

The Rock of Solutré above the village of Pouilly in Burgundy. Wine has been made here for over 1,000 years.

Discovering Wine-

Again?

Conventional wisdom instructs that true fulfillment comes from the journey not the destination. Nevertheless, when I found myself an assistant winemaker in a respected and well-established winery of California, I thought I had “arrived.” I had not come to the wine industry directly after years of tutelage and training, but rather propitiously, through the rare and fortunate combination of passion, ability, and luck. Within the very short period of six months I went from temporary harvest help to assistant winemaker interviewing candidates to be my boss. In the dog-eat-dog world of California winemaking (as with the parallel industry of the Silicon Valley tech-world), turn-over was inevitable and the job market so hectic that any warm, half intelligent body would do—if they were willing to sell their soul to the highest bidder.

Straight out of a master’s degree in microbiology, that is exactly what I did. The price? Live in bucolic, rural California and work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for the entire harvest, which typically lasted from mid-September through mid-November, at which point the pace slowed to a mere six days a week until mid-December. Did I care? Not in the least—I was being paid to contribute to and learn the most intriguing, utterly consuming, and romantic of human endeavors. Dionysus was not known as the deity of humanity for his community service.

A California winemaker’s Journey east

By Wilfred Franklin
Photo Credits: Greg Moore

Wine is intimately infused into mankind's very fiber. Throughout history, it has played a defining role in culture, tradition, and commerce. In many parts of the world, wine accompanies two out of three meals, each and every day. Not coincidentally, it has a symbolic, if not central role in religious traditions around the world. So, when I moved across the country to Philadelphia to help my wife through graduate school, I despaired that I was leaving the Promised Land. How was I ever to continue the journey I had begun? What could I possibly learn about wine on the East Coast?

Lessons from California

In California, the primary value in wine came from the image of a certain lifestyle that reflects one's sophistication, values, and status. Drinking the "right" wine allowed entrance into the elite and making wine catapulted one (deserving or not), into the realm of artistic genius. This image of winemaker as artist is perpetuated by Oenology Departments worldwide that turn out

pseudo-chemists, who consider their burden the heaviest, their training the most rigorous, and consequently their opinions the most important. This is the attitude of the self-aggrandizing winemaker, who sculpts and molds wine into his or her image.

In California, there is no tradition, no long-standing knowledge of place and time, and consequently it is ripe for the winemaker to fill that void with creative declaration. Never mind if the winemaker is trying to place a round peg into a square hole. In California, the goal was to make the biggest, most powerful wine possible. In the warm, dry conditions of the California summer, grapes became very ripe and lent themselves to making powerful wine. Wine was a race to be won, judged on a 100-point scale. Hence, this became the standard to judge all wine. Surrounded by it, drinking it, trading it, buying it, I thus aspired to make it. However, I could not reconcile one small problem.

Grapes turn into wine thanks to microscopic bugs that will do their work whether or not an aspiring "artistic

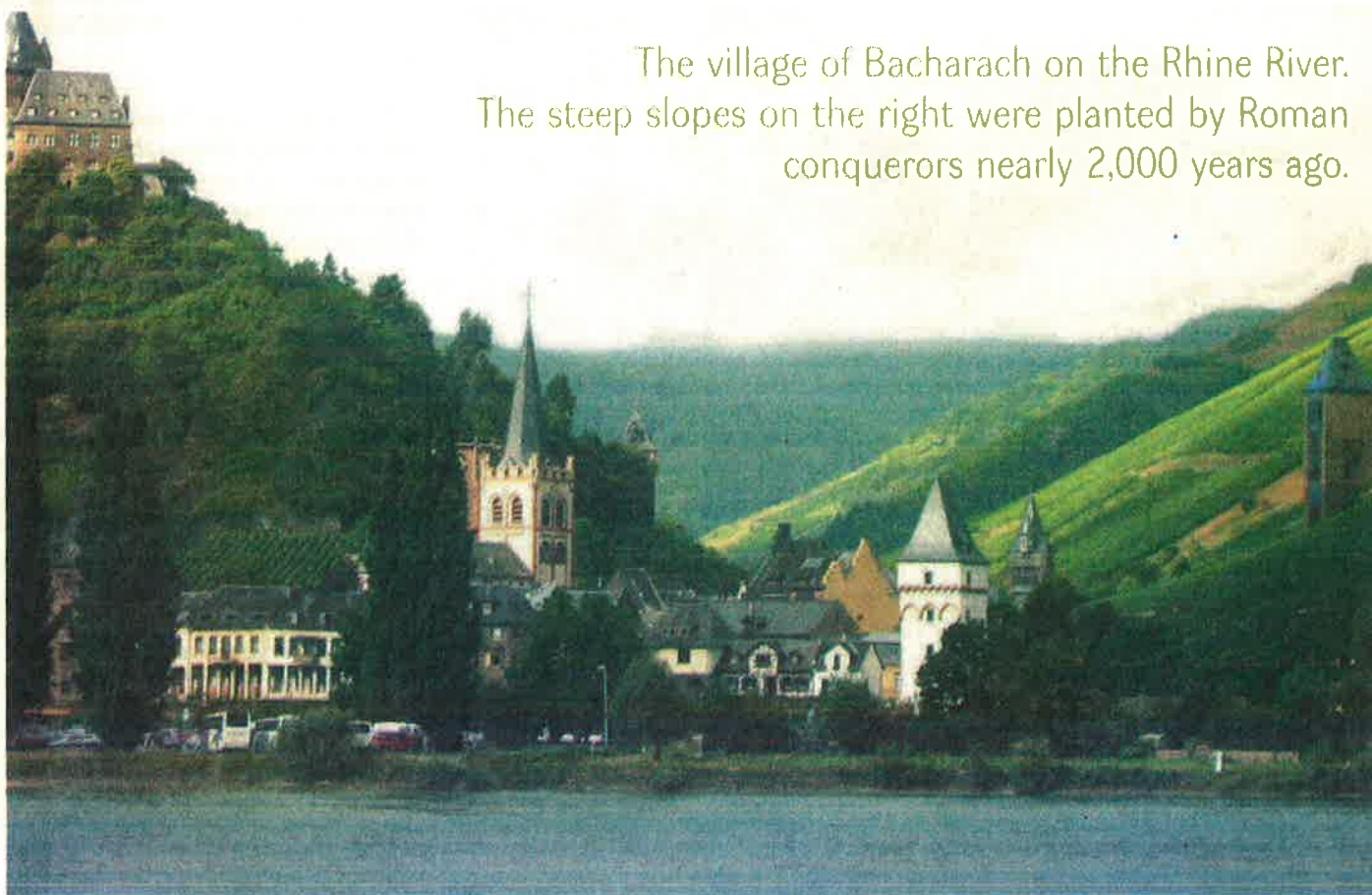
genius" (that would be me) becomes involved. Wine made itself. Winemaking seemed to me to be a misnomer. As far as I could tell, the endeavor should be known as "grape babysitting." If you were good at it, perhaps it could be known as "grape parenting." Wine is in the grape. Good wine is inside good grapes.

The most significant effect a winemaker could have on a wine was first, grow exquisite grapes, then second, ferment them in a clean environment. If this is true, what becomes of the "artistic geniuses" inhabiting the renowned cellars of California and for that matter, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and even much of Europe?

The Journey East

I had no idea that the path on which I had embarked would lead to entirely novel revelations about the very meaning of wine. Apparently, it was not just a product to "sculpt" in the image of one's own egocentric model or worse, just another

The village of Bacharach on the Rhine River. The steep slopes on the right were planted by Roman conquerors nearly 2,000 years ago.





Top Guns Corporate Photography

George B. Feder & Associates

Public Relations * Entertainment * Political
* Event Documentation * Corporate

435 Haverford Road, Wynnewood, PA 19096

Studio: 610.642.9078

Pager: 215.422.5914

Fax: 610.649.8633

email: topgunsphoto@aol.com



er mass-produced trinket marketed to the masses. Rather, wine can simultaneously be a beloved pastime and statement of the ultimate, intrinsic value of place and tradition. What in Apollo's name is "ultimate intrinsic value?" And what does it have to do with wine? Hear me out...

Transplanted to Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia, I did what any wine lover in a virtually "dry" state would do; I drove to New Jersey to buy wine (this may seem like a self-indictment, therefore, I invoke poetic license and take the fifth). I soon came across a small, but well respected wine shop that only carried imported French, Italian, and German wines.

I asked the manager, in a knowing, but unassuming way, "Could you help me find a big Burgundy?"

Politely he informed me; "Unlike California style "Burgundy" made from Pinot Noir (red wine from Burgundy, France, is made exclusively from the Pinot Noir grape), true Burgundies are not really considered 'big'. They are known for their aromatic bouquet, finesse, and elegance. In addition, most are the perfect compliment with salmon or a good epoisses cheese."

I froze like a deer in the headlights, "Ah, well, I meant I would like a 'typical' Burgundy." Good recovery, I figured, but thank God I didn't tell him I was a wine-maker from California.

After some more kindly banter and the confession of my true identity, I left with several bottles of very affordable, but "typical" Burgundy to try, if I assured him that I would try them with a good roasted chicken. So there I sat with my wife over a home cooked meal and real Burgundy. The experience was a revelation. I smelt and tasted baked limestone, dried rose petals, and maraschino cherries, unveiling themselves layer by layer, slowly over the course of our savory meal. Needless to say, I am now a regular customer, not only for the wine I purchase, but also for the ongoing discussions on the background and history of all wines.

What I have discovered, Matt Krammer, Kermit Lynch, and Greg

Moore discovered long ago. Wine is much more than just power and mouth-coating, jammy fruit. In the old traditions of Europe, wine was considered a food and consequently it evolved with the gastronomic delicacies of each region. Moreover, each region possessed its own microclimate, soil structure, topography, and native grape varieties. Over centuries and even millennia, with little or no technology, wine was produced that matched certain lifestyles, cuisine, and locations. Each year or vintage brought slightly new variations, such that each new wine was like a newborn child with a personality all its own.

What I had found on the older, more traditional East Coast, was a myriad of unique and authentic wines that were valued for more than just the 98 or 99 points they could fetch. Rather they were prized for their ability to evoke "ultimate intrinsic values" of a place and tradition. The wines were not trying to fit some mold that winemakers forced upon the grapes in order to collect accolades from the critics.

Wine, I learned, was an expression of these cultures and traditions, and in that sense, like a work of art. But unlike art, there was no "artist," only humble farmers, with clean manners and long traditions that allowed the expression of place to be unveiled. Places like the Juronçon hidden just north of the Spanish border that makes a lean, acidic, but full-bodied white wine that goes superbly with char-broiled octopus or grilled whole mung fish. And how about Fruili on the Italian-Slovakian border, where the subtle and elegant Tocai Fruiliano makes another delicious white wine served on the hilly terraces overlooking the wind-blown Adriatic Sea. The list goes on and on, but then I would be spoiling all the fun of making your own new discoveries.

This is not to say California or other New World vineyards do not have authentic, delicious wine. Places like Hawkes Bay or Cloudy Bay of New Zealand's northern island produce some very expressive Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnays. Likewise, the uniqueness of California Zinfandel is continually finding more complexity and nuance and given enough time will equal and in the best cases surpass many European traditions.

The point that I have recently uncovered while on the East Coast, is a simple one. Wine is diverse. Not all wine should try to be alcoholic, mouth-coating fruity bombs. Regional diversity and cultural traditions are another way in which to judge and therefore, enjoy wine. To be honest, it can seem a bit overwhelming. As I've found out, you could spend many lifetimes studying wine and there would still be more to learn. However, the reward really is in the journey, not the destination. I'm learning the lesson first-hand. *Z*



Wilfred Franklin recently moved to the Philadelphia Metro area from California's Central Coast, where he was assistant winemaker at Edna Valley Vineyards. When he's not immersed in the wines at Moore Brothers Wine Company, he enjoys hiking and gourmet mushroom hunting in the lush deciduous forests of the East Coast.



Kendall's Kitchens LLC
Bertch CORIAN

To Complete the Epicurean Lifestyle

Custom & Semi Custom Cabinetry by:

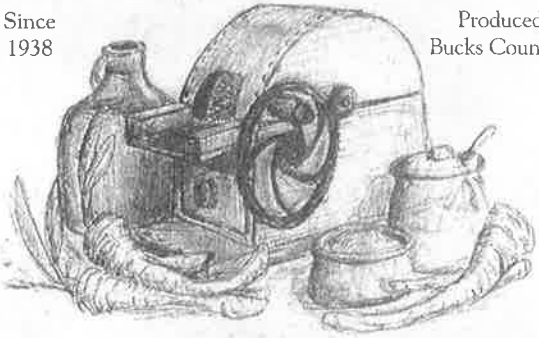
Rutt
♦
Dutch Made
♦
Bertch
♦
Legacy

601 Bay Avenue Ocean City New Jersey
609 • 391 • 1617

concept design construct

KELCHNER'S[®]
HORSERADISH PRODUCTS

Since 1938 Produced in Bucks County, PA



We've been making the best loved:
HORSERADISH • COCKTAIL SAUCE
HOT MUSTARD • BEET HORSERADISH
TARTER SAUCE

Available at your local grocery, seafood and specialty markets

Call 1-800-424-1952 for more information
www.besthorseradish.com

KELCHNER'S HORSERADISH PRODUCTS
DUBLIN, PA 18917