

## Kathryn Kennedy Winery

For over twenty years *Kathryn Kennedy (KK)* has grown Cabernet Sauvignon grapes in the hills above Saratoga, on Pierce Road, not far from the old Paul Masson place. She was born in Ruth, Nevada (near Ely) in 1927 but grew up in Santa Cruz. She went high school there for one year, and to Campbell High School for a year before, at the age of fifteen, she went to Stanford University, where she majored in education and art. In 1949 she built her home here on a 2.5 acre plot, split with her father, who also built his home here. A few years later, in the sixties, she acquired two land-locked four acre parcels behind her property, so that today the Kennedy estate amounts to about ten acres, all in vines except for the buildings and access roads. In 1973 she planted her vineyard and in 1979 bonded her winery. Her son, *Martin Mathis (MM)*, was born here in 1958. Before becoming his mother's winemaker in 1981 he received his degree in international relations at U. C. Davis.

I interviewed the two at a table in the vineyard in front of the winery.

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March 30, 1994

CS: How did this vineyard become what it is?

KK: I was divorced in 1965 and had to support myself on the assets I had acquired at that time. The acreage I had here was a drain on my finances, because the taxes were so high. I kept looking at all the fallow land surrounding my home and I kept thinking of ways to use it so that I could at least make the tax payments. There was a vineyard across Pierce Road owned by the Knight Smiths that had been there for many years and I kept asking the Smiths if it was lucrative enough to pay the taxes and they kept saying NO. But in the early seventies I was going to San Jose State University to get an advanced degree in art and one of my teachers, my faculty advisor, was Paul Staiger, who was getting started in growing grapes.<sup>1</sup> I asked him and he that it would really pay.

CS: Were you one of his student helpers up there?

KK: No, but you couldn't have been one of his students and not have known about his involvement in it.

CS: This was a good time to make money growing grapes.

KK: Right, this was a boom period in the early seventies. I actually made the decision to go for it in 1972. I was going to plant the whole thing.

CS: How was the land being used then?

KK: It was fallow. Scattered oak trees and some walnut trees, the remains of an old orchard. It had been an old prune orchard that had decayed through the years.

CS: How did you learn what you needed to learn?

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<sup>1</sup> See Staiger interview. He started making wine in the sixties and built his winery in 1973.

KK: I asked around. I talked to Mario Gemello, who was doing the Knight Smith vineyard then. I asked him about what varieties I should plant. And I asked Paul Staiger. Gemello said that there was nothing to consider here other than Cabernet Sauvignon. He was getting medal winning wines from the Knight Smith vineyard.

CS: Yes, and he was getting top-notch grapes from Rose Gaspar's vineyard up the road here.

KK: I went up to UC Davis for two semesters and audited a basic viticulture course. I did that during the gasoline crisis and was driving to Davis twice a week. I took two courses, one that included a lab out in the vineyard, and the other was a lecture.

CS: Did you read any books?

KK: Winkler's *General Viticulture*.

MM: At that time she didn't interest herself in anything but grape growing.

KK: At the time I said that I would never go into winemaking. I just wanted to grow grapes to get enough money to pay the taxes.

CS: I recall reading about your trying to keep a road from being built through the property.

KK: When they subdivided the farmland adjacent to my eight acres in back they wanted to put an ingress/egress road across my property, through eminent domain. That would have divided my property in half. But at that time I don't think I was thinking much about being a farmer. I was having trouble with vandalism anyway.

MM: She used an aerial photograph to show that the developers of the other parcel had another access. That put their request to rest.

CS: So that issue is really irrelevant, so far as the vineyard is concerned. But I wonder if having a crop on the land wouldn't have raised its value in terms of an eminent domain action, so far as fair market value was concerned.

KK: But they wanted a subdivision there, for the taxes. The value of my land was in its being a subdivision. I got an attorney, and they told me that it was OK, and that they'd let it go for now, but that I'd be selling it in a year or two.

CS: So you were motivated almost entirely by wanting to keep this land around here.

KK: Exactly.

MM: But this battle did give you motivation to do something with the land.

KK: Oh, I suppose it all adds up. But a year or two passed before I decided on the vineyard. We went to Europe in 1971 and when we came back I made the decision.

CS: Did wine have any important place in your life at that time?

KK: Wine was not a part of my daily life. I probably couldn't have afforded it if I wanted it to be. Until the 1960s I had never been able to stand wine. But one time we went to Gallatin's in Monterey they had a cellar of aged wines and we had a well aged bottles of Martin Ray Cabernet Sauvignon with our dinner. I think that was in the sixties. I found it highly enjoyable and I couldn't believe what



I had been missing. I had only tasted less expensive wines before that or wines that hadn't been aged sufficiently.

When I considered what to do with my land in the seventies I considered having a Christmas tree farm, or raising grapes. Both seemed like something I could do as a single woman with a young family. I considered the economies of each business, and when it became feasible to pay my taxes by growing grapes, because of the change in the grape market, I chose that over the Christmas trees because I didn't want to be that busy at Christmas time when I had a family of my own.

CS: How about now?

KK: I have a great appreciation of wine but I can't tolerate too much of it. I do a lot of tasting where I spit it out.

CS: Marty, how about you.

MM: Currently I agree with Kathryn. Wine is not a daily part of our lives, so far as every evening meal. We are very interested in it and we taste it a lot. I never miss the opportunity.

KK: And on special occasions we'll take out a special bottle.

MM: But our average weekday evening doesn't include wine. I think that I could count on my hand the number of times in a year that we sit down and finish a bottle with dinner. Mostly most of the wine gets poured down the sink. We get the flavor, the experience, but consuming the volume in there is not important to us. We love wine but we are not big wine drinkers.

I remember when we were planting the vineyard, after one of the long work days, she brought the family together and said that since the cuttings had come from David Bruce we should celebrate by tasting one of his Cabernets. I think it was the 1972. I was under age and that was the first Cabernet I had ever tasted, and we drank it out of Dixie cups. I liked it. We placed a time capsule under one of the end posts after we finished, and we left a bottle of that wine in it.

## The New Vineyard

CS: How did you plant the vineyard?

KK: While I was going to Davis I picked up from David Bruce 3,333 Cabernet Sauvignon cuttings.

MM: She got them for a nickel apiece.

KK: I brought them down in the back of a borrowed station wagon, and had the whole family-- there were three homes here by then, my mother and father and aunt on one side, and my sister and her husband and her three children on the other side, and my four children-- planting the vineyard.

MM: Better say, planting the nursery.

KK: That's right. We had them in a nursery for a year and then put them out in the vineyard.

CS: Hold it-- you mean these vines right here are on their own roots.

KK: That's right.

CS: Not a sign of phylloxera.

MM: Not that we can see so far.

CS: Boy, I'd be more careful. I'd have people like me taking their shoes off at the entrance.

KK: I was careful until Marty took over. (Everyone laughs.)

MM: We have a joke when we get together for those viticulture meetings, such as we had up at Ridge where you spoke a few months ago. One grower walks up to the host of the meetings and asks if he'd actually ever seen a phylloxera bug. The host says NO, so the grower pulls off his shoe and says, "Here, let me show you what they look like."

CS: In 1976 I had an infestation of grape leaf skeletonizer in my home vineyard and I made the county agriculture people use my boots when they'd inspect the place and spray. My vines were on their own roots also. Then, six years later they all died of eutypa.

But I have to say that this is really remarkable. You can always say, when people ask you, that you knew not to use AxR-1 rootstock. You just didn't use anything.

So did the vines go out the following year, the dormant season of 1973-1974?

KK: Yes. They whole family put them out. It was really a wet year. I almost didn't get them in. You almost couldn't dig the holes in all the mud.

CS: How did you survey it?

KK: My sister and I did the whole thing. We used a transit and got perfectly straight rows. We made the solder marks on the wires, as they showed us at Davis, to get the spacing perfect. We laid it out at 12x8. The first leaf in the vineyard was 1974.

CS: What kind of a take did you get from this planting?

KK: Terrific. I'd say over 90%.

MM: She really babied them.

KK: I was doing the whole thing at that time. I trained them up the stake, tying them as they grew. These are the stakes right here that we used, and the cross-arms and wires. It's all just as they instructed us at Davis.

MM: In the front area here we dug all the holes by hand, with a shovel. Then we turned to a tractor with an auger. I wanted a big, wide hole to encourage growth. The soil is very heavy here.

CS: When did you get your first crop?

MM: Just a few boxes in 1976. They went to Martin Ray. Then in 1977 a bigger amount to Mt. Eden.

CS: You're getting your first commercial crop right in the middle of a horrible drought.

KK: The first two or three years I had to water them with a hose. My daughter did a lot of it.

CS: Those 3,333 vines did the whole place? You didn't add over the years.

KK: Another acre, but that was much later. You're looking at the original vines here.

CS: What's that cordon pruned vine there?

MM: For demonstration. We can prune and when people ask what cordon pruned vine is I can show them that one.

CS: And are those vines over toward the south edge? Are all those being brought back from eutypa with double trunks?

MM: Those are my uncle's vines. He has his own home vineyard and they're doing a double cordon, the Geneva system. He's doing the conversion right now.

CS: I see, those are going to be side-by-side cordons. I was thinking it was fantastic that the eutypa hit all those vines there at once.

KK: That land is owned by my brother-in-law, Ralph Morocco; he has about half an acre.

MM: He makes a barrel of wine in his garage every year.

CS: He has quite a gate on that access road.

KK: We're putting in one too, for the deer.

CS: When did you have your first full crop? And what is a full crop?

MM: Our top yield was 2.2 tons/acre. A big year is 20-25 tons. Average is more like 15 tons.

CS: What's a bad year?

MM: A quarter ton per acre, like 1990. That was because of the rain during berry-set. And there was a general drought situation.

I recall in 1990, some of our rows in the back are 120 vines long, and we would start off with some workers and start down that row filling the buckets, and by the time we got to the end of the day our crew had worked for six hours, and we figured that each worker had only filled six boxes. That means that a worker worked for an hour to find a thirty pound lug box of grapes. Clusters were tiny with four or five berries on them.

But in 1978 we had a good-sized crop. It was our first one. This one also went to Mt. Eden.

## Making Wine

CS: Next year you make wine, so what changed your mind?

KK: Bill Anderson, the winemaker at Mt. Eden, was the enthusiast. I had an underground cellar we had built in the 1960s as a fall-out shelter. It's a 10x12 cinder block room.

MM: I use it now for my library wines.

KK: The first year that was the only place I had to put my barrels. Anderson had been very enthusiastic about the wine he'd gotten from this vineyard. He agreed to be the winemaker.



MM: Part of it was that the growing grapes hadn't been as lucrative as you thought it would be, and that this new avenue provided a hope for a greater financial reward.

KK: We still we having trouble with the taxes.

CS: And in 1979 and after Proposition 13 is going to be a help, but you hadn't felt it yet.

KK: And I'd been putting a lot of capital all these years for which I had gotten nothing back as yet.

MM: But in 1979 we were bonded and went through the paper work, but we were only able to finish through a permit for cellaring and bottling, not for production. When harvest came around we weren't a winery yet.

CS: You were a BWC, a bonded wine cellar. So you mean my bottles of 1979 Kennedy Cabernet Sauvignon from here, which have "produced and bottled" on the label, weren't! I have historic bottles; I'll never throw them away. The statute of limitations is past, so it's OK.

MM: So we produced the wine at Congress Springs winery. We fermented and pressed it there and then brought it down here in barrels in the back of a pickup truck. I think we made 350 cases. That was about half-a-ton per acre.

KK: We had fifteen barrels.

CS: That must have been pretty tight in that little cellar.

MM: We hadn't thought ahead to the next vintage, when we'd still have this one in the barrels. When the 1980 vintage came along there was no more room. So we moved to this building down here.

CS: Where did you get your first barrels?

MM: From Landmark Cellars in Sonoma. They were used French oak.

KK: We used French oak from the beginning.

MM: We did buy some American oak for the next vintage.

CS: Was this building, today's winery, was it already here?

KK: Yes, it was our cabinet shop when I was married. We were in the general contracting business.

MM: We spent a year remodeling this building, insulating it, with a new roof.

KK: He had just graduated and took a year off.

MM: I was thinking about grad school and the Foreign Service but had begun to work at the winery, at first in the summer, and then in the harvest of 1979.

KK: But during that year off this was all "mother's folly" as far as he was concerned.

MM: We had the 1980 vintage in this place covered with canvas while we were putting new shingles on the roof.

CS: How were you getting the grapes in?

MM: The same way we do it now. We borrow some migrant workers from other wineries, a crew of maybe 15 or 20, for one day. They pick into five gallon buckets and they pour these into lug boxes. First we had used lug boxes. I can remember one summer scrubbing the old prune juice out of these used boxes. Finally, we bought new boxes. Later we switched to plastic lug boxes.

CS: You don't have a group of friends and relatives helping in the harvest.

MM: When it comes to the actual picking, we need to have professionals.

In 1980 we had a very small vintage and made only 120 cases. It was a cool summer, the fog hung into the afternoon. Very large berries. It was one of our more restrained wines, more claret-like. It was hot for a lot of people, but for here it was a very cool summer.

KK: That vintage turned out to be one of my personal favorites. Marty says the 1990 wine is similar.

CS: 1980 is Anderson's last year as winemaker. You had denigrated the operation up to this point. How did you become winemaker?

### The New Winemaker

MM: I had been the vineyard manager. And he was now ready to move on from Mt. Eden. He went to Chateau Julien in the Carmel Valley.

CS: I think he's still there.

KK: He actually did a year of speculative construction before he went down there.

MM: Now I was anxious to take over. I had some rebellious ideas and was ready to take charge.

KK: Before that he didn't love the business and really wasn't very devoted. I had to push him some.

CS: You weren't married yet. Were you living here?

MM: Right, living at home with mom.

CS: Tell me about the 1981 vintage, now that you are in charge and this winery is now finished.

MM: I thought I already knew how to make better wine.

CS: What made you think that? What had you been reading, who were you talking to?

KK: It was ego. He never took a single wine course.

MM: But I was reading everything I could get my hands on. And I was tasting a lot of wines. I think I was influenced by David Bruce. He got to me about acidity. He advocated wines have natural acidity. And I didn't like the idea of acidification. I was determined to pick the grapes with a natural high acidity.

CS: What had been the Brix level of the 1979-1980?

MM: We had been looking at 24° was the goal, and that 24.5 was still good. And we got it here. This is a warm vineyard. I go by budbreak times and harvest times. But I made the 1981 with the lowest acidity I've ever made.

CS: How did your international relations training prepare you to titrate these wines?

MM: Bill Anderson had given us a step-by-step instruction on titrating. We did not have pH meter for the first five vintages.

CS: They weren't all that common thirteen years ago.

KK: And people weren't paying all that much attention to pH then. It was just starting.

MM: We sent the wines out for the final lab work.

CS: How about malo-lactic? I know Anderson is going to be all for it. You too?

MM: Yes. From the very beginning he taught us how to inoculate for it. The interesting thing was that neither the 1979 nor the 1980 completed malo-lactic. In 1979 the cellar was too cold.

CS: How did you stabilize it?

MM: Filtration. Just before bottling.

CS: So the lab will catch it if it's there before bottling.

MM: But we do paper-chromatography, but we still send it out at the end just to be sure. But I have a fairly high tolerance for a wine that isn't complete. I'm willing to roll the dice a little bit. Unfiltered is my goal. I have only had to filter three of my vintages. If the grams of malic acid are low enough at the end I'll take a chance.

Still the 1981 vintage came in with low acid. We still waited for 23.7° Brix. By that time the acid was down so that the finished wine only had .58 total acid. That's low compared to what I do now.

## Selling Wine

CS: In 1982 you are going to sell some of that 1979 wine. How?

MM: We started out with high hopes. We didn't want to deal with the wholesale wine trade at all. We had 350 cases that would go for \$12 per bottle, retail.

CS: That's just about \$18 per bottle in today's dollars. High, but not really high.

MM: Bill had advised us on this. This was a good price to start with. We wanted to sell directly to customers, as Mt. Eden was doing then.

KK: But things were starting to change right then. Marketing was becoming a much bigger part of things.



MM: So, we couldn't do it. We didn't have the mailing list yet. We stumbled for a period of time, moving five cases here and there. I finally became convinced we were going to have to deal with liquor stores and restaurants. Then we got some better movement, but only after a lot of hard work and a lot of pounding the pavement. I was doing it, briefcase in hand and samples too. I was overjoyed when I finally had thirty accounts.

CS: Where.

MM: Right around here, in the Bay Area. I recall that Coach House Liquors on the corner of Prospect and Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road was the first local account to buy our wine.

KK: There was a lot of resistance at first, a lot of sexism, in accepting the wine from a woman's winery.

CS: Why did you put your name on it?

KK: It was my effort, my gamble, my land, my money. If David Bruce and Martin Ray could do it, so could I.

CS: But did any marketing people talk to you about using a person's name on the label?

KK: No.

CS: That's interesting, because that's the received way to go now, even if you have to make up the name. So you had the right instincts. It isn't Kennedy Vineyards; it's Kathryn Kennedy.

MM: It works now. It's a great name.

KK: And he had no choice. He wasn't around when I made the decision.

MM: Before that the name was The Vineyard. There was a certain amount of bravado in that. I still have a business card with that on it.

CS: Did you ever have a vineyard designation on those Mt. Eden wines?

MM: On their MEV label, on the bottom it says entirely from the Kennedy Vineyard.

KK: The one before that too, but there was only one barrel and it just went to the investors.

CS: Now when 1982 comes, you are an experienced winemaker. Are you making any changes? What's informing your approach?

MM: Not changes as significant as have come later. Bill and my mother set up a sort of recipe for how to make a great wine---

KK: Traditional, old world methods.

MM: I stuck to that for several years, but I was biting at the bit.

1982 was really a wet winter and we had our largest crop ever. Big and healthy crop.

KK: We thought that was going to be the beginning of a series of bumper crops of great grapes.

April 6, 1994

CS: Let's talk through your vintages, starting with 1983. That's where we left off. You had said that 1982 was a really good year so far as volume goes, but it was your record, with 867 cases.

MM: The vintage has a bad reputation in Napa but it was excellent down here. We harvested on October 7 and 29. This is my favorite vintage, but not just for the quality of the wine. It was a vintage where everything went exactly the way I had planned it.

CS: You harvested on two days three weeks apart.

MM: We intentionally tried to pick these blocks a different times. It's a technique I learned from reading some notes by Martin Ray. He was doing that for a slightly different reason. He wanted to reach maximum Brix; he thought that was the measure of a great wine. He used to go on and on how we could reach 25° Brix and no one in Bordeaux has ever been able to do that, and that's why his place was the greatest spot in the world. What I found that it was OK to pick the grapes at different times, but I didn't want to have to hit the nail right on the head for the entire vineyard on one day. I decided that I wanted to pick some of the grapes at a moderate ripeness level and then take a chance on the weather and extend the vintage and pick the second or third harvest at higher levels of maturity. By doing that I was able to make an almost blended wine. I felt I was making a more complete wine when I put them together. I was thinking about acid and not having too much alcohol. If you wait for 24 Brix you end up here with too much alcohol. This way I got the natural acidity I wanted.

CS: In 1984 you were back to a sizable production-- 800 cases.

MM: We picked on September 12, 16 and 22. That was the hottest vintage we've ever had. The grapes rushed to maturity. The result was a "friendly" vintage. The wines didn't have so highly extracted Cabernet flavors. It was fruity and more approachable.

CS: 1985 gave you a moderately high crop-- 700 cases. And it was middling so far as picking goes-- September 18, 28 and October 5.

MM: That was the year of the Lexington fire here. It started toward early July. It was really hot for a week. And then the weather took a significant turn. It turned misty and cold. It was a very cool summer. We had a really long, drawn out maturing period. That's what makes the vintage stand out for quality. *Wine Spectator* gave our wine a 93.

CS: By that vintage you had a pretty good collection of wines. How are sales going now?

MM: They're going very well. Much better than earlier. Our price was up by the time we released the 1985, but this didn't scare away buyers. Our distribution was still growing. We were in several new communities, in a lot of Liquor Barns and other large chains. We were actually getting into a situation of wine scarcity. That's great. We didn't have enough of the 1983. By the 1985 vintage there was good demand for our wine.

CS: How did you deal with Liquor Barn?



MM: I always dealt with the individual managers. I never met the chain buyer. I'd go from one to the next. We sold mostly in this area, and even some in Southern California. They took our wine into communities where there were no fine wine shops. Fremont is a good example. They took a wide selection of wine to those areas. So ours was one of many good Cabernets on their shelves.

CS: In 1986 you're back to modest production-- 400 cases.

MM: We had a classic Saratoga summer, cool til August when the heat picked up. There were a couple of rains in September and then a dry Indian summer. Harvest dates were September 7 and October 4. We had excellent grapes. Robert Parker gave the wine an 86.

CS: 1987 was another pretty short year-- 350 cases.

MM: This was the beginning of the drought. But the weather was good, another typical Saratoga summer. September gave us really cool nights and the grapes were really complex. We harvested September 3 and 19. The grapes were smaller and the wine was very intense and tannic, and very dark. A drought vintage, although it doesn't always work out that way. An example of that was 1990. There was also something happened while the wine was in the barrel that was strange. It fermented well and went through malo-lactic before Christmas. But it continued to kind of fizz a little bit. There was just the slightest amount of pressure in the barrels. That continued through the entire winter. I don't think it was residual sugar or malo-lactic. I think it was just some form of trapped carbon dioxide in the wine. But I can't explain it. And it is the densest wine I've ever made. I'm confident that will be a twenty-year-plus wine. The wine evolved very slowly. Even in the spring it tasted as if it had just been made. That carried right over into the bottle.

CS: 1988 was really a drought crop.

MM: I'll say; we only made 200 cases. (Everyone laughs.)

KK: It really isn't funny. (More laughter.)

CS: I notice in 1988 you didn't make a double harvest. September 19 and 21 and that was it.

MM: There weren't enough grapes and they did get ripe together. But I had also played the course out on picking grapes with lower sugar levels. By this year I had found some reasons not to do it. At that time I began saying to myself that picking at lower sugar levels was not what I thought it would be and that I needed to go back to Kathryn's traditional approach-- 24 Brix and one pass. As a result the wine has 14.4% alcohol. The early pickings hadn't been working so well because of the acidity. There is the tartaric and the malic acids. When you pick slightly underripe grapes the proportion of malic to tartaric is more significantly malic. If that is completely removed through the malo-lactic fermentation you actually ended up with a higher pH than if you had waited a little while until the tartaric acid was more dominant in the grapes. The early harvest was giving me an opposite effect from what I wanted. Now I take a more moderate approach. I wait for what they are calling the "maturity of acids." Brix will be closer to 22.5 at the first picking, and then below 24 Brix on the second pick. I think 24 is too high.

CS: So you are aiming for about 13% alcohol.

MM: And we have a really high conversion ration. I almost can't make wine below 13%. I recall one time I picked a batch of grapes that were 20 Brix and it still gave me 12.9% alcohol.

CS: That's well over a 60 ratio; that is high. 60 is high. Maybe that's the Pierce Road effect. Where did you add the new vines this year



## More Vines

KK: Across the creek, to the east. There had been apricots.

CS: Ah yes. Apricots and eutypa.

KK: The fruit fly problem also was part of it. The trees had already been down for a few years.

MM: During the med-fly crisis they came out and in the spring when the apricots were hard and green and they told us we'd have to strip all our fruit and throw it away. I looked at that job and decided that picking all those apricots was not going to be rewarding in any way. I knew I wanted to put grapes here later anyway, so I just chain-sawed the whole orchard. The ironic thing was that when I asked the fruit fly inspector what I was supposed to do with this debris with the fruit on it, he told me to take it to the land fill. It was about an acre.

I planted it on rootstock, 110R. In retrospect that wasn't what I was looking for. It had been described to me as a drought-tolerant rootstock, but they meant that it was vigorous and strong that grows well without a lot of water. I wanted a low-vigor rootstock. But I've learned to manipulate it. I only irrigated for the first three or four years. I also put the rows in the opposite orientation from the way mom did it, north- south. And because I'm taller I made the trellises higher. They have a three wire vertical system up to about 6.5 feet. And we put in drip irrigation, which we hadn't had before.

KK: And we planted them at a higher density. The new vineyard was 10x6 feet spacing.

MM: Now I'd even consider doing it closer now.

We have about a half acre in back that we call "The Knoll." Very rocky and the vines are very weak. The soil is very thin and the trunks are much smaller than the others. So we did an interplanting up there. We added a vine between the vines in rows. And we also added a row between the old rows. So we have quadrupled the vine density. It's tight for our little tractor but it just makes it. On that half acre we have about 1,200 vines. It's approaching European density.

CS: I remember one time walking back there are your c=showing me a couple of really old vines that predate your vineyard.

MM: Yes, there is a Palomino and a Mission. In the old days the guy was apparently making brandy and sherry.

CS: Having Palomino might make you think sherry, but probably not. Everybody had Palomino as a standard in their vineyard and then would stretch the juice with a better variety. They called it the "Napa Golden Chasselas," of all things. Some people in the Santa Cruz mountains even had that distorted to the "Shasta."

MM: I think that there were about five acres there before. It was called Pinetta's place.

KK: That was the neighboring strip, not mine.

MM: The subdivision destroyed that. But the vines are on the next door property and I step across and prune them.

KK: There is still some undeveloped property there and the assumption is that it is ours-- but it isn't.

CS: Why don't you get the owner to plant some grapes?

MM: I have, a little. We talked about it and he came by and said that he wished he had planted vines twenty years ago. So I told him it cost about \$10,000 to plant an acre now and he immediately lost interest.

CS: Let's talk about the 1989 vintage.

MM: It was a nice growing season. We picked early in September and had 90% of our grapes in when the rains hit on September 16.

CS: In the North Bay it was a disaster for some growers. And it was humid after the first storm, and then it rained again on September 28. Botrytisville!

MM: We made good wine that year. And during the vintage we had the earthquake. But we were very fortunate; there was no serious damage. Saratoga was really spared and Los Gatos was hard hit. I was making wine and decided to blend all the new Cabernet in the stainless steel tank. Then it would go back into the barrels. So I had gone back to make some dinner and to watch the World Series. I was at the table in my room having a sandwich when it hit. There was a lot of flying glass from memento wine bottles. I rushed down stairs before the shaking stopped and checked on mom. She yelled, "I'm fine," so I ran right down to the winery and expected to see a river of the 1989 vintage. The barrels stacks were still wobbling because the barrel shocks had all fallen out. We just lost a couple of bottles in the lab, but we did spend the next hours putting the wine back in the barrels. We didn't want to lose the whole tank if there was a heavy aftershock.

CS: How big was the vintage?

MM: About 500 cases.

1990 started out as a small crop from the drought and then the rain at the end of May cut it even more.<sup>2</sup> We got about 1/4 ton per acre. But the berries were larger; they almost looked like Pinot noir. The wine was less tannic and very elegant. It was a unique vintage but I like the wine a lot. There were only 180 cases.

CS: That's what we had the other day. I can see why you have the price up. No one is going to get any.

MM: After we count the wine for people who pick it up here and some for our library, we have only about 100 cases for the wine trade. But now we have representation in ten states and the Bay Area--it means that each account is only going to get one or two cases.

1991 had the most ideal growing conditions I've ever experienced. It was a very cool summer, long and slow. It went into October and everyone kept saying the the Indian summer couldn't last. Whether the wine will turn out to be as great as 1985, it's too early to say. But you couldn't beat the weather. We have a good crop. We had added three things in the previous winter that made this vintage a kind of renaissance for us. We put up the deer fence, an irrigation system, and a deep soil ripping to relieve the soil compaction.

CS: What is your cultivation regimen?

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<sup>2</sup> There were two clear days between May 19 and 31 and six days of rain.



KK: When I learned about viticulture at Davis they were very clear that you must avoid harming the soil from plowing. So I made the decision at that time to use a non-tillage approach. We've kept to it. We mow the weeds.

MM: The the deep ripping after 15 years was to break up the natural compaction of the soil. Then we mow annually. Those three things really affected things. The vines just came alive. And what I had thought had been bird damage we discovered was deer damage. I didn't realize how many fresh fruit clusters they were eating. When the fence went up so did production. We made about 600 cases.

CS: While we're talking vineyard, tell me about the eutypa problem you've had.

MM: I remember exactly when I found it. I was driving the tractor over there and I saw this obvious disease in the spring growth. So I cut it off-- out of sight. . . .

KK: At first we thought of it as something like an insect infestation.

MM: Then later we saw it more and more. In the early years we were out there pruning in the rain, which is very dangerous. And we were cane pruning, which lends itself to larger cuts along the vertical trunk. So we got it bad.

We've been able to come back to a certain extent by amputation the diseased sections and retraining a shoot from below for an alternate trunk. You can see these vines all around us here. We also prune later in the spring and never in the rain. We don't use Benlate spray any more. First, it's not so effective as they thought it was, and second, it's a pretty nasty chemical. The more we see about it now the more dangerous it appears.

CS: Were you spraying or painting?

MM: Spraying. We were walking around with a squirt bottle after pruning. Now we don't do anything. I tried soap in the new vineyard and I haven't seen it there at all, but it's seven years old and now's the telling time. And, of course, Cabernet Sauvignon is particularly susceptible to it.

CS: Don't I know. I lost every vine, even when I trained them up after amputating the old trunk. Now I have a half a dozen volunteer seedlings and I haven't seen a sign in eight years. I haven't pruned a couple of them yet.

KK: We'd do it that way if we could.

CS: 1992 is still in the barrel?

MM: Yes and scheduled to be bottled this June. It's another big vintage-- 700 cases. The vines were happy that year. We applied the irrigation system by copying mother nature . When there is a good chance of rain according to the weatherman but here in the South Bay we are getting anything or very much, I turn it on. Then after we get much growth and the grapes are ripening we don't irrigate. I value the wine that comes from vines that are water stressed. We picked some of the grapes in early September and then it got foggy and wet. Then we began picking again after a couple of weeks.

CS: And then 1993-- the great mystery vintage.

MM: It was similar to 1992. There was a real start and stop effect. But the stop happened earlier so that we never pressed the first panic button. We waited for the Indian summer and we got it.

CS: Ridge didn't pick on Montebello until very late. They were really nervous.



MM: But we're quite a bit warmer than they are. They're best vintages are the warmer ones. They don't like them cool. But our cooler vintages are excellent.

CS: In late September when you're looking at 22.5 Brix they were looking at 19. In the North Bay there were millions of gallons of Cabernet hanging at the end of September. If it hadn't gotten warm for that long stretch it would have been a disaster.

We talked some about changes you've made over the years. Any others you'd like to mention?

MM: In sections I've modified the trellis system. Where I have very vigorous vines I have put in a divided cane, like a Geneva double cordon system, but with canes, not cordons. This year on about an acre we took off the cross arms and raised the fruiting wire at 54 inches, and then at every fourth vine added a tall metal stake and moved up the next two wires of to the 6.5 foot level. That's an attempt to allow me to stand more upright when I'm pruning.

CS: And maybe more sunlight. Do you leaf thin much?

MM: Very little. We have such relatively weak vines that we have a natural level of light exposure. Maybe 5% of our vines are densely foliated. On most of our vines, if anything, the fruit may be overexposed to the sun. We like to bend back growth to create a little canopy over the fruit if it's getting too much sun. So we sort of ended up with the canopy system that everybody wishes they had.

There is a place down below where we had a severe problem with vines in a low, fertile area. Vines were very productive at first, and then they got just super vegetative. After a few years you'd look inside one of these massive vines and there wouldn't be any grapes. There I made a narrow trellis and let more light in and that has brought the vines back into balance.

We modify the vineyard here and there depending on the situation.

CS: Do you have specific sections you identify.

MM: Yes. We have names for them. Some ripen sooner than others. They may be as small as a half acre. But we don't do much box counting. I have made some barrels from specific areas. But there has been nothing organized.

CS: Part of these reserve programs is to identify certain parts of a vineyard that give the best fruit, but you have a reserve program going in.

MM: I just tell people that we only make a private reserve. That's something we have considered but we've always resisted it. We think that from a marketing point of view it would be a big mistake to segregate a section of the vineyard, or even a barrel selection. We don't want to give the impression that there is a great wine and a second best wine. I've seen that happen at other wineries. Reviews can knock the second wine to nothing. People don't like to buy the second best.

CS: Randy Dunn on Howell Mountain solved that. His non-Howell Mountain wine is so good that it sometimes gets better reviews and now they're both up there in price.

How about cellar practices-- any changes you haven't mentioned?

MM: I am currently discontinuing the use of egg white fining. We have used two to four per barrel to reduce the tannins. Through an experiment trial I've discovered that there was an unexpected effect on the aroma. Egg whites actually muted and dulled the aroma. Even when the tannins were high the wines without that fining were more vibrant and alive. And we don't filter either. I think that when you make robust wine like ours and after it has sat in the barrel for 1.5 years I think it is pretty stable from the tannin and the alcohol. I may take a small gamble.

And with SO<sub>2</sub> we may use 50 ppm when the wine is young. But as the wine gets older we use

less and less. I know longer do a pre-bottling addition. That would be the safe road since you don't have another chance. I think it's unnecessary and we end up with less total SO<sub>2</sub>.

CS: So you're just compounding your risk.

MM: But it makes a better wine, and we've never had a problem. I have also begun to play around with the skin contact time. Bill and Kathryn taught me 14 days. We stuck to that for many years. Then I began reading and heard lectures on it. Professor Bolton at Davis was from Australia and there they hold down skin contact. They figure that color comes out quickly. Tannins start coming out more as the alcohol builds up. So they think you can make a full bodied red wine without heavy tannin by holding down skin contact. So I have been trying that, for about four days, with about 10-20% of the production.

CS: What about extended maceration?

MM: I've done that too. In France they may go for as much as forty days, long after the cap has collapsed into the fermenter. So I've done 10-20% of production that way also, for 20 days or more. And in 1993 I even did a batch for 40 days and I have that barrel separate and will check it out.

CS: That is a very powerful idea now.

MM: But I've never seen less tannin from that approach. I see more body and substance that carries the tannin better.

## **Appellation Santa Cruz Mountains**

CS: Let's go back to 1981 and talk about this winery and the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation.

KK: I was going to the Vintners Association meetings and I heard about it there. I think that Bill Anderson also talked about it. Everyone said that I should try to get in. The alternative would have been Santa Clara County. Everyone impressed on me that it might be a serious business mistake not to be a part of it. I decided to go for it, but there was opposition to it.

CS: Your idea was to get in on the original petition.

KK: That's right.

CS: My impression is that they were nervous about anyone coming in and changing the original petition, not so much that anyone wanted to keep you out.

KK: I tried to describe my area for the BATF that would be an appendage to what the appellation committee had already laid out as their description of the appellation, which excluded this vineyard.

CS: How high is the vineyard here?

KK: 400 feet. The appellation committee had drawn it at 600 feet. So I had to figure out where it would be easiest to make a written description to include us. So I submitted that as an addendum to the original petition.

CS: That was before the final OK by the BATF so that you were part of an amended petition, your amendment.



KK: I changed the description of the boundary through this area and the BATF accepted it.

CS: I remember that I thought it appropriate that you be included, but I don't recall that they asked me anything about it at the hearing. I think that anybody not down on the valley floor with an established vineyard should be able to get in.

MM: Some people thought we were. When you are way up there and you look down here it might look like that. But you can see when you're sitting here that you're in the hills.

CS: Of course. And this is not deep valley alluvial soil. But you didn't just draw the line around the vineyard, did you?

KK: I couldn't, because I didn't have the engineering marks that would have made it possible. So I had to take it to lines and marks on the map that were there.

CS: You didn't just use contour lines?

KK: No. At some points I did, where a certain contour line intersects this creek. That sort of thing. On the southern most edge there is a very important historical line from the rancho days, so I used that. And I used Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road for the eastern line and from there it cuts over to include the old Regnart property.

CS: Regnart had a winery and vineyard there before Prohibition.

MM: It turns out that some friends of mine are planting a new vineyard up there to the north and it's in the appellation, but wouldn't have been if the amendment hadn't gone through. William Pfeffer's place is right over there. You wrote about it in your book, the old Fremont Older estate.<sup>3</sup>

CS: Had your amendment gone in by the time of the hearing?

KK: Yes. I was surprised there wasn't the overt opposition I thought I'd have at the meeting, but from what you say I can see why.

CS: Right. They were just nervous about having anything disturbing the process. That was in 1981 and this was one of the first appellations in California. Now they look easy, but back then Bennion was not so sure. Now nobody cares, as long as no one is making any trouble. They don't want to hear gripes. I talked to Dave about it then. They weren't concerned about you're being in the appellation; they just didn't want anything to distract the BATF from a quick and clean decision. I told him at the time I thought you should have been drawn in in the first place. I think we talked about it at the hearing, you and I.

KK: Yes, we did talk then.

CS: Tell me about your move to use non-estate grapes in recent years.

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<sup>3</sup> Like *Modern Edens*, 58-59.



## Lateral

MM: That's only for the Lateral label. This idea started for two reasons. One was my restlessness, producing only one wine every year. The other about those short crops in the late eighties. We looked at that short crop in 1988 and shook our heads. We had a decent sized winery building with only a few barrels in it. We had capacity that wasn't being utilized and we had to make more wine. Now we had a relatively good sales network. I knew we could move more cases through it.

KK: And we could sense the change in the market, where people were wanting wines that we ready to drink earlier.

MM: We don't do anything around here without a lot of forethought. This project was two or three years in the thinking, 1986-88. In 1988 we bought grapes. We didn't want another wine that required ten years in the cellar and I wanted a wine that required the same equipment we were using. I didn't want to make a white wine, which would probably need refrigeration and filtration. So I wanted to make a Bordeaux style wine, that needed barrel aging. So I decided to make a wine like those of St. Emilion. No body was making a Merlot-Cabernet franc blend without Cabernet Sauvignon as a significant partner. This gave me a window of opportunity and it would give me a wine that would not compete with my other wine; it would not compete with it.

CS: Of course. No one would ever buy the one instead of the other.

MM: And I had seen other small wineries which had developed something I consider a problem. They would buy Zinfandel from the Jones vineyard and bottle it with that on the label. They build this wine's reputation. Then Jones decides to ask for more money or another winery offers more money.

CS: Or Jones starts his own winery.

MM: Right. But whichever happens, this small winery really can't get those grapes any more. So they go out and buy grapes from Smith, and consumers wonder where their beloved Jones wine went. I don't want that. I had seen the Kendall-Jackson Cardinale which started out at about \$8.00.

CS: Now it's closer to \$40.

MM: More like \$50. But it is a California appellation. It is not site specific.

KK: It used to be that the California appellation was a dirty word. No longer.

MM: There is one type of consumer who only cares about price and taste, and weren't concerned about the grape source.

CS: That's what Jess Jackson has done. And no one is going to tie him down because he can't get their grapes. That's one of the reasons his face was on the cover of *Wines & Vines* last month.

MM: So that's what we did. We made a California appellation and called it "Red Table Wine." So I could use whatever grapes I chose and whatever combination of varietals I wanted. I could change vineyard sources and percentages whenever I wanted.

The first year we bought Monterey County Merlot from Smith & Hook. And we bought Cabernet franc in the Sierra foothills at Indian Springs Vineyard near Grass Valley. In 1989 we went to Ventana (Monterey) and San Ysidro (Gilroy) for Merlot. Later we got Cabernet franc from Casa

Nuestra in Napa Valley. And we got a Garrod Cab franc right up from us off Mt. Eden Road. Then Merlot from Wente in Monterey. And we also got some Cabernet Sauvignon from a neighborhood vineyard here called Charles Guichard, a one acre vineyard. He was a home winemaker and he had an acre in his backyard. You can almost see it to the north up there through those trees. And right above it you can see the recently plowed vineyard that is just going in. You can see three guys on there hands and knees right now pounding in survey stakes. I'm helping him to do it. His name is Charles Maridon.

KK: He is an old orchardist here.

MM: He says that as a young man he used to work at the Regnart vineyard. If you like I'll introduce him to you.

CS: I already wrote that book. There's a limit now to how narrow my focus can be in this area anymore.

MM: Guichard numbered each vine and took pennies and stamped numbers on them and drilled a hole and with a nail pounded them onto the top of each stake.

CS: I did the same thing with that plastic tape you print with the little hand machine, and I also put on the planting date.

MM: He died and his wife Peggy wanted to maintain the vineyard in his memory but she didn't want to be bothered with the barrels and such. So she came to me and I have been buying her grapes for the last few years. That goes into the Lateral now.

CS: I was going to say that you could play the St. Emilion thing a bit too heavy. There's nothing wrong with a little Cabernet Sauvignon to build up the flavor.

MM: Château Cheval-Blanc is my model, but I think that Château Figeac does have Cabernet Sauvignon.

CS: There are a few; I think of Fourtet and La Gaffelière right offhand.

While we're talking about other vineyards, tell me about the Knight Smith place across the street. I already interviewed Mr. Smith and got the basic history, but I'd like to get your connection down.

MM: I bought the 1989 grapes. Then I started to manage it through 1993. I can put those grapes in the estate wine, and the Guichard grapes too, if you have a managing contract for three years or more and the vineyard is in the same appellation as the winery.

But the deer and bird damage has always been very severe on the Knight Smith vineyard. We never got more than a barrel of wine from it. It was expensive to maintain, because they wanted it to look good. It was running me about \$2000 per year in vineyard maintenance. That for a half a ton. And it has leaf-roll virus and I could never get the Brix above 21. It was a marginal situation and when I decided I wanted to deer fence my area his problems are going to be double. They can't eat ours so they'll go to his. I asked him to put up a deer fence and he didn't want to. So I got out of the contract. I don't think that is going to be a productive vineyard in the future.

CS: Let's go back to Lateral. You do make changes from year to year.

MM: Yes, I can make changes whenever I want to.



CS: But do you change this back label with the percentages each time?

MM: Yes. I just sent one off to the printer.

CS: How much did you make in 1988?

MM: We made 200 cases.

CS: That isn't going to give you a month in Europe.

MM: But that year it doubled our production.

CS: Do you use any different fermentation practices?

MM: Not really. The difference in the wine is a testament to the differences in the grape varieties. Same fermentation and barrel regime as the Cabernet.

CS: But this one you filter.

MM: No. Unfined and unfiltered.

CS: Tell me about the Lateral front label.

MM: And we wanted the packaging to be very different. Kathryn Kennedy is there but the Lateral proprietary name dominates the label.

KK: We designed the label ourselves.

MM: The border on that black and gold label (see to the left) has an interesting story. Labels run about 10¢ and this was is about 30¢. I wanted an original pattern. I noticed that when I dumped the wine lees out of a barrel, not the gross lees, but about six months down the line, it has acid tartrate crystals. I dumped the barrel out on the cement next to the winery, on a sunny day, and it sparkled and swirled like a Paisley pattern. So I snapped a photo. So what you see on the label is an enlargement negative of that shot.

CS: Let's talk about the subsequent years, after 1988.

MM: It sold very well. In fact, it sells like wildfire. We started at \$14.50. Now we're up to \$18.50. Originally I didn't think we'd cross the \$20 line, but I think we're going to cross it. The people who sell it for us couldn't believe it-- a drinkable Kathryn Kennedy wine. We'd sell them a case and a customer would buy a bottle and he'd be back wanting two cases. We're up to 600 cases now. So at this point the winery is at full capacity. We can't make more of either wine.

CS: Have you considered any of this San Luis Obispo County Merlot that is becoming so popular?

MM: I personally drive to the vineyard where we buy grapes, I watch them pick the grapes. The pickers really give me a look as I stand on the picking bin taking out leaves. They aren't used to seeing a winemaker in the field. So, San Luis Obispo is too far to drive. Even the Sierra foothills was too far. I'm looking for Cabernet franc closer to home.

KK: That immediate crush after picking has been important to us.

MM: We don't want a trucker bringing up grapes from Monterey at mid-day and stopping for a



hamburger.

KK: We don't want to start a fermentation with hot grapes.

CS: Where is Lateral going to go in the future?

MM: We've been talking about that quite a bit. We thought about taking it out of this facility and making it grow big. Custom crushing and keep the price down with bigger volume. But we would lose control.

KK: We want to top barrels when we want to do it.

MM: And there are some legal considerations concerning the actual ownership of the product before you bottle it. The other problem is that it takes capital to expand. We crunched the numbers and it didn't work for us. It might in the future.

Another way we might go with Lateral is to keep it small and keep finding better and better vineyards. Then take the price to a more premium level.

CS: There is a lot of non-bearing Merlot and Cabernet franc north of Santa Barbara and I think you're going to have some good opportunities in the next few years as this acreage come to bear. I think we're going to see some really good varietal Merlot at Trader Joe's in a few years.

MM: And I really don't think Merlot is what it's cracked up to be.

CS: How about white wine. Kathryn mentioned a vin gris you made a few years ago.

MM: I think it was in 1980 that I left a box of Cabernet in the field. So I pressed it into a blanc de noirs and I bottled it and opened it a couple of months later with Bill Anderson. He liked it and said we ought to make a blush wine, but not from Cabernet. He said I should make it from Gamay Beaujolais and he sent me down to Doug Meador at Ventana and we bought a ton the next vintage. He asked me whether I wanted to call the grapes Pinot noir or Gamay Beaujolais. I said that I wanted it to be Gamay Beaujolais, since that's what Bill told me. So when I got home Bill said NO, that the Pinot noir was more valuable, so we called Meador back and got him to change the invoice. So we made Pinot noir vin gris. Next year we had Meador press it for us.

CS: How did you label it?

MM: Saratoga Cellars. But we've dropped it.

KK: We just haven't used it; we didn't drop it.

MM: But a few years ago somebody came out with a negociant label out of Lodi, Saratoga Hills, which is too close.

CS: Saratoga is a really good name. That's why they took it. You all should get together and get a Saratoga appellation, which would stop that sort of thing. You could get these little guys and Garrod and Mariani and Cinnabar, Mrs. Gaspar. It should be the whole Mt. Eden area, Pierce Road, La Cresta and Congress Springs.

MM: There's a resistance in the Santa Cruz Mountains to breaking down into smaller areas. We might go in that direction if we started breaking up and getting factional.

CS: I remember at the BATF hearing, that's one of the questions they asked me, what would I think about sub-appellations. And I said it was perfectly logical, just like Médoc, and inside that Pauillac, Margaux and St. Julien. We could have a Monte Bello, Saratoga, Portola Valley. We already have a Ben Lomond Mountain, and Bonny Doon is coming.

And you don't have to worry about losing the Santa Cruz Mountain integrity. You just have to do what they did in Napa. Get your assemblyman to put in a bill that states that sub-appellations have to have the main appellation on the label. Today a Howell Mountain or Stags Leap wine has to have Napa Valley right there with it. It's a state law, but you have to do it area by area.

Back to Saratoga Cellars.

MM: The next year we had Meador press the wine and we rented a moving van and put the barrels in the back. As they were pressing I could see the difference in the first part of the press and later, how much lighter it was at first and I marked the barrels. So in 1981 we made a Pinot noir blanc and a Pinot noir vin gris.

CS: Why did you stop making it?

MM: Next year we made barrel fermented dry Chenin blanc from Ventana. And I liked that wine as well. But we realized that on our scale we couldn't make inexpensive wine. Those wines were five or six dollars per bottle. And we didn't want to make Chardonnay. So we stopped Saratoga Cellars.

KK: And we weren't equipped to make white wine.

MM: We had no capacity for cold stabilization so we had to imitate the process by adding calcium carbonate. We got that from Bill Anderson.

CS: They used to call that "plastering" a wine, which is not a very attractive term.

MM: White wine is not what we're designed for.

KK: But people still ask us why we don't make more.

MM: We put the first one in a clear bottle and the label was a decal. We got it at a place that made decals for motorcycle clubs, and such. It was silver letters and clear otherwise on a clear bottle. A gorgeous package, but we had to put soap on the bottle and squeegee the bubbles out. It was a real pain.

CS: Let's talk about the future. What do you see down the road?

MM: Years down the line I'll be making wine somewhere else. I know this is a terrible business to make a career out of, it's in my blood now. David Bruce says if you're in for eight years you're hooked. I love it. I may have to go to another area and start up again. That may be our distant future.

I want to make as many great vintages of Cabernet from this spot as I can. But I don't think this will be like a European estate passed down through generations. It's too valuable and I have brothers and sisters who are not interested in the wine business. And when inheritance becomes an issue, they will want out. Then I'll try to restart some place.

CS: But Kathryn, you're just going to sit on it? Really?

KK: For the time being, but it has always been an appealing possibility, to sell the land. There's not a great fortune in this business and I have been pumping capital in for years that I haven't gotten out. That can be traded for millions, for which you have to do no work whatsoever. If there was a way that I could keep the estate together and know that it would persist through the years, that would be



my first choice.

CS: That's why in medieval times they developed the system of entail and primogeniture to keep the estates together. It wasn't such an evil system.

KK: But you cannot do it in today's world. So there is a possibility that the property will be sold in whole or in part before I die. And I wouldn't mind having my ship come in after all these years.

CS: But this ship here is pretty nice. There's nothing like these foothills.

KK: The alternatives of going out of business here are not what most people face.

MM: That's one of the things that has helped us to operate on a shoestring, knowing that going out of business was more lucrative than staying in business.

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