



## EAT RUTHERFORD'S DUST

*Vroom, Vroom*

BY BEN WEINBERG

The late, revered winemaker André Tchelistcheff often said that “it takes Rutherford Dust to grow great Cabernet.” He was speaking of specific sensory components inherent to the appellation’s wines, but what the world now refers to as “Rutherford Dust” has also come to reflect an enduring commitment to quality, a spirit of achievement and a deep connection to this appellation’s soil.

Since Rutherford’s earliest days, its growers and vintners have been committed to quality, and this attitude is the driving force behind its distinguished vineyards and wines.

Founded in 1994 by wine grape growers and producers, the Rutherford Dust Society’s (RDS) stated mission is to help wine lovers discover Rutherford’s unique expression of wine grape terroir. In 2007, the RDS created a consumer-focused branch called Rutherford Appellation Wineries (the two branches have recently merged), with the express purpose of introducing the Rutherford AVA and its wines to consumers.

### A NOTE FROM THE PREZ

Regina Weinstein, director of marketing at Honig Vineyard and Winery (and family member and partner there, as well), the current

president of the RDS, says the organization “is really an opportunity to share experiences, work together to resolve issues, promote the American Viticultural Area (AVA) to trade and media and find ways to support the community of Rutherford.”

Members pay dues to the RDS to support its missions and to offset the cost of the marketing and outreach programs that RDS undertakes each year. These programs raise funds that are donated back into the community, supporting such organizations as the Rutherford Volunteer Fire Department, the Rutherford Grange and the Rutherford 4-H Club. RDS also supports various trade and consumer-focused events such as the Rutherford Wine Experience (May 1–3, 2015) and the Day in the Dust Media and Trade Event (July 15, 2015), along with Auction Napa Valley (June 5–7, 2015).

### THE LAND

“The Napa Valley is one of the most recognized wine growing regions in the world,” says Weinstein, “but it is important to remember that it is made up of many sub-appellations with unique growing characteristics which impact grapes grown, as well as wines produced.”

The Rutherford AVA encompasses approximately six square miles that begin just south of Cakebread Cellars and BV Vineyard #2 along Highway 29. It ends at Zinfandel Lane, 3.3 miles to the north, and stretches across the valley two miles at its widest point from Mt. St. John on the west to the Vaca Mountain Range on the east.

The soils from this district's three alluvial fans are primarily gravelly, sandy and loamy, having been formed from shattered, well-bedded sandstone deposits that are dominated by marine sediments with some volcanic materials. Deep and well-drained, they contain pockets that allow runoff to easily flow to nearby streams and the Napa River, characteristics that benefit both Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc.

Rutherford has an average rainfall of 26–36 inches per year and, although bordered on the west and east by two mountain ranges, the AVA does not extend more than 500 feet above sea level.

One of its more unusual aspects is a higher radiant value than other parts of the Napa Valley. In other words, because the area is located in the valley's widest point, it spends more time in the sun.

Although the spring season is typically mild, it can bring freezing temperatures at night, especially during March and April. Warm summer days ripen the grapes before giving way to cool evenings that promote balanced acidity and tannin. An average summer day's temperature can drop 12° F. immediately after sunset, the fluctuation allowing the fruit to ripen at a steady pace.

## THE WINES

According to Daniel Moberg, co-owner of Vintelligent Marketing and current executive director of the RDS, "the defining flavor characteristics of Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon [the most widely planted variety] are currants, black cherry and a slight dusty, mocha element that is often referred to as 'Rutherford Dust.'"

When Moberg considers white wines from Rutherford, specifically Sauvignon Blanc, "I think of great minerality, orange blossom, flint and citrus fruits. Also, while Rutherford is known for its red and white Bordeaux varieties, a standout in the appellation is the Star Vineyard, which produces Burgundian varieties such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. One of my favorite Pinot Noirs is made by El Molino Winery from this vineyard, whose soil lends a certain richness of bright red fruit and a loamy earth note that sets it apart from other Napa Valley Pinots."

Rutherford first earned worldwide recognition in 1939 when Georges de Latour won a gold medal at the Golden Gate International Exposition for his 1936 Beaulieu Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon. Since that time, BV's Private



Andy Beckstoffer and André Tchelistcheff

## ANDY BECKSTOFFER AND HIS DEEP ROOTS IN RUTHERFORD

### ANDY BLEEDS DUST

"William Andrew 'Andy' Beckstoffer is one of the largest growers of high-quality grapes in the entire area," says Rutherford Dust Society President Regina Weinstein, "and many of the Napa Valley's best wines contain Beckstoffer grapes. He was instrumental in founding, was the first president of, and continues to be involved with the RDS. He is dedicated to quality, employees, family and community, giving his support to local causes, and has been a crucial developer and implementer of new vineyard technologies as well as a strong supporter of agricultural preservation in Napa County."

A native of Richmond, Virginia, and a graduate of the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, Andy joined Heublein, Inc., in 1966. There he played a critical role in advising the company to enter the super-premium wine segment of the California wine industry, including its purchase of Beaulieu Vineyards. As a founding director and the second president of the Napa Valley Grape Growers Association (NVGGA), Andy forged a historic agreement on grape pricing that tied the price of grapes to retail bottle price. In 1989, he led the NVGGA in establishing the Winery Definition Ordinance that mandates that 75% of grapes used in Napa Valley wines must come from the appellation. And, in 1994, as founder and first president of the RDS, Andy encouraged and promoted the highest quality standards in grape growing and winemaking in the Rutherford AVA.

Andy is also known for his close relationship with André Tchelistcheff, a Russian-born immigrant who, according to *Wine Spectator's* James Laube (February 29, 2000) "... (along with) John Daniel, a strong-willed heir to the Inglenook estate, (were) two of the most important 20th century personali-

ties that helped shape the course of Napa Valley Cabernet winemaking."

"In 1969, after the Heublein purchase of Beaulieu Vineyard [where Tchelistcheff was head winemaker], I met with André," relates Andy. "My job as youngest member of the team was to explain the purchase to André. After giving a detailed explanation of our plan, he responded, 'Talk is cheap, let's see what you do.'"

Andy's got a million André stories. "After the Heublein purchase there was a reception at Silverado Country Club. An attractive younger woman, wife of one of the Heublein principals, came up to André and said, 'Mr. Tchelistcheff, I just had your Beaulieu Private Reserve. What should I have next?' André replied, 'Have a martini, Madame, there's nowhere you can go with wine.'"

Today, Beckstoffer Vineyards owns and farms over 3,600 acres of the highest quality grape growing properties in three Northern California winegrowing regions, including the Napa Valley, Mendocino County and the Red Hills of Lake County. Andy lives in the Napa Valley with his wife, Betty, to whom he has been married for over 50 years. In 2000, Andy and Betty were named Citizens of the Year by the St. Helena Chamber of Commerce for their dedication and active participation in the community. And, in 2010, Andy was elected into the Culinary Institute of America's Vintners Hall of Fame, the first grower to be honored with this prestigious wine industry award.

Andy Beckstoffer is a living part of wine's history in California, especially in Napa Valley's prestigious Rutherford AVA. From personal experience, I can also say he is a tremendous resource, a master storyteller and a true gentleman in the world of wine.

*BeckstofferVineyards.com*

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Reserves have set a standard for many of the appellation's wineries. But many other varieties are grown and produced in the AVA, including Cabernet Franc, Carménère, Chardonnay, Malbec, Marsanne, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, Pinot Noir, Roussanne, Sangiovese, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris, Sauvignon Musqué, Sémillon, Syrah, Tenant, Viognier and Zinfandel.

To be associated with the RDS, a winery must either grow the cited variety within the AVA or produce a varietal wine that includes at least 85% Rutherford-grown grapes (it must also contain at least 75% of the named grape). A separate section of the RDS has been created for producers of Meritage wines—wines that are patently Rutherford wines but may not conform to the minimum percentage necessary to be designated as a varietal wine.

### PRESERVING THE DUST

In 2002, the RDS board of directors voted unanimously to empower a subcommittee, the Rutherford Dust (Napa River) Restoration Team (RDRT or "our dirt"), to initiate a plan to manage and restore a 4 ½ mile reach of the Napa River in partnership with Napa County. This committee is chaired by Rutherford Dust Society board member Davie Piña, owner of Piña Vineyard Management, and includes over 25 riverside property owners.

According to Piña, the Napa River required management and restoration because "it had been confined by farmers, ranchers, roads and bridges. Over the years, the river incised and that made the banks fail. The added silt in the water caused the river to be impaired."

The RDS created RDRT and funded its start. "The county was drawn into the program with 'Measure A' money [a half-cent sales tax to help pay for flood control and protection work in Napa]," says Piña. "When we showed up with a plan to correct the problem, the owners and the community immediately got behind it. We brought community and they brought money, permits and the construction abilities to make it happen."

Project construction commenced at the Zinfandel Lane Bridge (the upstream boundary of the project area) in July 2009. As of the writing of this piece, three phases have been implemented, completing the project downstream to the Rutherford Cross Road. Restoration of the remaining reaches between the Rutherford and Oakville Cross Roads is scheduled to be complete by 2017.

Founded by wine grape growers and producers, but also serving wine lovers, the RDS helps all interested parties discover Rutherford's unique terroir through conservation, smart management and focused education. Don't neglect this amazing resource when you plan your next trip to the Napa Valley.

*Rutherford Dust Society, [RutherfordDust.org](http://RutherfordDust.org)*

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