

# *Society of Medical Friends of Wine*



*A Non-Profit 501(c)(3) Corporation, FEIN 94-6088159*

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## **NEWSLETTER APRIL 2022**

### **President's Letter**

Greetings Members and Friends,

Springtime brings the promise of new life, and we are sensing the possibilities for the resumption of more in-person events as we navigate through the progressive chapters of the Covid-19 pandemic-endemic era here in the Bay Area.

As president, I hope to promote our 2022 wine education theme of exploring wines from lesser known regions in our virtual tasting, in-person events and anticipated winery tour experience. I'd like to begin with a brief overview of 2022 events:

Lively conversation and new enthusiasm abounded at our 83rd Annual Dinner at Poggio Trattoria on March 5th, coordinated by immediate past-president and now ex-officio Event Manager, Dr. Jim Gallagher. We sent out Wine Notes ahead of the dinner, and will aim to do so with our wine education events going forward. We had 19 members and six guests in attendance,

of which two represented the wine industry. All enjoyed a thoughtful comparison of Italian wines matched to Poggio's excellent cuisine that was served in a private room. Thanks also to Claire Keiser, Executive Secretary for a smooth event delivery and to Dr. Jim Gallagher and Cellar Master Dr. Bob Blumberg for researching and selecting the wines with me.

Next up will be the Virtual Tasting on Saturday, May 14th at 4:00pm. Please invite your family and friends for a Zoom-format tasting comparison of three California Rhone-Style wines and one French red Rhone varietal. Information on purchasing the wines and registration details has already been issued to members and previous guests. The virtual tasting is an ideal opportunity to introduce prospective members to the Society. Rhone-style wines pair well with a variety of foods. We will wrap up the tasting by 5:30pm so that you may enjoy your evening. The tasting will be co-moderated by Jim Gallagher, Bob Blumberg and myself.

The Executive Committee is actively planning for a tour of Petaluma Gap AVA wineries this summer. Petaluma Gap spans an area stretching from the Pacific coast at Bodega Bay and running southeast to the San Pablo Bay along the border of Northern Marin and Southern Sonoma counties. Think of the cooling winds and fog that contribute to the terroir for some unique Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. Once the wine tour date and details are worked out, we will contact you with essential information.

We now know that the Society's much anticipated French Club Dinner will be on Friday, September 23rd, 2022. Event Manager Jim Gallagher will provide further information this summer. We appreciate Marc LeClerc for serving as our liaison this year to the French Club.

We will return to the Mill Valley Community Center on Sunday afternoon, November 13th for our cherished Cheese and Wine tasting moderated by cheese expert and food author Janet Fletcher and Cellar Master Bob Blumberg. Information will be forthcoming this fall.

Our membership is small but steady, with room to grow this year. We welcome two new members: Gianna Fugazi, wine maker at Wander Must Wine, and Sonoma County resident Becky Chaboya. I encourage members to think of people that you may know, including those in the wine industry, who would enjoy our events and might possibly become our next new members. I encourage you to contact Claire or myself with your ideas on growing our membership.

The Society's Executive Committee is working diligently to plan and organize activities while addressing our responsibilities for operating as a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization. With appreciation to Dr. Jack McElroy, Finance Manager/Treasurer, we are meeting our non-profit status requirements. However, membership dues do not cover all of our operating expenses, and that is where cash donations from members and other supporters helps to offset the gap. I join Jim Gallagher in thanking those of you who made cash contributions in 2021. I also thank our first twelve members who have given gifts of cash and fine wines to the Society in 2022. Several donations have been made to the newly established Susan Guerguy Fund, in memory of our former executive secretary who passed away last year. Please refer to the Donor Thank You section in this newsletter. Donations of wines in excellent condition to the SMFW cellar help to defray future event expenses. Our goal this year is to welcome donations from 100% of our

members, and to expand outreach to wine industry donors who are motivated by the mission and value of the Society of Medical Friends of Wine. Please contact executive secretary Claire Bloomberg Keiser or myself with your suggestions of potential donors.

I am honored to be your President during this era of an expanded Executive Committee that provides an “all hands-on deck” approach to overseeing member events, finances, a creative website, an outstanding newsletter, focused wine education, wine and health coverage in the SMFW newsletter and a myriad of administrative and documentation functions. In a two-year period of time, we have increased the Executive Committee size from four officers to an additional four ex-officio positions for a total of eight regular members, aided by the advice of five additional SMFW Board members. I consider myself lucky to be surrounded by a fellow group of volunteers with medical, finance, writing, legal and administrative talent, and also to have the opportunity to get better acquainted with my fellow Society members this year. My door is open, and I welcome your communication with me at any time related to our shared adventure. Thank you, 2022 members of the Society of Medical Friends of Wine!

*Cheers and Salute,*

David Schwartz, MD

### **Good News for us Seniors: Drink a little and live longer (and better)**

Neumann et al. European Journal of Preventive Cardiology 2021:  
doi<org/10.1093/eurjpc/zwab177

The authors used data from the Aspirin in Reducing Events in the Elderly (ASPREE) trial which was performed to look at the effects of low dose aspirin on survival in healthy older people. The trial recruited 19,114 community dwelling individuals above 70 years of age in the United States and Australia who had no history of prior cardiovascular disease events, dementia, or physical disability. CVD events and death were all adjudicated. Information on alcohol consumption was assessed by self-report. For the U.S. participants, a drink was considered as having 14g alcohol. For the Aussies, it was 10g (? beer vs wine, hard to believe they have smaller drinks). Former alcohol consumers were excluded from the current study resulting in a final number of 17,978 participants with a mean age 74, of whom 57% were female, 43% current or former smokers, mean BMI 28 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. 18.6% were teetotalers, 37.3% reported 1-50g/wk., 19.7% reported 51-100g/wk., 15.6% reported 101-150g/wk., and 8.9% reported over 150g/wk.

The median follow-up period was 4.7yrs. During this time there were 756 CVD events and 793 deaths. All groups consuming over 50g/week (3 or more drinks/wk.) had a reduced risk

of CVD relative to the teetotalers, and the consumption of 51-100g/wk. was associated with a reduction in all-cause mortality. Women and men had similar results.

These are rather surprising results, especially for the reduction in all-cause mortality, which previous recent large studies did not demonstrate (e.g. Alcohol use and burden for 195 countries and territories, 1990-1-2016, Lancet 392:1015-1035, 2018 that I previously reported on) are thought by the authors to be due to a healthy volunteer bias due to the selection process and a rather small number of participants consuming large amounts of alcohol.

The take home message for me is if you are healthy as you enter your senior years (however one wants to define that), modest drinking enhances both quality and quantity of life, and maybe the two are linked.

Submitted by Daniel Bikle, MD, PhD.

## **Report of the 2022 Appellation St. Helena Trade Tasting**

February 24, 2022

By Jim Gallagher, Ph.D.

While the **Appellation St. Helena** (ASH) received its American Viticultural Area (AVA) approval in 1995, the viticultural history dates back to the bonding of the first St. Helena Winery in 1861 and the formation of an association of growers and vintners named the **St. Helena Viticultural Club** in 1875. Appellation St. Helena includes approximately 6000 acres of vineyards. Currently, the appellation consists of seventy members. Katie Simpson is the ASH President.

The geographic range is from Bale Lane on the north to Zinfandel Lane on the south and for the most part is framed by highway 29 to the west and the Silverado Trail on the east, with the notable exception to the west within St. Helena proper and a significant extension east of the Silverado Trail, at the edge of Howell Mountain and along Crystal Spring Road, where a specific map best denotes the region.



The members of ASH proudly point to the decision made by Charles Krug, Henry Pellet, and other members of the St. Helena Viticultural Club in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to replace the existing Mission grapes with European varieties mostly from France and Italy. These prescient farmers recognized the significance of the microclimate and soils of the Napa Valley, particularly centered in the St. Helena region, as highly suited for growing “noble” varieties, such as Cabernet Sauvignon.

The annual trade tasting held by ASH is usually held during the larger Napa Valley Vintners Association’s Premier event, which hosts wine industry merchants from around the world. This year’s ASH was held on the Hall Winery premises. The requirement for pouring at this event is that the pouring vintner is a member, and/or that the grapes must be grown within the appellation. Thus, the vintner may be located outside the boundaries of the appellation if the grapes themselves are sourced from within the boundaries.

Armen Khachaturian (shown in the panel on the left), representing the **Morlet Family Vineyards**, was pouring their Estate 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, ‘St. Helena’. The wine showed a dark red color, with a dense purple edge, a rich bouquet, heavily scented cherry, raspberry, and chocolate character with much sweet toast; a medium body, superb fruit, excellent tannin structure, all balanced with an excellent finish and rich, lengthy bitter aftertaste, exhibiting much promise.



Henry Pellet was one of the original (1859) wine growing pioneers in St. Helena, who later joined with fellow winegrowers Charles Krug, David Fulton, H.W. Crabb, and Dr. G.B. Crane to form the St. Helena Viticulture Club and was the Club's first Secretary. Pellet founded one of earliest wineries, Pellet and Carver, and was an early importer of European varietals.

Eric Risch, the General Manager and Director of Wine Making for **Pellet Estate**, poured both the 2018 Pellet Estate Cabernet Sauvignon and 2018 Pellet Estate Henry's Reserve. Eric is a graduate of the University of San Francisco and subsequent to several years of corporate work, gained much of his experience in the industry as the founder of Grapevine Software, which he shepherded to become one of the Bay Area's top internet firms.

**2018 Pellet Estate** showed a dark red color with a deep dark purple edge; a rich cherry, blackberry, and toast bouquet; medium body, superb fruit, firm tannic structure; excellent finish: rich, long, luscious aftertaste. A wine that already has a surprising accessibility while sustaining a cry for greater maturity, seriously motivating a wish for longevity.

Tom Rinaldi (photo below) describes his role at Pellet Estate, as a consulting winemaker. Tom was raised in San Francisco, a St. Ignatius High School graduate, gaining his degree in Oenology at UC Davis. His early fame as the winemaker stemmed from a two-decade success at Duckhorn Vineyards and later his skills in making outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot were evidenced at Provenance Vineyards and Hewitt Vineyard. Tom's philosophy in winemaking is that the resulting wine reflects the soil and microclimate of the vineyard and varietal. He is especially fond of the rich character imparted by the growing conditions of the Napa Valley.







**Hall Winery** is located just south of the town of St. Helena, across from Heitz's Cellar's tasting room on highway 29. The winery facility served to host this year's ASH Trade Tasting. When the Halls originally built the winery a number of eyebrows were raised as it featured a giant silver rabbit sculpture leaping through the vineyard abutting highway 29. Someone suggested a coyote should be placed behind, prompting the



flight. In any case, for visitors, it was a prominent feature, very hard to miss. The winery's construction featured a number of major innovations and other artistic displays (see pictures) as a part of its 21<sup>st</sup> millennium theme.





Kathryn and Craig Hall are the winery's principles, both with impressive educational and professional histories. Their tenure in Napa Valley began in 1995 with the purchase of property on the eastern slope of the Vaca Mountains in Rutherford, named Hall Rutherford. While this facility served immediate winemaking production needs, its location and limited access restricted receiving visitors on the premise. In 2003 they were able to purchase the St. Helena Bergfeld Winery, the site of their current location. This new location was clearly a better fit for their ambitious plans for a state-of-the-art winery and a reception center.



The Halls have focused on three highly successful Napa Valley varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Sauvignon Blanc. Their website attests that 40% of their grapes are from Napa Valley and their top-of-the-line wines are primarily produced from Estate owned vineyards. One of these is the Sacrashe Vineyard, wines from which I have much enjoyed as produced by other vintners prior to the Hall's purchase of the property. The Sacrashe vineyard is located high up on the eastern slope of the Vaca Mountains in Rutherford. Production from this vineyard and

total production of the winery is unavailable on the Hall website and an inquiry to the winery led to my being told that the wine production numbers are not made available to the media or public.



Ryan Williams, Hall's California Regional Marketing manager was pouring two of Hall's premium Cabernets.

1. **2018 1873 St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon.** Showed a dark red hue, with a dark purple edge; a bouquet of cherry, light blueberry, spice, and toast; it has a medium-light body, excellent fruit with a good deal of tannin, a little much for current sipping but promising a nice future subsequent to additional bottle aging.

2. **2018 Coeur St. Helena.** Showed a dark red hue with a very dark purple edge; a bouquet of highly attractive cherry-raspberry character wound within a toasty framework; on the palate again is seen evidence of much tannic structure suggestive of longevity. Four or five years of bottle aging recommended, or else

pairing with a highly tangy, aggressive BBQ sauce.

Doug Stanton is shown below pouring his 2018 Petite Sirah 'JB Ranch', one of the **Stanton Vineyards** property wines he produces. Doug is a second-generation grower of Napa Valley wine grapes. His father planted their Oakville property way back in 1947 and began the family business of selling Napa Valley varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petite Sirah, to local vintners. Today's varietals on the Oakville property also include Malbec and Mourvèdre. In addition to the thirty-three original acres in Oakville, the family has acquired two ranches in St. Helena: Mills Lane (20 acres) and JB Ranch (22 acres). In 1999, Stanton began producing a Cabernet Sauvignon from a small amount of grapes from their estate property in Oakville along with a Petite Sirah.



The **2018 Petite Sirah** showed a very dark red, with a dense dark purple edge; medium body, superb fruit, good balance and long, lingering aftertaste with immense “soft” tannins—an accessible, near chewy, yet lusty version of this varietal.

### Varozza Vineyards



Similar to the Stanton story, Jack Varozza’s grandfather, a Swiss immigrant, acquired and planted a family vineyard, in this case, over one hundred years ago. The vineyard lies just west of

the Silverado Trail along Platt Avenue, a major link from the Silverado Trail over an old stone bridge and the upper Napa River to the town of St. Helena. The family's history is grape growing and just recently small amounts of wine are produced from the family's estate. Jack oversees the vineyard and has maintained dry farming methods while sustainably managing the vineyard.

They poured their 2016 Varozza Vineyards Petite Sirah and their **931**, the latter being a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah. The 931 showed dark red hue with a deep purple edge. It had a bouquet of red raspberry, light cherry with hints of cranberry and earth; medium light body, excellent fruit, balanced and a long, lush finish. The petite sirah served to add much spiciness to cabernet sauvignon leading to a wine I found pleasing and very attractive.

## **A Tale of Two Wines**

Robert Blumberg, M.D., Editor and Cellar Master

I recently came across news from two of California's most famous producers of Chardonnay, albeit Chardonnays at totally extreme ends of the tasting spectrum.

The first is Rombauer Vineyards, which for more than 40 years has been producing a Chardonnay in the rich, buttery, powerful style that has captivated so many palates and led it to become one of the most highly sought after restaurant wines. Rombauer has recently purchased three additional vineyards, one in the Sierra foothills, one in Sonoma, and one in Carneros, and has plans to increase its production from its current 350,000 cases annually. Best known for its Chardonnay, Rombauer also produces Sauvignon Blanc and Zinfandel.

Rombauer's style for Chardonnay is not without controversy. The big, bold, and oaky flavors are loved by many. Others feel this style detracts from the true fruit flavors of Chardonnay. I must admit that I have wondered whether many of those palates who choose this wine today might, in an earlier era, be those who would have favored spirits and mixed drink cocktails as their dinner beverage. Still, on whichever side of the spectrum your palate falls, one must respect the marketing and reputational success Rombauer has accomplished, allowing for its recent purchases and plans to grow further.

The other winery is Stony Hill, a historic and celebrated property that is very much the opposite of Rombauer—small, boutique in size, wines sold almost exclusively through a mailing list, and for more than 70 years featuring a Chardonnay that is totally different than Rombauer—light, clean, tart, and aged in neutral oak, and sometimes known for its age ability.

Stony Hill, which had been in the McCrea family since founded by patriarch Frederick McCrea in the 1940's, has in the past several years been sold twice, with the latest acquisition by Gaylon Lawrence and Carlton McCoy, who in recent years have also purchased historic Napa properties Heitz Wine Cellars and Burgess Cellars. Long term winemaker Mike Chelini has also retired, and Stony Hill's new winemaker is Jaimee Motley.

I must admit to having a fondness for Stony Hill dating back to first tasting the wines and visiting the beautiful hillside vineyards in the late 1960's. In the first edition of our book, *The*

*Fine Wines of California*, published in 1971, Hurst Hannum and I felt that some vintages of the Chardonnay represented the finest examples of this varietal then made in California. In that edition we also commented that the winery was opened as a pleasant way to spend one's retirement.

I also remember a subsequent visit to the property when Fred McCrea politely chastised us for making such a comment—stating that “running a winery and property like this is a lot of hard work”, and undoubtedly, he was right.

Through the years the Chardonnays of Stony Hill were capable of stirring up a variety of emotions. Many of my friends agreed with my palate that the wines, in general, were lovely examples of pure fruit wines possessing a fresh green apple aroma and a clean, if simple, stoniness and tartness to the finish. When young they may not have been that impressive, especially when in blind tastings against some of the rising superstars of California Chardonnay, wines that featured riper flavors, new French Oak aging, and often some time on the lees. A number of my other tasting comrades were unimpressed, finding the wines light and rather neutral. Those of us who were believers, however, often marveled at how the wines mysteriously aged so well, over decades rather than just years, gaining in complexity and nuances while remaining fresh. In my memory the 1973 was legendary. My notes on the 2001 from a tasting in 2019 are an example of this.

2001: Medium yellow color with a green edge. Amazingly fresh, tart, and lively apple character in the nose with some slight reduction and yeastiness there as well. Medium full in body with glycerine contributing a mouth filling sensation. Good acidity. Finish is lengthy and intriguing. Hard to believe it is 18 years old. 1<sup>st</sup> place, with 5 first place votes.

Even for devotees all was not nirvana at Stony Hill over the years. A number of vintages from the 1980's and early 1990's seemed to suffer from premature oxidation, with golden colors and baked apple noses instead of green apple freshness. Sometimes intriguing when served with a soup course, but not what we expected.

Still the memories of the high points and the modest prices kept me returning as a customer.

I just received the latest offering from Stony Hill. The wines currently for sale were made by the prior owners and wine maker. I don't know which direction the new team plans for their wines. A traditional Stony Hill at its best? A bigger and richer wine tending toward the Rombauer? Somewhere between these extremes?

I do know the prices have changed. For years the Chardonnay sold in the mid \$30 per bottle range. The current release is \$95. The winery started offering a small amount of Cabernet Sauvignon a while back. I bought some to see how this historic white wine property did with reds, and if I remember paying about \$50 a bottle to satisfy my curiosity. The current release (2016 vintage made by the prior winemaker and owners) is now \$193 a bottle.



As I said, I don't know what the future plans for the wines of this historic property will be. And at these prices I am unlikely to ever know.



### **DONATIONS TO SMFW – Thank You! – Merci! – Grazie! – Gracias!**

*Many Thanks* to the following individuals who have made charitable donations to the Society in addition to their 2022 membership dues. As we re-build membership and meet our budget needs, this additional support is vital to the continued success of our non-profit organization. Donations made to the newly established *Susan Guerguy Memorial Fund* are noted with an asterisk.

#### **2022 Donors to Date**

Marshall Berol  
Dr. Edward Bloomberg  
Drs. Robert and Marion Blumberg\*  
Joan and Barry Boothe\*  
Dr. Roger Ecker  
Dr. Richard Geist

Dr. Elizabeth Kass\*  
Dr. Barry Liu  
Dr. Maynard Johnson  
Dr. David and Susan Schwartz\*  
Dr. Brenda Shank\*  
Dr. James Shapiro

We also thank Dr. Richard Geist who has donated a unique wine for use at a 2022 Society event. Please contact Robert Blumberg, Cellar Master, regarding wine donations to the Society.

All donors are provided with written receipts for cash gifts, as well as for “*in-kind*” gifts of wine to be used at a Society wine education event. If you haven’t yet done so, please consider making a charitable donation to the Society of Medical Friends of Wine in 2022!

Amazon Smile: If you or a friend makes purchases on Amazon and would like to designate SMFW as a beneficiary of .05% of sales volume, please initiate your purchase through the *AmazonSmile* link on the SFMW website for a (no-cost) additional benefit to the Society.

## **A REMINDER—MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

May 14 Virtual Tasting of California and French Rhone style wines

September 23 Dinner at the French Club

November 13 Cheese and Wine event with Janet Fletcher at Mill Valley Community Center

Look for announcements on additional tastings, dinners, and an in-person wine tour of Petaluma Gap A.V.A. wineries. You will be notified once dates and details are confirmed.