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DREAM DESTINATIONS

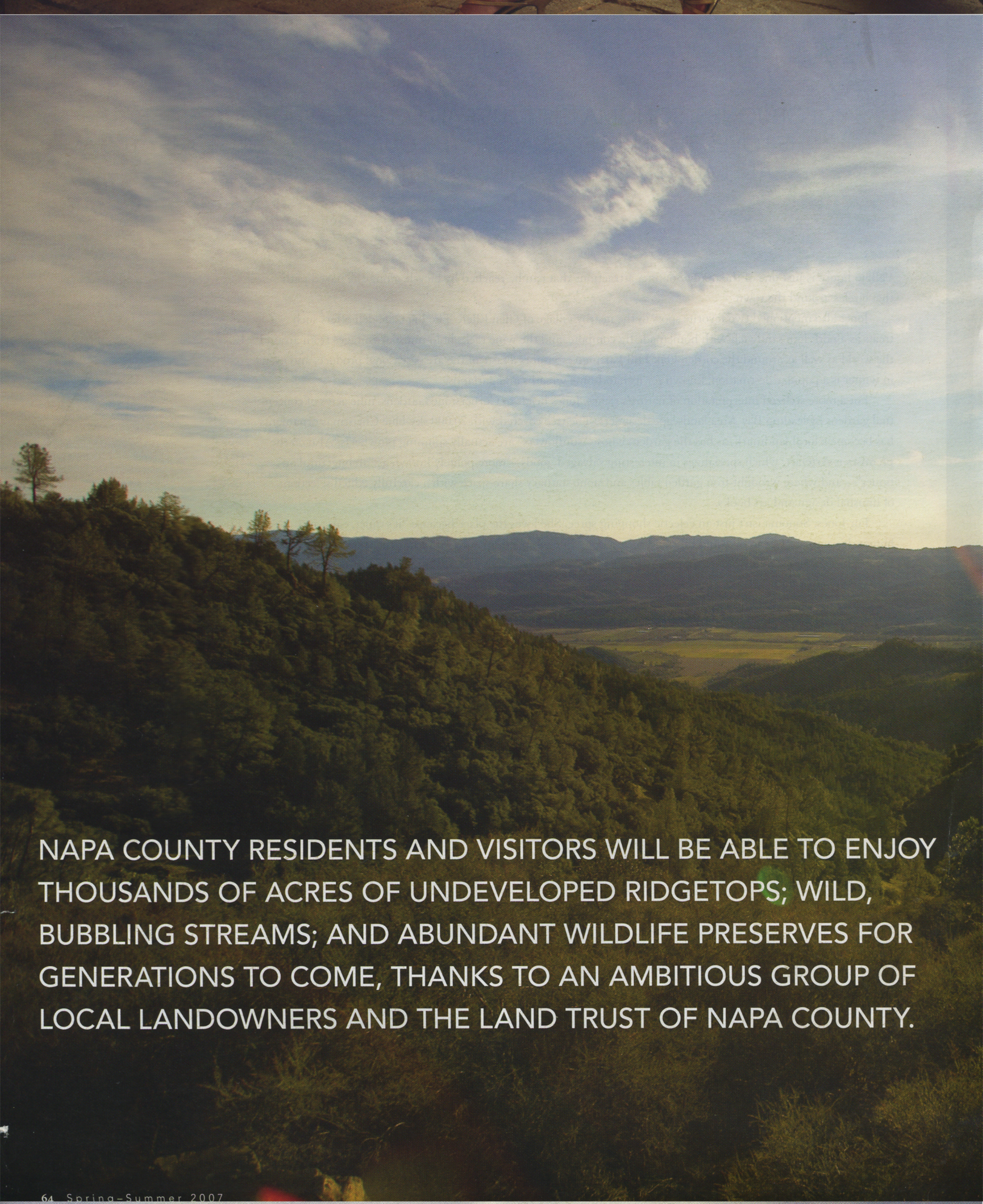
DARYL SATTUI BUILDS A CASTLE IN THE SKY

WINE COUNTRY'S ARCHITECT, **HOWARD BACKEN**

HOLLYWOOD GETS INTO THE WINE BUSINESS

THE ART OF GORDON HUETHER

ROBERT AND MARGRIT MONDAVI SHARE THEIR FAVORITE NAPA VALLEY SPOTS



NAPA COUNTY RESIDENTS AND VISITORS WILL BE ABLE TO ENJOY THOUSANDS OF ACRES OF UNDEVELOPED RIDGETOPS; WILD, BUBBLING STREAMS; AND ABUNDANT WILDLIFE PRESERVES FOR GENERATIONS TO COME, THANKS TO AN AMBITIOUS GROUP OF LOCAL LANDOWNERS AND THE LAND TRUST OF NAPA COUNTY.

story by Janet Parmer | photography by Martin Sundberg

LAND OF THE FREE

Wildlake Ranch

CONNOLLY RANCH
NAPA COUNTY LAND TRUST
1991

Some of Napa Valley's most prominent landowners have become stewards of the local environment, preserving undeveloped land by donating property, obtaining conservation easements, and contributing money to the Land Trust of Napa County. Sprawling vineyards and massive homes have dramatically altered the county in recent years, but since the land trust began in 1976, it has succeeded in safeguarding 50,000 acres, 10 percent of Napa County's 500,000 acres.

Warren and Barbara Winiarski, Rene di Rosa, Jack and Dolores Cakebread, Denis Sutro, Daryl Sattui, Andy Beckstoffer, Randy Dunn. These local icons, along with such celebrities as Robert Redford and Francis Ford Coppola, are just a few of the many well-known participants in a diverse group of land trust supporters who are helping to protect Napa's endangered open spaces and unobstructed skyline.

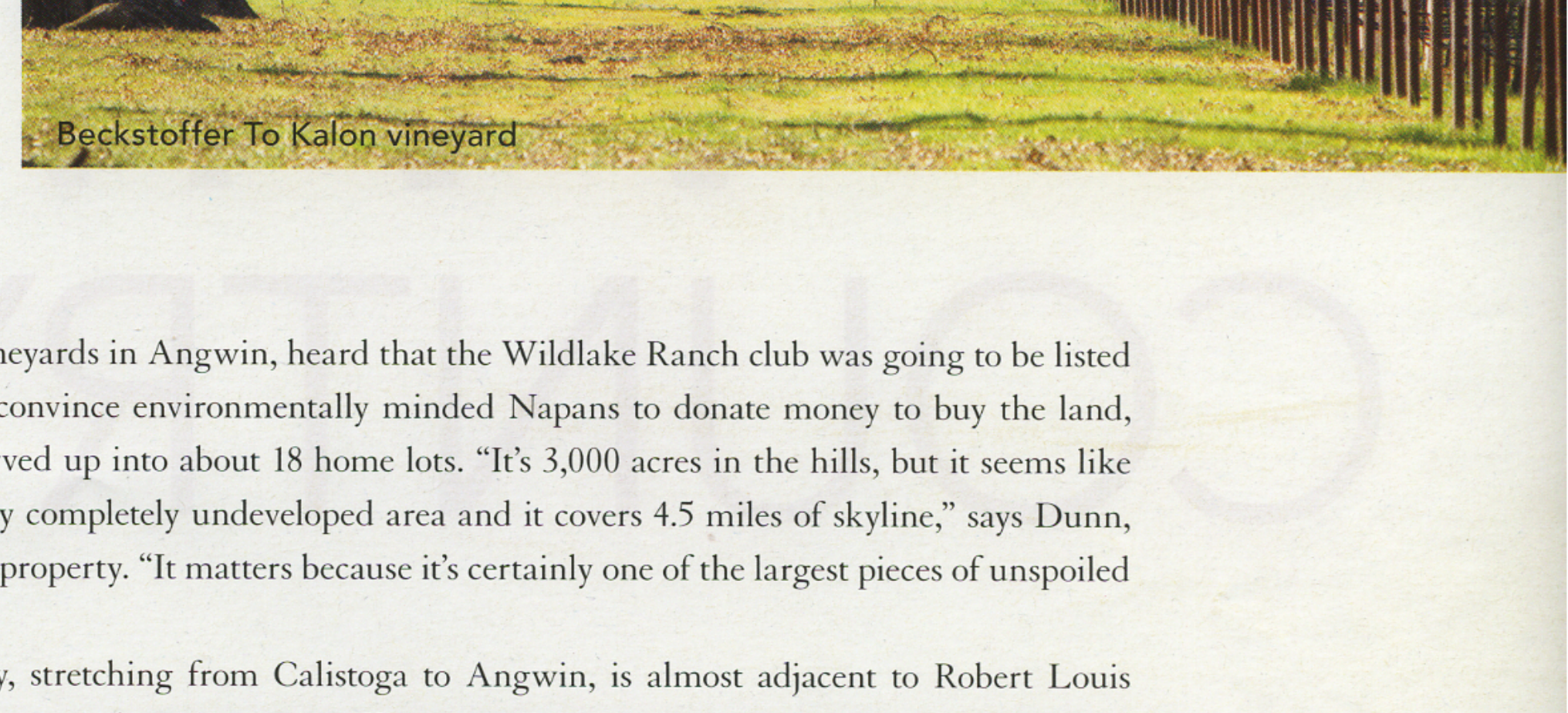
Redford, who owns property in Calistoga, is a member of the trust's advisory council and has been a host for its annual fundraiser, known as Feast of Eden. "We don't have the luxury of waiting when it comes to conserving our natural resources," he said in support of a recent acquisition. "When the land is gone, it's gone."

The land trust works to secure property in three ways. Some land is earmarked with conservation easements, meaning it can be farmed—and many acres are in vineyard production—but will never be developed. Some property has been donated outright to the trust and is designated as open space. Other land is purchased on behalf of the trust.

Dunn spearheaded the latest acquisition: 3,000 acres in the hills, including 4.5 miles of skyline. He and a group of passionate volunteers spent six months furiously hustling to raise $22.4 million for Wildlake Ranch. The deal was sealed last summer and is one of the more important recent acquisitions for the trust.

ch is now an agricultural and environmental center

Andy Beckstoffer



Beckstoffer To Kalon vineyard

When Dunn, owner of Dunn Vineyards in Angwin, heard that the Wildlake Ranch club was going to be listed for sale, he moved into high gear to convince environmentally minded Napans to donate money to buy the land, which otherwise would have been carved up into about 18 home lots. "It's 3,000 acres in the hills, but it seems like 10,000 acres because it's surrounded by completely undeveloped area and it covers 4.5 miles of skyline," says Dunn, an equestrian who used to ride on the property. "It matters because it's certainly one of the largest pieces of unspoiled property around."

The upper Napa Valley property, stretching from Calistoga to Angwin, is almost adjacent to Robert Louis Stevenson State Park. If the land trust succeeds with current efforts, it will acquire a small parcel linking Wildlake to the park. John Hoffnagle, executive director of the land trust, anticipates the park system will ultimately agree to manage Wildlake, opening it to the public for recreation and environmental study. A dramatic mosaic containing dozens of types of vegetation, the property is regarded as a rich example of biodiversity, with woodlands, chaparral, and grasslands. There are year-round springs, five miles of perennial streams, and a four-acre man-made lake.

In addition to private donations, Wildlake was financed by a $5 million grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, $2 million from the California Coastal Conservancy, and a $5 million loan from the Packard Foundation. In a magnanimous gesture, Dunn took out a $5 million personal loan to help reach the $22.4 million goal.

With changes in federal law amounting to enhanced tax benefits for land owners, the land trust is steaming ahead with its push to get residents to designate easements before a two-year tax credit window expires at the end of 2007.

Beckstoffer, who has nine separate vineyards on 1,000 acres in Napa, has been another huge supporter of the trust and has protective easements on several properties. He set up a conservation easement on his 89-acre Beckstoffer To Kalon vineyard, a historic property first planted with grapes in 1868 and known for its yield of high-quality cabernet sauvignon. He says the tax incentive is helpful, but his primary motivation was environmental protection of the Napa Valley. "You decide what you want to leave to your family when you're gone," he says. "You can leave a bag of money or something more important. We think it's important to eliminate the risk the property will be developed. It's what we want to do with a lot of our land."

SPRAWLING VINEYARDS AND MASSIVE HOMES HAVE DRAMATICALLY ALTERED THE COUNTY, BUT SINCE THE LAND TRUST BEGAN, IT HAS SUCCEEDED IN SAFEGUARDING 10 PERCENT OF NAPA'S 500,000 ACRES.