

## Roudon-Smith Vineyards

Roudon-Smith Vineyards became a bonded winery in 1972 and produced its first wine that year. It was founded by *Robert Roudon (RR)* and *James Smith (JS)*. Their wives, *Annamaria Roudon (AR)* and *June Smith (JMS)*, have been an important part of the operation from the outset. The two men had no experience in commercial wine production when they set out on this venture. Both had been engineers in Southern California, but had not known one another there.

Roudon was born in Fort Worth, Texas; Smith was born in Bear Creek Wisconsin. Their winery, built in 1978, has a capacity of about 60,000 gallons, and is located on Bean Creek Road, north of Felton. Their current production is about 10,000 cases per year. They have about five acres of estate vineyard, but have always bought most of the grapes that have gone into their wines.

My interviews took place at the winery, a few weeks before the 1993 vintage and just after it ended.

\* \* \* \* \*

August 5, 1993

CS: Let's start with your background in Southern California and how you got together on this venture.

JS: For a long time I didn't drink wine. After my wife and I were married, she is of Italian descent, she told me that we should be having wine with dinner. I said she had to be kidding; that is what people drank out of brown bags. We didn't have anything like fine wine in Wisconsin. It was all Virginia Dare, Mogen David, or fortified sweet wines. After we started drinking wine we began experimenting and trying different kinds. I ended up being a pretty serious wine consumer.

I came to Northern California to work at a new venture, Amdahl Corporation. I had been with a new venture company in Southern California, but the venture capital people wanted to put their money behind Gene Amdahl, so I got a call from him to work up here.

CS: Let's go to the Roudon story.

RR: I was working down there as an engineer in Culver City after having moved there from New Mexico, where I had gone to the University as a fine arts major, in music. But I quickly learned that you don't make much money in music unless you are extremely talented, unless you want to teach. I had tried teaching and I couldn't hack that, at all.

CS: What was your main instrument.

RR: Bass clarinet. But I got into engineering so I could make a living. But I found out that after a period of time in the manufacturing side of things you cease to be an engineer and become a people pusher, a supervisor, or a personnel director. So my wife and I looked around for some other business to get into. We went to a travel agent school, but we decided against that. We opened a mail-order business but we didn't get into that very far. But I did know how to make wine. I had learned how it was done in Germany and then actually made some in Los Angeles.

CS: Where does Germany come in?

RR: That's where I met my wife. But before I met her I was not a wine drinker either. Thus the influence of women. In fact my family was teetotaler, at least my mother was. My father was not, unless he was home. I never drank wine until I was in the army in Germany. But I was introduced to the fine Rieslings there and I became interested, so I went around to the different wineries to see how it was done. My wife's family drank wine as part of meals. It was a food product.

CS: Was this around Frankfurt?

RR: Closer to Mannheim, in the Pfalz, which is a very large wine region in Germany. All this was a revelation to me, that something could be so good just from grapes. So we became interested in the wine business in 1965. We traveled to see the wineries of California. We would fly up to Northern California almost every weekend we could. We just looked around. We went all over, from San Luis Obispo all the way up to Mendocino. We were thinking seriously of getting into the wine business, somehow.

CS: Were you making any wine.

RR: Oh, yes. I made some Riesling, Pinot noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel. I had the grapes shipped down from Napa.

CS: Did you have any wine "cultural" connections in Southern California, like Nate Chroman's classes at UCLA?

RR: No. Nothing like that. I got books by writing to the University of California at Davis. I made a lot of my equipment.

CS: Where would you get something like a hydrometer?

RR: From Bob Ellsworth in Yountville.<sup>1</sup>

CS: So did I, and from Davis Bynum in Albany.

RR: Ellsworth was very helpful and at that time Dick Graff was selling barrels and I called him and bought a couple.<sup>2</sup> He also was very helpful and pointed me at several connections. He was the one who told me to visit Ridge Vineyards; this was in about 1966. He told me they were doing some really spectacular things. That how I got to know Dave Bennion. I dropped by unannounced one time.

CS: So, when did you move up here?

RR: 1971.

JS: We both came up here in 1971, but we didn't know each other then.

RR: I came up here with the specific intention of getting into the wine business.

CS: Who else did you visit and talk to?

RR: David Bruce, Bob Mullen; they were oldtimers by the late sixties. They'd been in business for five years already. Up north I visited Mike Robbins at Spring Mountain, just when he was putting the

---

<sup>1</sup> Today, The Compleat Winemaker, 955 Vintage Avenue, St. Helena 94574.

<sup>2</sup> Richard H. Graff was the founder of Chalone Vineyard in 1960, BW 4512.

winery at the original place, what's today St. Clement.<sup>3</sup> He was just installing things there and I was very impressed.

CS: How did Roudon and Smith meet?

RR: Jim put an ad in the *San Jose Mercury* newspaper, a blind ad, two lines, that said he wanted a manufacturing engineer, and I answered the ad. I was looking for a job up here.

CS: So your idea, like practically all Santa Cruz Mountain vintners, was to get a job in Silicon Valley and then to start up a winery on the side.

JS: I was the first person in manufacturing at Amdahl. I started there about six weeks after they opened their door in 1971. I was to develop the process to build this state-of-the-art computer. They told me I could hire one person to help me the first year. So I had to find somebody who had strengths where I was not particularly strong.

CS: Wine never came up in the conversation when this was going on?

JS: No, it wasn't even mentioned. That year jobs were very hard to come by. I had dozens of applicants from that one ad. Bob Roudon was the one that really fit.

CS: That was during the Nixon recession. Things were tough for engineers for a while then.

JS: My boss and I talked to Bob and we put together an offer an hour after he had left.

CS: But you were just a consumer at this point.

JS: That's right. This idea of a winery had never occurred to me. We got together on that part of it because I was out looking for property to buy. I wanted my children to be raised the way I was raised, in a rural setting, where you really learn things.

CS: So you're in Silicon Valley working, but you want to live a few miles out in the trees and meadows.

JS: That's right. I'm out looking to buy a farm. Bob asked what I was going to raise on my farm, and I said I didn't know. Whatever will grow there. So we started looking for property together.

CS: With the same kind of idea.

RR: No, I was going to build a winery.

CS: All this happens very fast, because you bonded the winery the next year, 1972.

But, let's go back; what's the genesis of the idea of you two doing a winery?

JS: Bob asked me what I was going to raise on my land. So he said, "Why don't you raise grapes?" So I agreed. Then we decided that we should look for property together. That way we could afford to buy a bigger parcel. And we would be getting it for less unit cost.

CS: The wives involved in all this?

<sup>3</sup>Michael Robbins founded Spring Mountain Vineyards in 1968, BW 4521. Today that winery is St. Clement, BW 4745, founded in 1975 after Robbins moved his operation onto Spring Mountain.

JS: Oh, yes. They have been involved since day one. I can remember going into the basement of my wife's grandfather's house in Chicago and all the winemaking equipment was there. He had made his own wine for years.

CS: What is the next step to make this all work?

RR: We bought the property, up on Mountain View Road. That's off Vine Hill Road. It's only one mile long. It goes from the northern terminus of Branciforte Road, where it ends and becomes Vine Hill. We bought twelve acres of mostly fruit trees and brush. This was a joint venture. We were a partnership; we're a corporation now. Both families owned the land and now the corporation owns it. I have my house there.

CS: What did you do with the land after you got it?

RR: We started clearing the part that we were going to plant first. It was full of fruit trees, plums and some black walnuts. There were some grapes up there too.

CS: Had it actually been a vineyard.

RR: Yes. We know that it was a vineyard.

JS: There were grape stakes all over the place. It had been a vineyard before the fellow we bought it from had owned it.

RR: His name was Antonio Gargiulo. Before then, we have a list of owners; I'll get it for you. It goes back into the 19th century.

CS: I'll stick it in right here. You're pretty sure this is a commercial vineyard, not just somebody's half acre for home use.

JS: Yes, it was commercial.

CS: Do you know what the varieties were?

RR: They were red and white. I tried to identify some of them, but I don't know what they were. I do know that they had been grafted onto St. George rootstock.

Antonio bought the place in 1945 and the vineyard and fruit trees were already well established.

CS: I'd guess it was a Prohibition vineyard. It's really hard to get red grapes ripe up there. But a lot of the grapes in this area were sold to home winemakers, and you don't have to have such ripe grapes for them. There were lots of sales to local families and John Spezia tells about loading up the railroad cars in Felton for shipment east, from Vine Hill and Bonny Doon.

RR: I know Antonio packed grapes and shipped them east, after he bought the place.

JS: But this property we bought didn't even have a road into it. Bob and I took off one day and drove over to Stockton and bought a bulldozer, and we built our own road there. We cleared the place with it. We tried to dig the foundation for his house, but it didn't have enough poop for that, to cut that sandstone. But we took all the trees out with it.

CS: What did you end up with the first year?



RR: We planted three acres of St. George rootstock, which we got from Tom Kruse.<sup>4</sup> We worked our tails off planting them. We had no water to irrigate. We had a well, but we had no means for getting the water to the vines. But it did rain quite a bit that year and actually we had a fairly good take in the rootstock. Unfortunately we neglected to build a fence.

JS: Well, we didn't build a good enough fence. We made our own fence posts out of Monterey pine, and in one year they rot and fall down.

RR: So the rootstock is coming up, maybe about a foot high, and the deer got in and mowed the place.

JS: An eight foot fence post made from Monterey pine takes two people to lift it when it's new. A year later one person can lift it with one hand.

RR: Two city guys.

CS: So what happened. Did they make it.

RR: No, not really. We had several problems. We didn't have the rows in the right direction. The deer ate them down to nubbins. It was hard to find people in those days who could do field grafting. I didn't know how. So we decided to take it all out and start over.

CS: When did you start over?

RR: Those went in in the spring of 1972.

CS: But still you are going to make a crush that year.

JS: Bob lived in San Jose. We built a stemmer-crusher in his garage there.

RR: I'd started on it in Los Angeles. I'd seen Ellsworth's and I started building one but I didn't have it finished when we moved up here. Jim and I finished it here. We built a nice stand for it which we painted a bright blue.

JS: And we were busy at work, six days a week. During the crush we would split the chores.

RR: And we needed a press. We got an old basket press from John Roffinella.<sup>5</sup> There it is right over there in front of the winery. It looks sort of sad now.

JS: We bought twenty-one whiskey barrels from Orchard Supply Hardware and scraped the insides the way Tom Kruse showed us.

RR: Some of them actually had whiskey in them. Which we drank.

JS: We also got six French barrels from De Bella in San Francisco. They were remanufactured. He made them from spare staves and broken barrels. Sixty dollars apiece.

RR: But I think we paid ten bucks for the whiskey barrels.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Thomas Kruse Winery was bonded in 1971, in the Hecker Pass area near Gilroy, BW 4566.

<sup>5</sup> A vineyard owner in the Hecker Pass area. His family had operated BW 2248 there after Prohibition. In later years he acted as a grape broker for small wineries and home winemakers.

CS: What were your grape sources?

RR: We got Petite Sirah from Roffinella. And we got Sauvignon blanc from Hollister, through him.

CS: That's funny. I bought Petite Sirah from Roffinella in 1972.

RR: It was dynamite Petite Sirah. We just had the last bottle last year.

JS: We also bought the crop from that Portuguese guy down the road from Mirassou. I can't remember his name. Zinfandel.

RR: He said it was Zinfandel, but we had our doubts.

JS: We also got some Sauvignon vert and some Palomino.

RR: And we traded that to Roffinella for the Sauvignon blanc. I think it was two to one. That was from Hollister.

JS: He would never tell you his sources.

CS: He could have been buying it from Almaden, at Paicines. That was about the time they were having a lot more grapes than they could use, or sell.  
What were the commercial wines?

RR: The Zinfandel, the Petite Sirah and the Sauvignon blanc.

JS: We had just enough Petite Sirah for one barrel. We were planning to make a Petite Rosé out of it, but there was too much color. The plan was to make a red, white and rosé.

CS: How much did you make?

JS: We had twenty barrels, and one for topping.

RR: So, it was about 1,000 gallons.

CS: Where did you make it?

RR: We made it in Antonio's out-building up on the property.

JS: He had lived in that once. It was on the property site. We bought part of his property, this thirty acre parcel. This little house was on his portion of the property. He had lived in that house while he built his own house. Then he abandoned it. It was just sitting there with an upstairs room and a downstairs basement. Full of junk. We rented it from him.

RR: We moved it all out under his car port. He didn't wanted it getting rained on.

CS: You thought you'd be using this as your winery?

RR: No. This was just for the first year, while we were building my house with a basement. That's where we live now. The basement was to be the winery the next year. That was planned as the winery. We had no idea we would get this big.

CS: So then you saw yourselves as working on at Amdahl, and this was a sideline; you might

CS: So then you saw yourselves as working on at Amdahl, and this was a sideline; you might make money or not.

RR: Yes. A commercial venture, but we didn't understand how big it would have to be to make a go of it.

CS: When did you finish the house?

RR: 1973. We moved in September 1974.

JS: We crushed there in 1973.

CS: What's happening in the vineyard?

RR: We got smart and ripped up what we had planted and bought some benchgrafts, on St. George. From Emmolo Nursery in St. Helena. What we planted was White Riesling. It was very popular at that time. And I knew how to make it. I think we planted about an acre.

JS: And we put up a real fence. That was in 1976. Later we planted Chardonnay and grafted over the Riesling.

RR: Then Riesling went into the dumpster as far as pricing and sales were concerned. So we decided early that it had to go and went with Chardonnay.

JS: And the Riesling didn't do well there.

RR: But the Chardonnay we grafted onto the Riesling are still doing very well.

CS: So you had a Riesling sandwich between St. George rootstock and Chardonnay.

RR: By then we had three acres of Chardonnay. Then in 1988 we planted two more acres of Chardonnay.

CS: So there are five acres of estate Chardonnay. What about these vines? (Points to about a third of an acre of vines near the winery.)

RR: These went in about twelve years ago.

CS: These are twelve years old? They look about five or six years old.

JS: Actually, they were planted in 1979. I took all the vines we culled out from the main vineyard, as plants we thought were too weak, and we brought them over here.

CS: Where did you get the Chardonnay?

RR: The first was from Emmolo, and the next was from Rich Kunde in Sonoma.

CS: Do you know what clone, or clones, you have?

RR: I'm a firm believer in the European mixed clone approach. So we intentionally planted as many clones as we could find. We have thirteen different clones in the five acres. We have several Davis clones, 104, 105, 107. We have some Wente and we have some Mt. Eden. And we have several

CS: What did you do with this wine you made in 1972?

RR: We bottled right out of the barrel, and we got bottle variation you wouldn't believe. The Sauvignon blanc was fined but not filtered, so it eventually dropped some sediment.

JS: And there was also some malo-lactic in the bottle. Not all of it. Some would go if it got warm.

JMS: That was the one that was in two batches?

RR: Yes. One was in French oak and one in Canadian. No, wait a minute; that was in 1973.

JS: The Sauvignon blanc went into the French oak barrels in 1972.

RR: The Zinfandel went into whiskey barrels. Also the Petite Sirah.

CS: How did you sell this wine?

JMS: Lots of it was word-of-mouth. People we knew.

JS: The Zinfandel, which we didn't really think was Zinfandel, we sold through Eric's Deli. He started in Scott's Valley. We had a couple of barrels we hadn't bottled and he wanted it in gallon jugs. So we bottled it a barrel at a time and sold it to him. Then one day it was gone and he couldn't understand why he couldn't get it anymore.

CS: So people liked it.

JS: Well, we didn't like it very much, but other people did.

CS: What had been your guide technically in making this wine?

RR: Most of what I got out of books came from Amerine and Joslyn.<sup>6</sup> It was pretty general, but for details I got lots from other winemakers. I got a lot from Dave Bennion. If I had a question I could just get on the phone. That's one of the marvelous things about the wine people in this area. But back in those days it was pretty much that way throughout California. I could always call Tom Kruse. But I think it's changed a lot up in Napa and Sonoma in recent years. I learned an awful lot about equipment from Mike Robbins. He had really done his homework.

CS: I can still see it a lot in Sonoma. Less so in Napa.

How did you sell the Petite Sirah?

RR: I know that we sold some to Gerald Weisel, Weimax in San Mateo. He was about a seventeen year old kid back then, working for his father. He was a good friend with Tom Kruse, and Alexia Moore. Back then it was Alexia Gabler.<sup>7</sup> She was living with Tom Kruse back then. That's how she got into the business.

JS: Actually, she made that Thompson Seedless varietal for Kruse.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> *Table Wines*. Berkeley, 1970.

<sup>7</sup> Important in Bay Area wine sales today.

<sup>8</sup> *Wines & Vines* (February, 1976).



JS: Actually, she made that Thompson Seedless varietal for Kruse.<sup>8</sup>

CS: She and her husband live on the old Rixford La Questa land today and have a little Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard in their front yard. They sell the grapes to Woodside.<sup>9</sup>

Let's go to your grape sources for your next few vintages.

RR: The next vintage we made in the basement of my new house.

JS: We got Sauvignon blanc in Sonoma Valley off Arnold Drive.

CS: You really got a lot of Sonoma grapes over the years.

RR: We both like Sonoma grapes, particularly Zinfandel. And Sonoma Chardonnay. You have to understand that in those years there was almost nothing to buy down here. And there wasn't much to buy south of here yet. Much of the Monterey plantings were corporate and they didn't want to deal with anyone like us.

JS: We bought grapes from Bob Carver, from his Chauvet Vineyard. We made that connection through Rich Kunde, who has the nursery up there in Sonoma, and he gave us Carver's name. He had about three acres in his front yard.<sup>10</sup> Those vines were planted in 1935.

We made our connection with the Steiner vineyard on Sonoma Mountain through Merry Edwards. She had made one vintage of Steiner Cabernet Sauvignon up at Mt. Eden. When she left for Matanzas Creek, she told us about these grapes.<sup>11</sup> Steiner's first wife is the owner today of Matanzas Creek.

CS: Sandra McIver was Sandra Steiner?

JS: That's right. As a matter of fact Matanzas Creek put out an estate Cabernet in 1978 that was from Steiner vineyards.

RR: After the divorce they couldn't call it "estate" anymore.<sup>12</sup>

JMS: We got grapes from the Old Hill Ranch Vineyard.

JS: We made Zinfandel in 1978, 1979 and 1980.

CS: That was a Ravenswood exclusive in the mid-eighties.

JS: That was a 17 acre vineyard in 1978 and we got five tons. In 1979 we got twelve tons. Carol Bowen sold the place in 1981. She was one cantankerous lady. She could embarrass a truck driver. I think we got those grapes because I don't think anyone else wanted to deal with her. After the sale we couldn't get those grapes. It is behind the Hospital below Glen Ellen.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Wines & Vines* (February, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> See Woodside interview.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Chauvet was one of the historic winegrowers of the Glen Ellen area of the Sonoma Valley. See: *Wine West* (July, 1980): 58; *Wines & Vines* (April, 1967): 60; *Pacific Wine & Spirit Review* (May, 1908).

<sup>11</sup> For Edwards' history see: *Wines & Vines* (December, 1984): 19; *Wine Spectator*, 2/16/86; 8/31/92.

<sup>12</sup> Matanzas Creek Winery was bonded in 1978, BW 4848.

CS: That means that vineyard is part of the old William McPherson Hill vineyard.<sup>13</sup>

RR: We thought that these vines predated Prohibition. It was a mixture of vines, an old Italian field blend vineyard. Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Mataro (Mourvèdre), Mondeuse (Refosco), Carignane. They even had some Concords in there. Some white grapes.

JS: There were as many poison oak plants as there were vines.

CS: So you used those grapes for three years. How many years for the Chauvet grapes?

RR: Fourteen years. 1974 was the first year. That year we blended it with some grapes we got from Livermore, just up the road from Ruby Hill. Ken Nather. We only got one ton from Chauvet that year.

In 1973 we made Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot noir from the old Schermerhorn vineyard on Vine Hill.

CS: Ah, those were grapes from around the old house. Those were the vines that Quentin Quistorf planted in the 1940s.

RR: Ridge had those grapes, but for some reason Schermerhorn got mad at them, and we just happened to be there at the right time. So he let us have the grapes. 1973 was a fantastic vintage for Santa Cruz Mountain grapes. That wine is still alive.

CS: Nobody seems to know about the red grapes on Vine Hill. Fran Bennion first told me about seeing them. But I had read about their being planted in the Quistorf diary.

RR: We had it from Schermerhorn that he and Chaffee Hall had planted those grapes.

CS: Well, he did except he had someone plant them for him.

RR: Schermerhorn was good at supervising, so that figures.

CS: I don't think that Hall and Schermerhorn got their hands dirty very often, although I have seen a photo of Hall plowing the vineyard at Hallcrest. Planting vines is less romantic.  
Did you make any other vintages from those red grapes?

JS: 1974, but they didn't get ripe. And they shattered so bad.

RR: One year we made Zinfandel from Lodi. That was through Dave Bennion's connection there.

JS: We only had about 30 gallons of Cabernet from Vine Hill in 1974, and we ended up putting it into the Lodi Zinfandel.

RR: That's still a wonderful wine. It was about 20% Vine Hill Cab, and that gave it more acid. I liked those Lodi Zins from Ridge, too. As long as they didn't fizz.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>13</sup> Hill was the pioneer winegrower in the Glen Ellen area, with vines in the 1850s. *Daily Alta California*, 5/20/1870; *Sonoma Democrat*, 10/6/1877. He sold his land to the state in 1889 to be used to build the home for the feeble-minded. *Sonoma Index*, 9/21/1889.

October 27, 1993

CS: Let's talk about the period between 1975 and 1977. These were the last up at the cellar under your house.

RR: 1975 started out raining early and continued. We did Zinfandel from Chauvet and we also did Zin from the Santa Clara Valley. That was a one time deal in Morgan Hill, and we also got Gamay from that vineyard. I don't remember the name of the owner. It's houses now.

The weird thing was the Chauvet thing. We had hired a guy to haul the grapes down, since we were both busy working at Amdahl. We had been waiting for him and he arrived in the middle of the night. He stalled the truck down at the bottom of the hill and it wouldn't start. It was raining cats and dogs. I was asleep, I don't think that Jim was there, and he woke us up. The guy had a big beard and was dripping wet. So we hauled out some tarps and covered the grapes. At that time our hillside driveway was not paved, so by morning it was a quagmire and no way was anything going to get up that hill. So what we had to do was to take the tractor with the trailer, put bins on the back of the trailer, go down and shovel the grapes out of his truck onto the trailer. The grapes were in half ton bins, not boxes. Then we had to carry that back up to the crusher, crush them, and go back for another load. I think we had about five tons.

CS: I recall we were hit down here harder than in the North Coast that year.<sup>14</sup>

JS: But that was the lightest Chauvet Zinfandel we ever made.

RR: But we crushed it and processed it in the rain. It was diluted, but surprisingly that wine is still good. Without that rain I think it might have been as good as the 1974.

We also made Chardonnay from the Mill Creek Vineyards<sup>15</sup> and that wine is still alive.

CS: Was the volume in 1975 similar to 1974?

JS: We did more in 1975, about 2,500 gallons. But that's still only about 1,000 cases.

CS: Marketing the same.

RR: I think that was when Bill Gibbs started selling for us.<sup>16</sup> He was later one of the principals in the Felton-Empire operation. And he got the label after they went out of business. He came around and was interested in Santa Cruz Mountain wineries, and a couple of other people were with him at the same time. At the time he was selling for Burgess Cellars as well.

JMS: Wasn't he selling for Ridge at that time.

RR: No. He had just been "dumped" by them, he called it. They started selling by telephone instead of outside salesmen.

CS: You said you cut back a little in 1976.

RR: That was a particularly busy year for us. It was when we had all the problems at Amdahl. We were working six days a week.

---

<sup>14</sup> It was rainy and unsettled here from 10/6 to 10/12. It began raining again 10/25.

<sup>15</sup> BW 4739 (1976) near Healdsburg. Charles W. Kreck.

<sup>16</sup> See Beauregard and McCloskey interviews.

JS: I wasn't there. I left Amdahl in 1974. I was working at National Semi-Conductor here. I quit before the harvest in 1978. That's when we were building the winery. Later I did a little consulting.

CS: So, since then you've been able to live off the winery.

RR: I stopped working full-time in 1977. Then I worked a year part-time and quit in the summer of 1978 so I could go full-time with the construction project on the new winery.

CS: So 1978 was really important. It wasn't just a matter of raising your capacity and building a building. You were changing your way of life. I had thought you kept working up into the early eighties.

JS: And we didn't have to work as hard anymore. We didn't have two jobs. Before then we had to do most of the work on weekends or at night. I remember having to pick the Chauvet Zinfandel on two successive weekends. One batch came in at 23° Brix and the second one was 36°. That was in 1976. We kept them in two separate bottlings. We didn't have much of it. And the same thing happened in 1978. That year it all came in sweet, and 30 plus.

RR: Actually we fortified the 1978. It was port. The alcohol was about 18%. It had fermented out to over 15% and still it had 8% sugar.

CS: What did you call it?

JS: Dessert Zinfandel. It was really good, if you like port.

JMS: And we put it in half-bottles.

CS: How much down were you in 1976?

JS: We did about two-thirds of what we did in 1975.

RR: In 1977 we decided to do as much as we could to fill up the cellar. We did over 45 tons. Something like 7,000 gallons. It was mostly red wine.

We knew we were going to build this new facility, and we wanted to have enough stock to start on our upward move in production. This was to be the first expansion year.

JS: We moved everything out of the cellar and just filled it with barrels.

CS: How did you decide to go this route?

RR: We decided that we wanted to be in the wine business and to do that and make a living meant we had to produce more wine. We decided that we'd need 10,000 cases.

CS: And you're running at about 10,000 now. So you hit that and held. And the purpose of this was to make it possible for you to be full-time vintners.

Everybody happy with this? The family went along?

JMS: Our kids were not happy.

JS: This move automatically made us poor. They just weren't able to have the things that their friends had.

The first money we took out of the winery was in 1980.



CS: So, that early you were that much ahead.

RR: We were profitable before 1980, but before that the profits went back into the operation.

CS: How did you pursue the winery idea? Architect? Consultant?

JS: We just did it. We did hire a draughtsman.

CS: Well, you guys are engineers.

RR: We figured how big it had to be to hold the necessary barrels, bottling equipment, and all that, and some case storage. We just designed a serviceable building that would be unobtrusive. You really don't see much here when you come in.

CS: I'm always starting to drive by the place.

In a way you guys are sort of unique. Not quite. But this sort of thing is really very rare. But there is a certain uniqueness to the fact that you have stuck to this 10,000 case thing. You don't have a lot of employees.

JS: That was the idea. We didn't want them.

RR: Originally we wanted to do no more than would take the labor of just us two. We were sick of employees, having worked in industry so long. But it turned out you just can't do it all by yourself. Not at that volume. We have a part-time person in the cellar and in the vineyard.

CS: Today you hear people talking 20,000-25,000 cases to do what you have done and stick to it.

RR: Right. Today the profit margins are considerably lower.

CS: Of course, since you have to depend on outside grapes, you don't have the advantage that some of the "oldtimers" from the early seventies have, in that they had their land before prices took off and before interest rates hit the ceiling in the late seventies.

RR: And we don't have the disadvantages either. We're talking about two different businesses here. A vineyard is quite a different business.

CS: But my point is that you have to pay current prices for grapes and if you owned old land all you would have to do is to pay whatever it takes to produce them.

RR: And sometimes that's higher than what you sell the grapes for.

CS: Yes, but if you own the winery you don't sell the grapes. You have five acres and you are going to get maybe 15 tons of Chardonnay and you don't have to think a moment whether Chardonnay grapes prices are going to set a record. Of course today there's little chance of that.

JS: Well, 15 is high for us, but we should get that. But we only got 10 tons this year.

CS: Is that because of the late rain in May-- bad set.

RR: I think it's because we got 15 tons last year.

CS: But still, it's remarkable to me that you have a 10,000 case operation, you don't have a lot of vineyard, you started over twenty years ago, and you are content to stay at that level and content with the result. Most people in your position are not. Most have driven ahead on capacity and production. And, of course, there are quite a few who aren't around anymore.

RR: I like the idea that I can pick and choose areas where grapes grow the best. If we had vineyards here we couldn't produce Zinfandel and Cabernet is marginal. Forget Petite Sirah. So we have gone all over to other areas to find grapes.

CS: Was that in your mind, to hold to that all the way? You never had the ideal of 30 acres of Pinot noir and Chardonnay up here? It would always be an eclectic approach.

RR: I never wanted to go into the big time vineyard business.

CS: What else was special about 1977.

JS: We got a lot more from San Luis Obispo. And we got Chardonnay from Doug Meador in Monterey (Ventana). And we got several Zinfandels down there.

RR: And we did Cabernet from San Luis for the first time.

JS: There were four Cabernets and at least that many Zinfandels.

CS: But they ended up as blends didn't they?

RR: Mostly vineyard designations.

JS: We did have a 1977 Central Coast Zinfandel that was a blend. One of those vineyards for that wine belonged to the City of San Jose. They had a vineyard down near 11th Street, near Spartan Stadium.

CS: That's the one near Kelly Park. I had somebody call me about them the other day. Those are old vines. I think they are still there.

JS: I remember the acid was fantastic, about 1.4. And the sugar was about 26°. And we made some Zin from another place and found when we started to crush them they were at 19° Brix. They were from near Templeton, below Paso Robles. Blended together we had a pretty decent Zinfandel. We gave it some Acidex in that 1,000 gallon milk tank we had just bought.

And we got some Cabernet from Jack Niven at Edna Valley Vineyards (Paragon Vineyards).

RR: And you could smell it for blocks; it had the "greenies."

JS: And it was so cold we couldn't get it to ferment right away and it got some kind of a bacterial infection. We refermented it and sold it off in bulk to amateur bottlers. The rule was they had to take the full barrel, so we wouldn't have those barrels around.

CS: Now, you've had two drought years, 1976 and 1977. Could you feel it?

RR: The average rainfall at the winery is 58 inches and we had in 1976 17 inches and in 1977 we had 18 inches. The only way we got the vineyard through, without a permanent drip system, was for my wife to go down and change the lines daily. We had a drip that we could move from one row to another.

CS: Were your sources affected?

RR: Yes. Grapes were over-ripe. The 1977 Chauvet Zinfandel was well over 14% alcohol.

CS: I'm still drinking 1977 and 1976 Zinfandels. Some of them we call "red cabbage" wines, since you can take some vinegar with them and it's OK.

How did you integrate the building of this structure and the 1978 vintage?

RR: We decided early that we were going to do 150 tons.

JS: That was the target, but we didn't get to it in 1978. But we made up for it in 1979.

CS: 150 would just about have given you the 10,000 cases. Was the winery finished enough to get through?

RR: Barely. We had a Gewürztraminer come in in late August and we had no power yet at the winery, so we had to do it over in Jim's courtyard.

JS: And we took that juice up to the old winery for fermenting.

CS: When had you started to build?

JS: We started in July. We had all the permits to get, and we had to get another bond. While we had the two places going they insisted that we have two different numbers. Later we transferred the older one here. That's 4587.

CS: That means you're almost really old. People think of 4500 as the cut-off. You're just old-timers. What came after the Gewürztraminer?

RR: We still didn't have any power at the new winery. We couldn't get the building inspected, and so they wouldn't hook up the power. And we were expecting grapes any minute.

So our electrician called up PG&E and said that they might as well put the transformer in, and they came out and did it. And they ran the line over to that big tree at the corner of the winery and they called us up and warned our electrician to be careful since it was hot. Five minutes after they left we had power at the winery.

CS: The wonders of being engineers.

JS: We operated that way for several days. Then we unhooked it. Before that we had had some power to make the saws run and give us lights by running a couple of lines over from the house.

CS: What about the grapes.

RR: Everything came in at once and the crop was huge. The reds and the whites were big wines.

JS: That was good for the reds but not for the whites. The whites died an early death.

RR: That was the first year we did an Edna Valley Chardonnay. It came in at about 28° Brix, and in those days we didn't have sense enough to send them back. The alcohol was 16.2%. It was a fabulous wine for a short period of time, and then it fell apart. It just died.

JS: The 1978 Old Hill (Sonoma) Zin was excellent.<sup>17</sup> It was a very mixed vineyard. When we got those grapes all they did was prune it and they ran a disc through once. I don't even know if she sulfured it. It was one of those old Italian, mixed planting vineyards. Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Grenache, Mondeuse (Refosco), Carignane, Mataro, Grenoir, Alicante, and some Pinot noir; there were even some Concord and Niagara (eastern table grapes). It was a 17 acre vineyard, and we got five tons of grapes. This was the first year we got those grapes. Merry Edwards told us about them.

CS: What would she be doing with Zinfandel at Mt. Eden?

RR: Just that one year. She was trying to change things there. She made them in 1976.

JS: And Davis Bynum made them in 1977.<sup>18</sup>

RR: She had a falling out with him. Her name was Carol Bowen. She was a strange lady, hard to deal with, with a violent tongue. She sold the place in 1981 to Otto Teller.

JS: In 1981 he told us he wouldn't sell them to us anymore. They went to Topolos.<sup>19</sup> In 1982 he called up and wanted to sell us the grapes, and I asked him why he didn't sell to Topolos, and he said they hadn't paid for them.

RR: And that's the first year we did Steiner Cabernet from Sonoma Mountain. We also got those grapes through Merry Edwards. We knew her because of our association in the Santa Cruz Mountain Winegrowers. When she left Mt. Eden for Matanzas Creek she put us on to sources up there.

We made five different Cabernets in 1978; three from Sonoma County and two from San Luis Obispo.

JMS: And don't forget Saratoga.

JS: That was Arata. The little vineyard just down from the Villa Montalvo.

RR: We got a call from the Parson's Winery here in the Santa Cruz Mountains. (They're out of business now.) He was a dentist with a practice in Saratoga. He'd been getting these Arata grapes and he had a ton too many and he called us. He didn't have any more buckets to put the must in.

JS: We had all kinds of room. An empty building.

RR: It was one ton in boxes and when we picked them up I asked how long they had been sitting there and he said three or four days. We processed them and I put the wine into a couple of old whiskey barrels. I didn't want to waste any of my good new barrels; I didn't know what kind of stuff it was. We sort of forgot about it except for topping the barrels. Then about a year later I was tasting around and tasted it for the first time and it was absolutely fabulous. So we started paying more attention to it, but I was never able to get it into good barrels; we just didn't have enough.

JS: We kept it separate and bottled it separate.

RR: You wouldn't believe the writeups we got for this wine, out of whiskey barrels.

---

<sup>17</sup> This vineyard is used by Ravenswood today, but the grapes have been replanted and it is under different ownership.

<sup>18</sup> BW 4634. First in Albany and later near Healdsburg.

<sup>19</sup> BW 4855 (1963), near Forestville.



CS: Since then David Bruce and Sunrise have used those grapes. I guess the vines are still there.

JS: We had six different Cabernets in 1978 and bottled them all separately.

RR: But we never liked that San Luis Cabernet very much from 1978. Actually we blended two wines for that. We sold it mostly out of state.

A couple of years ago someone came in and told us that Robert Parker had given us a terrific writeup for a 1978 Cabernet. We figured it was the Steiner. So someone brought over his *Wine Advocate* and he had been tasting 1978 Cabs. At the top of his list was a 1978 Mouton Rothschild and then came that San Luis Cabernet. Also in there were the Caymus, Spring Mountain, Santa Cruz Mountain (Bates), Ridge Monte Bello.

CS: By then it probably tasted like an older Bordeaux.

RR: So I dug a bottle out of our library and we still didn't like it.

JS: The only gold medal we ever won at the Orange County Fair was for a wine he said was undrinkable.

JMS: But I think he got a corky bottle.

RR: We also made two Cabernets from Sonoma other than Steiner, from Moon Mountain, near the Louis Martini vineyards there, and another vineyard near Vineburg, just outside the town of Sonoma. We also made a Monterey Chardonnay. That was the year we discovered that we shouldn't be making Monterey Chardonnay. It just didn't fit our winemaking style.

JS: We also made a Pinot blanc and did very well with it. I can't remember where we got the grapes.

JMS: In 1976 we bought Pinot blanc from Vine Hill.

CS: That was when the Smothers owned it.

JS: We got a call in 1976 that they had about a ton of Pinot blanc.

CS: So you have a wave of wine coming on that is going to start cresting in about 1980 when the 1977s are coming out. How do you deal with this wave in terms of marketing.

RR: We started an out-of-state program with Bill Gibbs. It was working fairly well.

JS: We sold a lot in New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Iowa. He worked harder on that than he did the in-state sales. They actually dragged.

CS: Did you handle the local marketing here?

RR: We always did the Santa Cruz marketing ourselves. June was in charge.

JMS: I got to know people, retail and restaurants. And when you join organizations like the Chamber of Commerce or the Restaurant Association you meet people and that gives you another source. It has definitely been a continuing thing. I also work a lot with organizations, but I don't have to go out and hustle "on the street."

CS: Is there a Santa Clara County-Lower Peninsula market?

RR: We have never been successful in Santa Clara County.

CS: One of the problems is that we don't have the upscale wine specialty shops that we had years ago. When people ask me where to buy wine I tell them Pacific Wine in Los Gatos, maybe Rinconada Liquor, and then you have to go up the Peninsula, Beltramo's, K&L, Draeger's, Weimex. All those good old places like Gene's in Los Gatos, Bosley's in Willow Glen, the Argonaut in Saratoga-- they're all gone. Grocery stores and drug stores are often the best places to buy good wine over there, particularly now that Liquor Barn has collapsed. And there is Cost Plus now; they are good.

RR: We have been in a few restaurants like the Plumed Horse in Saratoga and Emile's in San Jose.

JS: Our biggest single customer is Zanotto's Market in Scott's Valley.

JMS: They have three stores; one is in San Jose.

RR: We have always sold a lot more wine in San Francisco than in the Santa Clara Valley.

JS: We have a lot of retail customers who come over the hill to the winery and buy wine.

CS: How do you sell in Southern California? Is that part of your California program?

JS: We don't sell in Southern California. It isn't worth it.

JMS: We used to.

JS: It's too expensive. In Southern California today they don't buy unless you're just about giving it away. We have 10,000 cases to sell and we don't have to go after that market. If we had 20,000 it would be a different story.

CS: Let's look at the segments of your sales.

JS: I'd say we sell 40% in the Santa Cruz area. Monterey is 10%. We don't have any real marketing out-of-state any more. If people want to buy it we sell to them. We have two distributors in Ohio. We sell in Pennsylvania now, maybe 100 cases or more a year. But it's complicated. Our biggest out-of-state account right now is in Oklahoma. We have a good-old-boy back there.

RR: But we had the Somerset deal back in the early eighties, and that didn't work out. That was a division of Norton Simon then. They came around in 1980 and told us that they were building a national distribution of a few select California wineries, along with their imports. There would be six California wineries, in 1980. At that time they had already signed up Cakebread.<sup>20</sup> I don't think we would have gone with them if we hadn't gotten a good recommendation from them. There was also Parson's Creek<sup>21</sup> and Knudson-Erath.<sup>22</sup> And there was Veedercrest in Berkeley.<sup>23</sup>

So we signed up with them. They would take all our wine nation-wide, give us the money, and sell it. Too good to be true.

---

<sup>20</sup> BW 4732 (1973) in Rutherford.

<sup>21</sup> BW 4894 (1979) in Mendocino.

<sup>22</sup> BW-OR 52 (1972) in Oregon.

<sup>23</sup> BW 4711 (1972). Out of business in 1982, *Wine & Spirit Magazine*, 10/1/1982. Later they won a \$3,800,000 settlement with Somerset. *Wine Spectator*, 5/1/1986.

They put the wine in the warehouse and didn't sell it. Everybody lost their shelf space everywhere. Somerset would go into a state market and give the wine to a liquor distributor, who didn't know how to sell wine, and the wine would sit in the warehouse. Meanwhile, our label was gone from a market where we had already been. Within two years we had no market out there. We'd get calls from people around the country asking where we were. They didn't see our wine anymore.

So they came back and said they were going out of business. We took our inventory back and started over, and we paid them for the inventory.

CS: You paid them the same number of dollars?

RR: We shouldn't have but we did.

JS: It was that or they go and dump our wines, and there goes the label.

RR: A lot of it sat in the warehouse until it was over the hill. White wines. This was a major problem.

At that time the wine business was heading down anyway.

CS: And there a recession in 1981-82.

JS: And the dollar became so strong you could buy foreign wine for next to nothing.

RR: French and German and Spanish wines just poured in. On the East Coast people are saying, "We don't need you guys." Some of those markets we never did recover.

CS: So the survival comes from emphasizing and expanding the market close to home.

RR: That's right. We are seeing that more and more with smaller wineries. With 10,000 cases you can't hope to work in a national market. That's what you see in Europe. The smaller wineries sell locally. And you are seeing Europeans coming over here and buying wine from small wineries like us.

JS: Another thing we got into was private labels. Part of that program of recovery was private labels. You could always get Windsor private label wines, custom labels, for the customers. It can be for a restaurant or liquor store.

JMS: Or for a company. Banks. Radio stations. We got a job or two and realized, this is a good thing.

CS: But how do you promote this thing. With all these wineries all over the place, why do they come to Roudon-Smith?

RR: Sometimes we go to them. This is a program.

JS: Coast Commercial Bank in Santa Cruz. Harvey Nicholson, the CEO, used to buy our wine. He is a big fan of ours. He used to give it away for Christmas. So one time June told him, "Why don't you put your own label on?" The bank would have its own label.

JMS: They are asked to contribute to different auctions and fundraisers around town, so why not have a bottle of wine with you name on it?

JS: He uses anything from 30 to 50 cases per year. We did it for a radio station in Monterey and they have a an affiliate station in Washington, DC, and the owner back there saw their bottle and decided he wanted one for his station.

JMS: And you multiply this several times and it is a good thing.

CS: Is the custom label a standardized label?

RR: No, they design their own label.

JMS: But it follows a format. It could get very expensive. But if you just use their logo and their colors, it's not bad. We offer them the service, to use our own printer, and we do the consultation for it, so they don't have to start from scratch.

JS: I have the labeler on right now because I just got through labeling 16 cases of wine going to Japan, for a Japanese company. We have an associated company here that designs the labels. And the owner happens to be a big fan of our wine.

CS: When did this begin and what was your first account?

JS: I think it was June's sister and her husband. That was in 1984. They own a development company in Southern California. He'd get 50-100 cases every year and give them away as gifts. He called it Legacy Cellars, because Legacy was the name of his company. One of his customers was another developer, and he wanted his own label. They had a beautiful label. There was a friend of his named Bramalea, whose headquarters are in Toronto, Canada. They also got some. I just put it in the van and took it up to Air Canada.

JMS: Another thing that got us going was that 75th anniversary label for the San Francisco Symphony. That's the thing that told us there was a really good market out there.

CS: Is your name on the bottom line, or do you use a fictitious DBA, like Branciforte Vineyards?

RR: Our name is always on it.

CS: What kind of wines do you use.

JMS: Our regular wines. Usually you go out and get plonk, but we don't do that.

CS: You sell at wholesale?

JS: That depends on the number of cases. If somebody got 50 cases they'd get the same price we gave to Liquor Barn. But they have to pay for the labels. We put them on. And for us, it's cash right now. Every time we bottle Chardonnay or Cabernet we always leave a certain amount unlabeled. For accounts to come.

JMS: Another thing, the radio stations don't usually pay you with money but in advertising air time. We have more stations now wanting to do that kind of business than Bob thinks we can allot. What is good about that is that you not only get you ads on the radio, but then they pass out the bottles to their clients and you get another lift from that.

CS: How many cases per year?

JS: I'd say at least 500 cases per year. Business is down now, so that is down also.

CS: The enthusiastic spin you're putting on this 5% of your business makes me think this is a fairly important 5%.



RR: Yes, it is. But these days you have to do everything.

CS: When do you get to 10,000 cases?

RR: 1979. We did 75 tons of Chardonnay that year. That was about half of our production.

JS: White wine was hot and because of our approach we were able to move with the market. Before that we had been mostly red wine.

RR: We've gone back to mostly red now. And the gloss has rubbed off of Chardonnay. It's practically become a generic wine. At the tasting room here at the winery we probably sell 90% red wine.

JS: And what we sell here at the winery is a really significant part of our production.

CS: Tell me about the Monterey tasting room. It doesn't sound as if you're very happy with it.

RR: It didn't work. It is still going only because our lease isn't up yet.

JS: We had a tasting room in Soquel for a couple of years in the early eighties. But people stopped coming up to the winery. It was too close down there, much more convenient. So why pay rent for something that isn't helping us.

JMS: And they were going to raise the rent.

JS: So we had the opportunity to go to this place in Monterey, so we said, if Soquel isn't working let's try Monterey. It's across from the Aquarium, on Cannery Row.

RR: There is no lack of people there but the problem is that the people are a cross section of America, and most Americans don't drink wine.

JMS: Bargetto is on the first floor; you have to be on the first floor. We're on the second floor. But they have cut their space in half. They are in the same building as Vintners International (Paul Masson and Monterey Vineyards).

JS: There is plenty of traffic but there aren't many buyers. Where we sell cases here, they sell one bottle. Our lease goes to the end of this year. This is our third year there. Our first year was the best. And every year has been worse.

CS: Of course, the recession hasn't helped.

RR: We've had days where we sold one bottle of wine.

JMS: And you would think that the Monterey restaurateurs would buy our wine because we are there. But times are so bad they have to be loyal to the Monterey wineries.

RR: Really, they are loyal to the lowest price they can find.

CS: Do things change much for you during the eighties, so far as wines are concerned?

RR: Things stayed pretty much the same until last year. We have tried to rectify the imbalance between production and sales; we cut back. Small wineries during the last two years have been having problems. A lot of the people who drink our wines are high end folks who have been getting

laid off. And in restaurants where people would buy a bottle, now they buy a glass. I think we are at the bottom right now.

CS: I noticed last year that the adult per capita consumption finally stopped falling.

RR: Our case sales have not changed so much. But what we see is that instead of buying our Cabernet Sauvignon they have been buying our claret. Claret and Zinfandel are up.

CS: How do your sources differ in the eighties?

RR: In the early to mid-eighties we started seeing a drastic downturn in red Zinfandel sales and a boom in white Zin sales. The price of Zinfandel grapes was going up while our sales were falling.

JS: A Lodi grower told me he was getting \$1,000 a ton producing 14 tons to the acre. It was wild.

RR: A good thing that came out of this is that some good Zinfandel vineyards were saved because of the situation.

CS: No question about it. Did you make any white Zin?

RR: We tried for a couple of years. People liked it but our hearts weren't in it.

JS: We actually stopped making Zinfandel for two years. In 1981 we started making our Claret and we could have called it Zinfandel if we had wanted to. That way people would buy it. Call it Zinfandel they don't buy it.

CS: Is your Claret still mostly Zinfandel?

RR: It varies from year to year. One big batch.

JS: There's Pinot St. George, Zinfandel, Cabernet Pfeffer. Back in 1985 is when we stopped buying the Chauvet grapes.

RR: We were paying \$900 a ton for Zinfandel that we couldn't sell. So we didn't make 1986 or 1987. The next one was 1988. Now we're back in business.

JS: We found a vineyard down west of Paso Robles at 1400 feet elevation.

RR: It's almost due west of town. It's about the same elevation as York Mountain, but one range closer to town. We give it the San Luis Obispo appellation. We don't think now that Paso Robles is an attractive term to put on a label. We're selling to people who know what Paso Robles is like in the summer.

We've moved around a lot with Cabernet and never have found a perfect place. We'd like to make a Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernet, but we won't do business with Bates Ranch. We get some from Beauregard, but it doesn't get ripe enough. And we got a fairly nice Cab from Cienega Canyon, near Hollister.

JS: Last year we got some near our Zin source.

CS: Do you label it Central Coast?

RR: California.

JS: This year we got some Cabernet and Merlot from the same vineyard. It's the first time we have ever made Merlot.

CS: That's a hot item now.

RR: And last year we also got some Cabernet franc to blend with the Cabernet.

CS: Are you making any wines from northern grapes now?

JS: No. And I'll tell you I love not having to drive through Oakland and San Francisco.

RR: And there is no need to buy grapes up there anymore. The grapes from Monterey, San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties, that's first class stuff now.

But I think we forgot to talk about one earlier northern source. That was the Nelson Ranch just south of Ukiah. We first made Chardonnay from there in 1980. He had been selling to Gallo and they didn't buy from him one year so we just happened onto that.

JS: We used them through 1989, ten vintages.

RR: We're concentrating on our own estate Chardonnay now.

CS: Any other whites?

RR: We've done a Riesling since 1986, every other year.

JS: And we made a two-year supply of Gewürztraminer last year. We get those grapes from Watsonville. It's near Corralitos. But it isn't up in the Santa Cruz Mountain appellation. It's the DiCicco Vineyard.

CS: Other than your Chardonnay are you making any Santa Cruz Mountain wine.

RR: We made Pinot noir from a little vineyard up near Bonny Doon, near Beauregard's place. It's across the street from McHenry, but he's been wiped out by Pierce disease. His name was Cox, but he died a couple of years ago.

JS: 1982 was the first year, through 1991. But we missed 1983 and 1984.

RR: Pierce disease is running wild in the Bonny Doon area. Randall Grahm has been hit. McHenry doesn't have a grape left. We suspect it's drought related. And this is worse than phylloxera. Your vineyard is dead in three years.

JS: We should talk about Petite Sirah. That started in 1978 through 1984.

RR: I'm a long-time fan of Rhone wines, and I love the blends of the Cotes du Rhone. In California back then Petite Sirah was as close as you could come. Back in the seventies, ink, that could take the enamel off your teeth. Our object was to make something drinkable. So we found this vineyard in San Luis Obispo, right near the Monterey border, near San Miquel. It produced Petite Sirah that had all the fruit in the world, moderate tannins and lots of color. Two weeks after you bottled it you could drink it like a Cotes du Rhone. We also blended in some Chardonnay.

CS: That's a Rhone trick, but not Chardonnay.

JS: That's what we had, but one year we used Pinot blanc.

RR: The best assistant winemaker we ever had was Lester Hardy, later winemaker at Cain Cellars on Spring Mountain. He had the best palate of anyone I have ever tasted with. We would do triangular tastings of this Petite Sirah with different amounts of Chardonnay, and at 5% we could consistently tell the ones with Chardonnay. We are able to make red wine drinkers out of people who never have liked a red wine.

JMS: We should also mention that we made a white Petite Sirah for the Cannery Row tasting room. We called it "Petite Saumon."

JS: It had some sugar from Muscat concentrate. It was specifically for the tasting room. 3% residual sugar.

JMS: With a beautiful label done by an artist there, a view looking out the window of the tasting room. The tourists love it.

JS: And it had a lot more flavor than White Zinfandel.

CS: Any other generics besides the Claret?

RR: We did a white table wine we called Krystal. We still have it. But it hasn't been as successful as the Claret. IT's a lot more difficult to make a good white generic than a red one.

JMS: It's Riesling and Chardonnay.

CS: How are your personal functions divided up here?

JS: I'm the operations man. Bob is the chemist and business. June is public and community relations. And Annamaria does the bookkeeping.

CS: What about employees?

RR: We hire a crew to pick our grapes. The last few years we've had a wonderful crew of Salvadorans here on this political refugee program. Really hard workers.

JMS: For the bottling we get students, waitresses, house wives. We know a few people and they know people.

RR: We don't have any full-time employees now. We have one part-time cellar man and another for the vineyard.

CS: What's the future of Roudon-Smith?

RR: We don't know. We couldn't sell it now. Annamaria hasn't been well, so we are going to take a year off and stay in southern France. That's another reason we've cut back considerably on production this year. When we get back maybe Jim and June will take off for somewhere. We'll decide then. But there will be a 1994 vintage here.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Bibliography

- Adams, Leon. *The Wines of America*. New York, 1985, 376.  
Holland, Michael. *Late Harvest..* Santa Cruz, 1983, 62, 71.  
*Santa Cruz Express*, 7/29/82, 9/12/85.  
*Santa Cruz Weekly*. 2/18/1981.  
*The Sentinel* (Santa Cruz), 2/21/82.  
Sullivan, Charles L. *Like Modern Edens*. Cupertino, 1982, 165, 171, 174.  
*Vintage Magazine*, 6:10, 11:1, 8/1/79.  
*Wines & Vines*, 6//1/75, 10/1/79.  
*Wine Spectator*, 2/1/80, 3/1/30.

