoc](#).

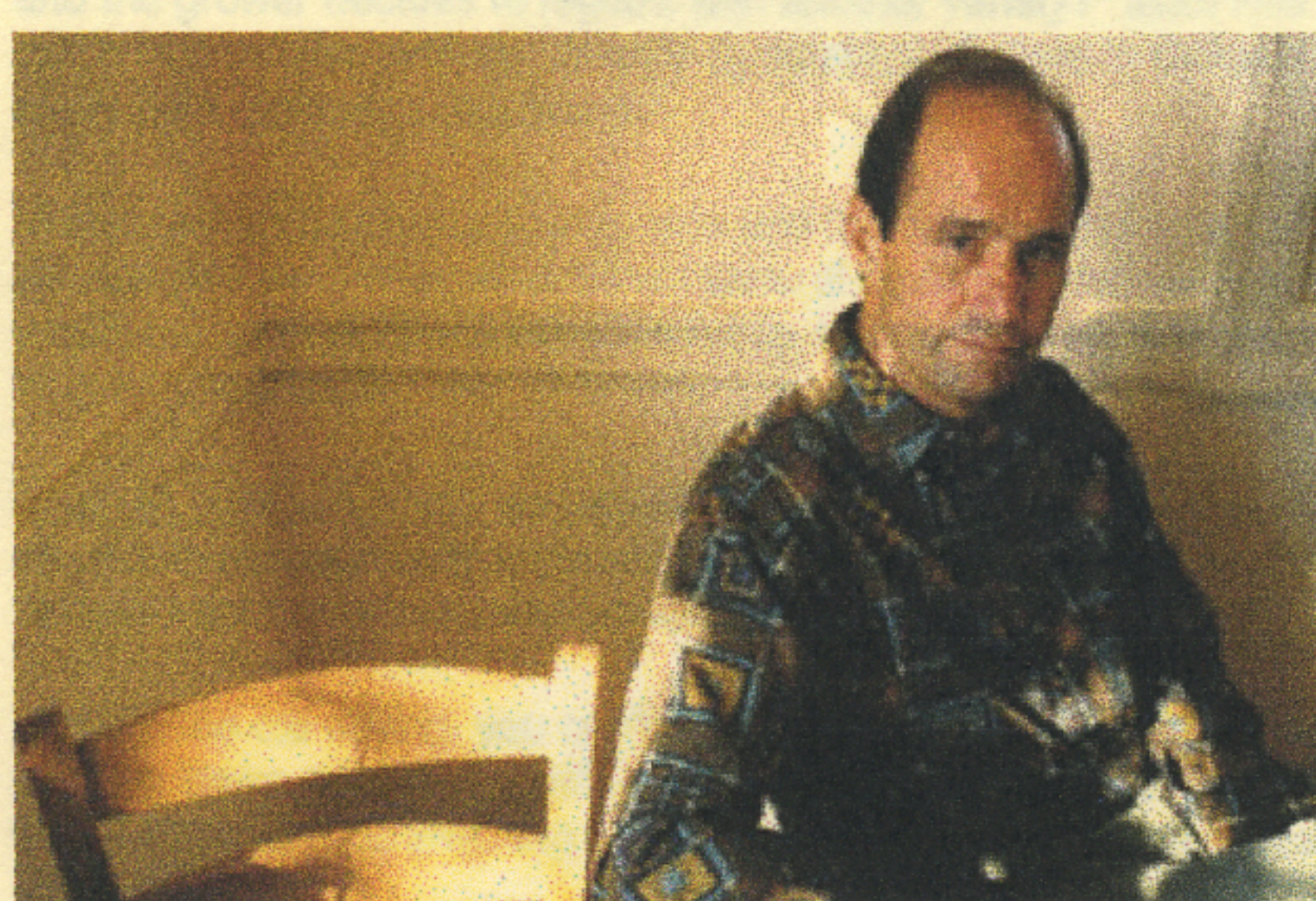


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Napa Valley-based grape grower Andy Beckstoffer
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Making the case for vineyard designation
Grower says vines' pedigree protects consistency of wine quality

Thursday, January 06, 2000

By [Jim Hammett](#)
 WineToday.com

Does anybody really think about the dirt in a vineyard or how rainy the growing season was as they sip a glass of chardonnay or merlot?



Joe Rochioli grows California's most sought-after pinots.

We should, argues Andy Beckstoffer. "In the end," he says, "perhaps we should care as much about when there's a change in vineyard managers as we do when there's a change in winemakers."

Of course, as one of Napa Valley's best-known grape growers, Beckstoffer has a stake in backing the idea that the grapes and where they come from are as important as a winery or winemaker.

Vineyard-designation is hardly a new concept in wine. Look no further than grand cru vineyards of Burgundy - La Tâche, Romanée-Conti - although California has been late in coming to the notion. Seldom has there been a more passionate champion for vineyard-designation than Beckstoffer.

He sees it as the next logical step to the appellation system and the best away to assure consumers that the wine they drink will consistently be as good from one year to the next.

The Beckstoffer name appears on bottles of wine from several Napa Valley, Mendocino and Lake county wineries, including [Acacia Winery](#), [Clos Du Val](#), [Merryvale Vineyards](#), [Signorello](#), [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](#) and [Guenoc](#).

"Growers can't hide anymore," he says. "If we're going to take an appellation to the next logical step, we as growers have to take responsibility for providing quality in the vineyard."

Winemakers generally agree with Beckstoffer, although some say there can be a downside for them by making vineyard-designated wines.

"What happens if you start putting the name of the vineyard on the bottle and the grower decides to replant with another variety?" asks Nils Venge, owner/winemaker at Napa Valley's [Saddleback Cellars](#) in Oakville. "That could be a marketing nightmare."

Venge currently owns two vineyards and the name of one is on a bottle of his sangiovese. He buys fruit from several small growers and says he would consider putting a vineyard name on one, but only if he had a long-term contract.

[Louis M. Martini Winery](#) winemaker Michael Martini agrees that growers must take responsibility for quality, but adds that quality comes from the vineyard and the winemaker working together.

"It's like the old saying, you can't make a good wine with bad grapes, but you can make a bad wine with good grapes," he says. "So if the winemaker can't do anything with good grapes, you can't guarantee the quality."

Martini says he believes that appellation and vineyard designation are going to be critical marketing tools in the future, because they are the only means of protecting the quality strides made in making wine.

The Martini winery, which owns the Monte Rosso vineyard in Sonoma Valley, sells some of its old-vine zinfandel to several other producers.

"We have six or seven producers who buy grapes from us because they like the flavors the vines bring to the wine," Martini says. "The Monte Rosso designation is on those labels, too."

There are many other examples where vineyard names appear on wine labels. For instance, the [Williams Selyem Winery](#) Rochioli Vineyard Pinot Noir is one of the highest-priced California pinot noirs at \$125 a bottle. To some wine drinkers, the fruit grown by [Rochioli Vineyards](#), located in the Russian River Valley of Sonoma County, is the epitome of quality California pinot noir, even though there are a number of other pinot noir growers in the same area.

Beckstoffer calls it vineyard pedigree. He owns vineyards in such well-known regions as Los Carneros (known for its chardonnays and pinot noirs), and Rutherford and Oakville (known for their cabernet sauvignons).

Taking a cue from Europe

He says that the wine industry should look to Europe as a role model to provide consistency in quality wines - where chateau or estate vineyards take the responsibility.

When consumers drink a Chateau [Latour](#), for example, they expect it to consistently be a good wine, Beckstoffer says, and that is what he feels growers should offer consumers of California wines.

"Through single-site expressions, we provide consumers with assurance of quality," he says.

That plays into the French reverence for terroir. But Beckstoffer says terroir, from the grower's point of view, is a bit more encompassing than