

Sunrise Winery

Sunrise Winery has a unique historical heritage in the Santa Cruz Mountain viticultural district. In 1976 it began operations at the long silent Locatelli Winery on the Empire Grade above Boulder Creek. Later, in 1983 the winemaking operations were moved to the historic Picchetti Winery above Cupertino in the Monte Bello area. The first operations at the Locatelli place were under the direction of a complex partnership of wine enthusiasts. The winery on the Picchetti property is today operated by *Rolayne (RL)* and *Ronald Stortz (RN)*, who had been members of the Sunrise partnership at the Locatelli place. Rolayne is the winemaker.

This series of interviews took place in the dining room of the Stortz home, formerly the Picchetti family home, which looks out onto the Santa Clara Valley and the old but still alive Picchetti orchards, surrounded by a garden of trees and plants, many of which date back to the 19th century.

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January 27, 1993

CS: Let's begin with a question about your relationship to wine before you got into the business of production.

RN: Our background was that of consumers. We had a small wine collection, mostly California wines, and we participated with Eugene Lokey in his home winemaking efforts. He was one of the original partners in Sunrise.

CS: Tell me about those home winemaking efforts.

RN: He made wine from grapes that were grown on the PG&E, maybe it was the Southern Pacific, right-of-way in Los Gatos off Pollard Road. He had an annual lease on a planting of some old Zinfandel there.

CS: That sounds like the Troquato vineyard situation.¹

RN: I'm not sure whether it's part of the Troquato vineyard, but it is within the same right-of-way. It was an old vineyard with lots of plants missing in the rows. Our involvement was just on an annual basis, assisting with the crush, and attending occasional parties to enjoy the fruits of the labor. Gene was active in this on an on-going basis and came to have an association with Keith Holfeldt. Eventually it was their collaboration that started Sunrise Winery as a commercial venture.

CS: What was Holfeldt's background?

RL: I'm not sure of the exact field he was in at UC Santa Cruz. But it was scientific.

RN: He was working at Paul Masson's back in the seventies doing research in their Champagne yeast program.

¹ Angelo Troquato bought his vineyard land near Pollard Road in 1976 and sold grapes, as did his predecessors, to home winemakers in the area. In recent years he has produced wines under his own label at Solis Winery in Hecker Pass. The coming of Highway 85 in the last two years has knocked out most of the Troquato vineyard, which was first planted in 1929.

CS: What did Lokey do for a living?

RN: He is a political consultant and lobbyist in Sacramento. During these years he was in the formative stage of developing his profession. He's still around.

CS: Does he have anything to do with wine anymore?

RN: He buys a lot of Sunrise wine.

The Locatelli Winery

CS: OK, let's go up to the Locatelli winery on the Empire Grade and see how Sunrise comes to life up there.

RN: Keith and Lokey had developed this association and friendship from sharing home winemaking efforts. They devised a plan to open and develop a commercial winery with an idea of having a recycling business for wine bottles to help fund the start-up of this winery.

CS: So the idea of the operation precedes that actual fixing of the location.

RN: My recollection is that there was more than one person who claims to have found the location. I think it was Keith who found the place but that it was Lokey who does the negotiating with the Locatelli family. They went in and reopened the winery and reactivated the old Locatelli bond, BW 3682. We still have that bond number here today.

CS: A number in the 3600s indicates they got their bond right after Repeal, probably 1934. It also shows they did not attempt to reactivate their previous bond number from before Prohibition, which would have been possible.

What did you find there on the Locatelli property in 1976?

RN: There are two buildings that relate to winemaking activities. There was a fermentation building that had concrete fermenters, the largest of which was about 5,000 gallons. The smallest was perhaps 2,000 gallons. And there were four or five of these fermenters in a row.

CS: That's a pretty healthy fermentation capacity, over 20,000 gallons.

RN: The other part of the facility was a cellar under the family home up there. It was filled with large redwood tanks, with capacities of perhaps 1,000 to 5-6,000 gallons. It was a cellar underneath the house.

CS: So you actually have a place that could have been a gravity-flow winery with the house attached.

RN: Absolutely. The positioning of the fermentation building was above the house on the hill.

RL: But that was not the original winery on the property.

RN: That's right. The first winery dates from about 1910 and was down the hill some from the other operation. The house was still being used on a weekend or periodic basis by the family. It was a favorite place for Vincent Locatelli, who was then probably in his seventies. He was up there quite a

bit.

Our own activities up there were primarily on weekends, since we were all pursuing other activities as well.

It all evolved into a situation where we had quite a nice relationship with Vince. In some ways he became a sort of a mentor for us. And because of his failing health, the family required him to be up there only when we were there, so there would be somebody with him. I think he died about 1980.

CS: When do you two get into this. You're not on board on the first day up there, are you?

RN: No, at first we were not there. They form the winery and got started and soon abandoned the idea of recycling the wine bottles. They also discover that they haven't thought through the costs to start a winery, even at that period of time. So they contacted us in the spring of 1977 about being perhaps investors. We expressed an interest in it but told them that we didn't just want to be investors. We wanted to be active participants in the operation. They had got their bond in the summer of 1976.

RL: The Picchettis had continued to operate under their old BW 148. I wonder how they kept the pre-Prohibition number and the Locatellis didn't.

CS: Well, you had to know to ask for it.

RL: And there was a different premises too. The Picchettis used the same winery.

CS: So you are now an owner, you two, Holfeldt and Lokey. Anyone else?

RN: Yes, Bruce Conklin. He was a friend of Dina Chase; she worked for Ridge Vineyards. They lived on the property just above the Picchetti place here.

RL: I think that property was formerly part of the Picchetti ranch.

RN: Bruce is not involved in wine now. He was in the reforestation business. So the five of us formed a new general partnership. All of us were on board when the first wines were released. I think that was in July of 1977.

CS: Were there any vineyards up at the Locatelli place that had survived?

RN: Were were a few vines across the road from the winery that had been abandoned long ago, but the remnants were still there, maybe a half a dozen plants still alive, out of the reach of the deer. Beyond that there were no grapes up there.

CS: I wonder how long winemaking had continued up there before you took over.

RN: I think they went into the fifties, maybe the sixties. But there was a crash in wine prices and marginal operations couldn't keep going. We actually were able renovate some of the tanks and if they had closed down before World War II they wouldn't have been any good.

RL: In your book you say they operated into the 1950s under the Eagle Rock Label.²

CS: I don't always remember what I thought I knew.

RN: So we set about dismantling the redwood tanks and we actually reassembled some inside the concrete fermenters.

² Like *Modern Edens* (Cupertino, 1982): 114, 136, 155, 173.

CS: Had they kept them up?

RN: No, we had to soak them and clean them up. And we couldn't use the concrete fermenters because they were of a larger capacity than we were dealing with then. And they were badly deteriorated.

So we used those redwood tanks for fermenters and also put small oak cooperage into the cellar.

CS: No stainless steel yet?

RN: No, not yet.

RL: Well, we had a 400 gallon milk tank.

RN: And as our production grew we actually went in and reconditioned the concrete fermenters. We put a new finish on them with a good grade of epoxy lining. But at first we fermented in redwood tanks and then moved the wine into small barrels. These were mostly new American oak cooperage.

CS: Did you get any old equipment in the area?

RN: We brought in the old crusher that Gene Lokey had used to make home wine. And we used the ratchet basket press that was here. But we got new pumps and other things. There was electricity, a minor amount. But it wasn't set up for modern production. We had no chilling capacity. We really had no hot water. We actually had a cauldron there that we stoked with wood when we needed hot water. It was very primitive.

CS: Was there any wine made here in 1976?

RN: Yes, there was a harvest in 1976. I recall that it was about 800-900 gallons. The grapes were from the vineyard in Los Gatos where Lokey had been getting them previously. From this they first bonded Sunrise as the Los Gatos Vineyard Winery.

RL: We also got some grapes from a vineyard in Morgan Hill. Gene got those grapes, but I don't know exactly where it was. It was Zinfandel too. And some Petite Sirah.

RN: And I think there was also a Sémillon.

RL: In 1977 we made grapes from a little Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard in the Almaden Valley, near the Calero Reservoir.

CS: I know that place. They eventually abandoned those vines and let them die.

RL: We have a real problem here, since we lost all our varietal records in the 1978 fire at the Locatelli place.

CS: What did you do with that 1976 wine?

RN: We bottled it and there was a grand opening over the 4th of July weekend in 1977. And a lot of that wine, since it's light and low alcohol is used then, and we start the selling process at the winery. We had a mailing list, and word-of-mouth.

CS: Let's talk about the 1977 season.

RN: Now everyone is on board and we have a little grander view of what we are going to become. And there's a little money. But that gets gobbled up buying some new equipment and cooperage. That year we went to about 3,000 gallons.

RL: We bought grapes from commercial vineyards in 1977. We went to Ventana in Monterey County for Pinot noir. We had a couple of different clones, #104 and 105. That was a great experiment. The two vineyards of these two clones were contiguous and planted at the same time and all things were equal. The grapes were harvested on the same day. We treated them in exactly the same manner. And they were very different wines.

We also got grapes from Arata Vineyard in Saratoga, near the Villa Montalvo. Cabernet Sauvignon from there. And we bought grapes from Dan Gehrs at Congress Springs, also. That was from the old Novitiate vineyard off Bear Creek Road, the St. Charles Vineyard. We got Chenin blanc. And some Sauvignon blanc.

RN: Also very important in 1976 were the grapes we got from Gaspar Vineyard, Cabernet Sauvignon. That was its last year.

CS: I bought the 1978 Sunrise Arata Cabernet. It was the first Sunrise wine I ever bought.

RN: I recall an interesting story about Mrs. Gaspar. Back around 1967 or 1968 we were going to college at San Jose State and we were driving around up there in the mountains and we wandered onto the Gaspar property. The house was closed up and shuttered. And we noticed that there were garages with a small apartment over them. So we left a note saying that we were a couple interested in the area and we wondered if she could use a couple of caretakers. She called us and was quite angry that we had violated the premises. Later when we were getting grapes from her we wondered if she would ever make the connection.

CS: Did those first wines come out under the Sunrise label?

RN: Yes. It's the label we still have today.

RL: That Gaspar story brings to mind another one concerning Ridge Vineyards at that time. We were looking for a place to be caretakers there, also.

CS: We're out of tape. That's where we'll start next time.

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February 5, 1993

CS: There was a similar story about your leaving a note up at Ridge Vineyards some years ago.

RN: It's a great story and goes back to 1969 or 1970. Rolayne and I were looking for a place to live in the hills here and this was long before we were involved in the wine industry. We drove up Montebello Road and happened onto Ridge and saw that there was a little house there that might be a caretaker's house. So we wrote a letter to the president of Ridge, Dave Bennion, saying that we were a college couple looking for a place to stay and we wondered if they were looking for a caretaker. We didn't receive a response to the letter but what was interesting was that several years later, probably in 1977, we were being introduced at a meeting of the Santa Cruz Mountain Vintners Association as

new partners in Sunrise Winery and Dave was at that meeting and he reached into his briefcase and pulled out that letter we had written to him several years before. We were amazed that he had this kind of recollection. He knew that we were new partners in the winery, but we hadn't met him at that point. But somehow he made a connection. How his filing system allowed him to get at that letter is beyond me.

CS: Fran Bennion says he didn't have a filing system, that he was always piling boxes of things in closets.

RL: I think that was sort of in support of our being there at that meeting, because there was some controversy as to whether wineries that were not family operated, that were partnerships, whether all the partners could attend the Association meetings, or whether it should just be the original families. I think that maybe he did that to show that we had a long interest in the area.

Fire

CS: This is a good place to talk about the fire.

RN: To set the scene for how we were operating in those days, there was nobody working full-time at the winery. We were doing most of the work on weekends. Keith was up there from time to time working with the wines. At this time we worked up there catch-as-catch-can, nights, weekends. On the day of the fire Keith had been there doing something in preparation for bottling. It was before the vintage in the summer. He left the winery in the late afternoon and later received a phone call, from the dispatcher or perhaps from the Ahlgrens³ that the winery was on fire. The fire was in the house which was over the top of the winery cellar. And there was some damage above to the fermentation building, since one wall was exposed to the burning building.

Keith was living up in the area at the time and by the time that he got there the winery was really enveloped in flames. The fire department was there, but they were not sure how to respond to the fire because they weren't sure whether the alcoholic beverages were flammable. The rural location meant that there wouldn't be a good water source, anyway. So the fire really burned and destroyed completely the house above the winery and its debris fell down into the cellar below the house.⁴ This burned a lot of the cooperage and the case-goods were there as well. Rolayne and I arrived on the scene the next morning, but by then the fire was out and it was just so much rubble.

At that moment it really looked as if the loss was total. But we were determined to save what we could by going through the barrels. There was some wine that could be salvaged and it was pretty much at that point that the Santa Cruz Mountain Vintners turned out *en masse* supplying manpower and equipment, pumps and tanks. So we set about pumping out of the winery into temporary storage the wines that were to be saved.

CS: Who was behind this goodwill mission?

RN: Dave Bennion was one of the main movers. But the outpouring of help was so universal.

RL: There was a Vintners meeting that week that had already been planned. It was there that we were asked if we needed help, and we said yes. They found out what kind of equipment we needed, like pumps and tanks and hoses. Peter Martin Ray brought up a pump and hoses and pumped from the cellar to the fermentation building. Mike Daggett of Ridge also brought pumps and hoses.

RN: Bob Mullen brought down some portable tanks from Woodside.

³ Dexter and Valerie Ahlgren's winery near Boulder Creek (BW 4764).

⁴ For published reports on the fire see: *Wines & Vines*, 6/1/78, 14; *San Jose News*, 5/19/78.

RL: The Sherrills and the Obesters were there.

RN: And the Starks from Page Mill Winery brought food.

We saved what we could. We lost about half of our wine. We lost almost all of the case goods. There was some that was uncorked and reprocessed.

RL: Oddly enough we had just done a bottling the weekend before and all the cases were at the front door ready to be moved out. And when the firemen arrived they had to ax through the door and into the case goods. A lot of the damage was done just trying to get into the building.

RN: At that point we had to decide whether even to continue in the wine business. We were able to store some of the wine in the fermentation building. And we also moved some of the wine down to Richert & Sons in Morgan Hill.⁵

Then we had a meeting of the partners to decide whether we were going to stay in business. The outcome was that Rolayne, Keith and I bought out Eugene Loke and and Bruce Conklin. Then the three of us continued as a partnership. We had two-thirds and he had a third.

RL: We each had a third.

RN: So we have a winery that's burned out and we have some wine in storage and we try to figure out how to get back into production. We physically cleaned out the winery. The Locatelli family agreed to put a roof up over the top.

CS: Did you have insurance on this?

RN: That was quite a mess. The belief was that everything was fully insured and there were some mis-communications in that matter. The long and the short of the story is that there was no insurance on the product or the equipment.

Because of that we have to salvage what we can. We took all the cooperage out into the yard at the ranch. We got drills with grinders on them and started grinding char off the barrels that are still salvageable. Most of the equipment was ours.

Because the fire burned from the top down, embers landed on the top of barrels and some were damaged beyond repair and others we could save. In 1978 we had a very small crush up there. Then we move on from there.

CS: What did you make that year?

RL: We made Cabernet from the Arata vineyard in Saratoga.

RN: And we made the Frey Cabernet, which was probably one of the best we've ever made. They are up in Mendocino. They have a winery now and made organic wine.

We did the Bergstrom Zinfandel, from the Santa Maria area. That's about all. We did just a little bit of white wine. This was a very abbreviated harvest for us. But we knew that we had to get some wines in the barrel for the future.

The continuation up at the Locatelli place is really just a matter of continuing to make the facility work again. We got the roof on and initially we didn't have lighting. At that point the business is essentially bankrupt. Then in 1979 we began talking about bringing in some limited partners to help finance the continuing recovery. And by 1980 we conclude bringing in three families as limited partners, which gives us a little capital to replace some of the burned cooperage, and buy more.

⁵ This was the old Paradise Valley winery west of Morgan Hill where Walter Richert (1911-1980) produced sweet wine, starting in 1958.

CS: What were their names?

RN: There was the Eknoian family in San Jose. They were high school teachers of mine who kind of became surrogate parents to me in my high school years.

CS: What high school did you go to?

RN: San Jose High School; I graduated in 1963, the Centennial year.

CS: I was coaching track and cross country then at Pioneer High School. So we could have run into one another when we came over there.

RN: There were also the Truesdales, who are over in Santa Cruz, and the Turmans, who are grape growers over in the Central Valley.

We continue there at the Locatelli place, to make wines through the 1982 harvest. At the end of 1982 we were finalizing the agreement to take on the Picchetti restoration project. Keith was also working at David Bruce's then and that October is when he had that serious accident with the fork lift at David's. He was in the hospital and he was also not in agreement with us concerning the Picchetti property and taking on this project. So it is decided that he is going to leave the partnership, so we bought out his interest. We had been leasing the Locatelli place on a year to year basis. But one of the difficulties we had there was that the family was reluctant to give us a commitment for the long term. And that was one of the attractions of the Picchetti deal, since we would know where we stood for a long period of time. And at that time we were having the problems of operating at such a remote location. We were having difficulty getting shipments up there and the general public had trouble finding us. So we now vacate the property by the summer of 1983.

CS: What kind of volume had you had up there after the fire, from the 1979 to the 1982 vintage?

RN: It was during that time that we establish our relationship with the Arata Vineyard, which continues today. The other red wines came from a variety of sources in that period. We had a couple of years when we got grapes from Ventana in Monterey County, both Pinot noir and Chardonnay. We also did a very good Pinot from the Glen Ellen vineyard. We also got Sonoma grapes from a small vineyard that used to sell to Chateau Souverain, I think their name was Scheffenberg.

CS: Not Scharffenberger, in Mendocino?

RN: No. Through them we learn of this grower who was making such good Pinot noir at Glen Ellen and we get his grapes one year. Those grapes came from the vineyard that is now Carmenet.⁶ And in 1980 and 1981 we were able to get Pinot noir also from Iron Horse⁷ near Forestville. We had an agreement with them not to reveal the source. We got such good press from that wine that they decided not to sell outside anymore.

CS: I didn't know there was any Pinot noir there.

RN: Yes, there was, and 1980 was a cool year and the vineyard really produced a nice Pinot noir. There was a very small amount. We shared the crop with Kistler.⁸

We also were exploring Edna Valley in San Luis Obispo County. We bought Chardonnay from the Macgregor Vineyard there, and from Paragon Vineyards. And we did a Livermore Valley

⁶ Off Moon Mountain Drive, Carmenet (BW 5173) was founded in 1983 and is today part of the Chalone group.

⁷ Founded in 1979 (BW 4873), on Ross Station Road.

⁸ A small Glen Ellen winery (BW 4899), founded in 1979.

Chardonnay, which we got through a Wente connection. We also did a Zinfandel from not far from Hollister, in the Lime Kiln area. We were doing a lot of exploring.

We are trying to grow in production some, but we were still terribly under financed. I'd say we were producing perhaps 3,000 gallons a year.

By 1981-82 and we really want to make our name with Chardonnay. We contracted for about 20 tons of Chardonnay from a vineyard in the Alexander Valley. We did that in 1981 and repeated in 1982. But with that vintage there were problems with rain during the harvest, and we couldn't really get what we wanted. So we went to Mendocino County and got grapes there. By 1983 we were sitting on a sea of Chardonnay. But at that point our winemaker has left, after his accident, and we were trying to establish our new property here at Picchetti. Then it really got a little squirrely for the business. We were overextended from these huge purchases. And the cost of cooperage was going up.

CS: Yes, and from 1980-83 there was tremendous overall price inflation. During those years the consumer price index, inflation, grew at an average rate of 10.3% per year.

RN: And at the same time the bottom sort of fell out of the Chardonnay market. It was the end of the great white wine boom. So we sat on some Chardonnay for a long time.

CS: How were you selling wine in those years.?

RN: We had some going out wholesale, but we were also selling a lot retail at the winery. Keith really handled the wholesale end of it. He was always working for another winery and in his capacity at these wineries he would deal with marketing people and make connections. From time to time our wines would be included in their sales by virtue of the connections he's made. So when he left the business we really had a big problem in terms of marketing. And we also have a credibility problem, since the best known person in the winery partnership has left, and he really was the marketing person and was responsible for the winemaking. A lot of people were taking a look at us at that point and wondered where this winery was going.

So we moved out of Locatelli's and put our barrel storage over in Livermore at the Fenestra Winery of Lanny and Fran Replogle.⁹ We then set about trying to get the Picchetti place ready for the 1983 harvest. But we were not able to do it. We did get bonded, but we didn't have the facility operating at a point where we could crush here.

CS: And you get the old Locatelli bond number, 3682.

RN: So we did the harvest in 1983 at Fenestra. We continued with pretty much the same wines that we had been making right along. We did do Chardonnay from Wasson in the Alexander Valley.

CS: How did you make a connection with them?

RN: Through David Bruce.

CS: He has used a lot of their grapes.

RN: We also did a Sonoma Pinot noir, and the Arata Cabernet. Our production was probably up to 4,000 gallons.

RL: That's the year we made that Chardonnay from Spring Mountain.

⁹ On East Vallecitos Road, founded in 1980 (BW-4956).

RN: That an interesting story. There is a man named Gantner on Spring Mountain who has a little label called School House.

CS: I don't think he has a bond; he must make it at another winery.

RN: He has a Pinot noir vineyard planted with cuttings from Romanée-Conti in Burgundy. He claims it's the best Pinot in California, so we set about trying to get some of those grapes, but the best we were able to do was to get some Chardonnay which he dry farmed on his property.

RL: They were from cuttings taken from Stony Hill.¹⁰

CS: Who was the winemaker?

RN: Rolayne has taken over the winemaking duties then.

CS: Let's get that story. There are lots of women in the production end of the business today, but I don't know any who didn't go through academic training for it some place. So what's your background for this job?

RL: My major was medical technology.

CS: Aha!

RL: I had a lot of science. Microbiology and chemistry. Because I understood lab work I did some of it with Keith. I did that when Keith was still there.

CS: This is not quite the miracle I thought it was. (Everyone laughs heartily.)

RL: Well, I think it's something of a miracle.

CS: No way, not with a solid academic scientific background.

RL: At that time I didn't have a full time job, but Ronald did. So I was the one who would go up to the winery and help Keith during the week, doing all kinds of winery jobs.

CS: Did Keith major in microbiology at UC Santa Cruz?

RL: Yes.

CS: So you know how to do a malo-lactic test with a jar, the chromatography test.

RL: Yes, I've done that. But I was never sure of the results. Now I send most of my analysis away to a professional lab.

CS: Everyone is doing that now, unless you've got a trained enologist on site.

RL: I'd make up solutions to correct acid concentration.

CS: How about yeasts?

RL: We normally used commercially prepared yeasts.

¹⁰ One of the first premium wineries in Napa, founded after Repeal in 1953 by Fred and Eleanor McCrea (BW-4461). The property is famous for its long-lived Chardonnays.

RN: But on occasion Keith would bring in a yeast he'd prepared himself. That was the kind of work he had been doing at Paul Masson's for their Champagne program.

CS: But in those early days you were helping out. You weren't looking down the line at eventually becoming the winemaker.

RL: Not back then.

CS: When does the idea take shape?

RL: When Keith leaves in 1982 we had to decide how we were going to operate the thing. And he is in the hospital during the 1982 vintage and we communicate by telephone a lot on the winemaking. Ron and I made the 1982 wines, so we knew that physically we could do it.

Keith had been sort of secretive about where he got his ideas. I recall that he wanted to do some carbonic maceration experiments with some Cabernet. But he never really shared his sources with us. It was an awakening to me afterwards to find out how much information there was around full of ideas, like *Practical Winery*.¹¹ In 1983 I started to read that publication. It was then that all the subscriptions started coming to us and we'd get all the mail.

Another important part of my technical development was our friendship with Lanny Replogle at Fenestra Winery in Livermore. He was really instrumental in teaching me a lot about winemaking.

CS: Well, I guess he has a solid enough technical background.¹²

RL: He was a wonderful teacher. He was the antithesis of Keith, in that he was willing to share any knowledge or technique that he had.

CS: He was an excellent teacher. A former student of mine took me down to watch him lecture on polyphenolics and I was impressed.

RL: I think that 1983 was really a year of consultation and study with him. I recall that in that year we took his suggestions on how to slow down the fermentation in the Pinot noir by localizing the inoculation of the yeast and letting the fermentation progress slowly across the fermenter, rather than mixing it into the entire batch.

CS: Without refrigeration it's a lot hotter in Livermore in September and October than it is up on Empire Grade in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

RL: I still ask Lanny's advice from time to time. But now I've gotten to the point where sometimes I don't take it. Now I like to develop my own specific point of view from my own past practices and a combination of others' views.

Lanny was really instrumental in helping us develop our views on winemaking techniques.

CS: That's interesting, because he sort of runs a Bordeaux operation over there, concentrating on Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Sauvignon blanc, while your concentration has a Burgundian lean, Pinot noir and Chardonnay. But then you make a Cabernet and he makes a Chardonnay.

RN: When it comes to the making Chardonnay and Pinot noir I think that we make quite different wines.

¹¹ A publication for the small and medium size wine producer emphasizing practical approaches to improved cellar and vineyard operations.

¹² Replogle, until his retirement in 1992, was a professor of chemistry at San Jose State University.

CS: So what's the seed of your conceptual focus with these two wines?

RN: I think that the style was originally set by Keith and we moved on from there.

RL: And we have a much more organic view of, say, the Pinot noir, while Lanny comes at it from a more chemistry oriented point of view. Our view is more influenced by my background in micro-biology. One thing that I've never felt comfortable with is blending, while Lanny does a lot of that.

CS: You mean like blending vineyards and parcels for Pinot noir, or blending varietals, like Cabernet and Merlot.

RL: Both.

CS: You don't blend anything into your Pinot noir or Chardonnay, do you?

RL: No. And most of our wines have been vineyard designated, so there is less blending there. Most of our wines are 100% varietal and 100% a specific vineyard. Lanny messes around with lots of varietal blends and does a good job at it.

CS: That's the Bordeaux tradition. Virtually all Bordeaux wines, red and white, are blends.

The Move to Picchetti

Let's move to the Picchetti story. Start at the beginning. What germinates this seed?

RN: It started at Locatelli's. The Open Space District here in the 1970s acquired the Picchetti property and they decided to set about leasing it. They hear from some source that we are operating the Locatelli Ranch on a lease basis and so they came up there to meet with us and talk about how it works.

CS: So they actually contacted you.

RN: Yes. This was probably in 1978, because I think we were in the midst of the fire mess. They asked us to tell them about the agreement we had with the Locatellis so that they have more understanding about writing such an agreement. They explained to me what they were doing and I promised to tell them all about it if it was all right with the Locatellis. So it eventually happens.

In addition I also told them that the project sounded interesting to us and that we would do this or that if we were involved. So they suggested that we throw our hat in the ring. I told them we didn't know whether we were in or out of the wine business, in the midst of the fire situation. It was not something that we could take on right then.

The next thing was that they went through a couple of years soliciting and negotiating with various people to lease the property. Then, at the last minute, the people who they were going to contract with decided not to do the project.

CS: Do you know who that was?

RL: It was some attorneys, home winemakers.

RN: So they were faced with going through the whole process again. At that second go-around we got a letter saying it was going to happen and they were looking for people to apply.

RL: That was in mid-1981.

RN: So we put together a proposal and submitted it to the Open Space District and were one of perhaps ten proposals that go in. There was a series of public hearings and it eventually got down to two proposals.

CS: What did the District want to see going on here?

RN: They were not definitive in their request for proposals. They wanted to preserve the buildings and they wanted proposals on how that would happen.

CS: So they didn't say that they wanted a winery here.

RN: Not necessarily. The proposals ranged from bed-and-breakfast ideas to cooperative home winemaking facilities.

It came down to two proposals in the running at the end. It was ours and that of Jeff Peterson of Mt. Eden.¹³ He put together a very sophisticated proposal and had strong financial backing. He presented a very grand program.

RL: With a stop light on Montebello Road and a turn lane here at the end of the driveway.

RN: That may be what doomed his proposal. At one of the public hearings there was an outcry by the public about the problems that might arise here due to the traffic. And Jeff was under considerable pressure, so he stood up and said that to solve the problem they would put in a turn-lane at the entrance to the winery. That was a message they didn't want to hear.

CS: That's what they put in over at Congress Springs on the Big Basin Road, but that's a very different kind of road.

RN: So we got the job. It was primarily because we demonstrated a sensitivity to the delicate nature of the property. They realized that we were actually going to move our family here, which means we were going to be acceptable to the neighbors.

We then are confronted with the reality of having the Picchetti project.

CS: You had just gone through a very bad economic trauma. Was this going to require another big injection of capital?

RN: Certainly it did. Nobody in the Park District, nor did we, realize what that financial cost was going to be.

We came in and had an engineer survey the buildings. And we had an architect. Our first one was John Bowles, the San Francisco architect, who did Candlestick Park. We thought we knew what we were getting into. But at that point, in the fall of 1982, we were just about to experience the collapse of the Chardonnay market, we'd just lost our winemaker, and we had only barely recovered from the fire. And now we were going to take on this restoration.

CS: Did you have to get more partners?

RN: No. That was on our mind, however.

CS: What about the limited partners who had come into the Locatelli operation.

¹³Jeffrey Peterson has been the winemaker at Mt. Eden vineyards for several years. It is a winegrowing property above Mt. Eden Road a few miles to the south of the Montebello area.

RL: They are still in it, today. They liked the idea.

RN: We saw ourselves as a winery with a limited amount of money and limited production. But we thought we'd be in the best financial situation if we were in a place where retail sales were the chief focus.

CS: What you did has been typical of origins of Santa Cruz winery operations since World War II. You have your business as a sort of ace-in-the-hole. Just about everybody got started that way. They didn't have to show a balance sheet profit it stay afloat. There have been practically no exceptions. Only in recent years do Cinnabar¹⁴ and Byington come to mind.

RN: And part of the situation here would solve some of the logistical problems that we faced at the Locatelli property. It was very difficult to operate from San Jose. That's where I had my accounting office. This place solves a lot of logistical problems. At that moment I didn't envision having my office here at the ranch, but now it is.

At the time there was an environment in which grants were available. We thought that we could finance at least some of the restoration that way.

CS: Let's stop here and next time we'll walk around the ranch in 1983 and see what you were faced with.

* * * * *

August 26, 1993

Picchetti Ranch

CS: Let's start with the winery itself.

RN: In the summer of 1983, when we started work on the property, the cellar of the winery had a dirt floor, and all of the original tanks were still in place. That is, the upright redwood tanks, of different sizes. And there were also some oval casks and smaller cooperage. And there were lots of other things that had been piled into that area. There was lots of horse harness equipment. There were some old pumps and lots of winery related equipment. There were a few ovals in the thousand gallon size. The redwood tanks started at about a thousand gallons, and then stepped up to maybe three thousand gallons. The old crusher and presses were not in that building.

There was no electricity going to the building at that point. (There had been.) And there was no water, although there had been. Upstairs the building had been used for storage. We understand there had been some kind of an auction, so that most of the good stuff was gone. There were bedsprings, boxes of shotgun casings, boxes of beer bottles. Lug boxes had been piled up.

CS: There was no evidence that this was the upstairs of a winery?

RN: No. It was really just a space for storage.

CS: But wouldn't this have been the fermentation area originally?

¹⁴ Cinnabar Winery, above Congress Springs Road, was founded by Tom Mudd in 1986 (BW-5333). Byington Winery, on Bear Creek Road, was founded in 1990 by Bill Byington (BW-5572).

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

Picchetti Winery
13100 Montebello Road
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space Park District
Cupertino
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-2012

Documentation: 4 sheets (1978, including map, site plan, site sections,
detail)
6 exterior photos (1980)
7 data pages (1978)
1 set of field records (including 1 field notebook and
72 field photos)

Jane Lidz, Photographer Summer 1980

CA-2012-1 WINERY, LOOKING NORTH-NORTHEAST
CA-2012-2 WINERY LOADING DOCK, LOOKING EAST
CA-2012-3 WINERY, LOOKING SOUTH-SOUTHEAST
CA-2012-4 MAIN HOUSE, LOOKING NORTHEAST
CA-2012-5 OLD HOUSE, LOOKING EAST
CA-2012-6 STABLES, LOOKING NORTHWEST

PICCHETTI WINERY

Location: 13100 Montebello Road, Mid-Peninsula Open Space District, Cupertino, Santa Clara County, California.
USGS Cupertino Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.580710.4127770.

Present Owner: The Mid-Peninsula Open Space District.

Significance: The Picchetti Winery was one of the early wineries in the area and is significant for its historical association with the agricultural heritage of the Santa Clara Valley. Containing much of its early outbuildings and machinery, the winery complex provides a vivid picture of the industry in the late nineteenth century. The winery was owned by the Picchetti family until 1976, and was operated as a winery for seventy-two years.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection:
 - a. The Old House, circa 1882.
 - b. The House: 1886 (Reese, Bob. "History of the Wineries #1467," Unpublished draft of report, California History Center, DeAnza College, hereafter referred to as "Reese.")
 - c. Winery: 1896.
 - d. Outbuildings: 1900-22, including fermenting and pressing house, blacksmith shop, stable, garage and wash house.
2. Architect: No information available.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Sometime between 1872 and 1882, Picchetti brothers, Vincenzo and Secondo, bought 160 acres on Montebello ridge for \$1,500 (Reese). Secondo and his wife moved to the ridge and began clearing the land and planting grapes. In 1884, Secondo sold his half interest in the acreage to Vincenzo (Reese), who subsequently bought surrounding properties which totaled 500 acres at the time of his death in 1904 (Lisa Beard, "The Pioneer Picchetti Family of Cupertino." Unpublished report, page 4, California History Center DeAnza College, 1973, hereafter referred to as "Beard"). Among these purchases was 100 acres owned by Dr. Ozea Perrone and located on the lower half of the ridge. Vincenzo later

sold his 100 acres to John Alves in 1950 (Mitchell, Mary. "Montebello Ridge." Unpublished report, page 1, California History Center, De Anza College, 1972, hereafter referred to as "Mitchell.") The Picchetti property was purchased by what is now the Mid-Penninsula Open Space District in 1976.

4. Alterations and Additions:

- a. The Old House: The first floor front of the house, beneath the stairway, was screened in for the birds that John Picchetti kept. John was known for his love of birds and animals (interview with Irene and Josephine Picchetti). A second entrance door was added to the left side of the house and an inside door, on the first floor connecting the two sides of the house, was closed off in the mid- 1950's. This modification was made in order to provide privacy for the two ranch hands who lived there. The bathroom was added about 1960-1963; prior to that time, two outhouses were used. At one time, a brick oven for baking bread stood in front of the house. The area at the left side of the house was used for washing wine barrels (Interview, Irene Picchetti), and one room of the house was used as storage for gallon wine jugs (Telephone interview with Tisch and Elio Picchetti). The Old House was later used as an office.
- b. The House: Originally, the entrance road led up the hill to the east side of the house which was the original front of the house. At some time prior to 1892 the driveway was altered and entry to the property was from the southwest side of the house, making the south entrance to the house the principal entrance. The entire house was already in its present condition by 1904. A huge oak tree once stood on the east side of the house where the existing arbor is and shaded that side of the house. A fish pond is located there. (Interview, Irene Picchetti). The formal dining room was used as an office beginning about 1912-1915 (Interview, Tisch Picchetti). The black and nicked Monarch wood-burning cook stove was installed some years after the house was built in 1886 (Tole, unpublished report).
- c. Wash Rooms: A brick oven was used to bake bread here. It was removed (circa 1948-1953) and a wood-burning stove was installed. At a still later date, a butane stove was substituted. The stove was used to process fruit (Interview, Tisch Picchetti).
- d. Bird Aviaries: John Picchetti loved birds and animals, and there were once several bird aviaries below the old house along the road. One of the aviaries still exists.
- e. The Big Yellow Barn: The yellow barn was built about the same time as the main house and was originally intended to be another residence for one of the sons (Interview, Tisch Picchetti). The barn was located west of the stable, with a large corral between

PICCHETTI WINERY
HABS NO. CA-2012 (Page 3)

the two structures. Because the roof was in a state of disrepair, the barn was torn down after the property was purchased by the Mid-Penninsula Open Space District. The upper floor of the barn was used for storage of hay and lower portion for the milking of cows. There was a shed, apparently added after the barn was built, in which the cows could take cover from the weather. In front of the shed was a corral for the cows with a pig pen in the lower right section of it. The corral southeast of the barn was for horses and contained a large wooden hay feeder and watering trough.

- f. Chicken House: North of the barn and west of the garage and main house, the large chicken house was located under a willow tree. Several pens were located in this area for pigeons and other fowl. None of these structures exist.
 - g. Cutting Shed, Dehydrator, Shed for dipping prunes, Sulfur House for apricots, etc: West of the main house, was an area consisting of several sheds and equipment for processing dried fruits, primarily prunes and apricots. Behind these was a large clearing for drying trays. All of this has been demolished.
 - h. Garage: The garage was divided into four areas. The north end of the garage was used as a wood shed and the entrance was completely open to that section. After the Mid-Penninsula Open Space District purchased the property, the entrance was enclosed and a door added. The area next to the wood shed was used for automobiles. The room adjoining this was used for storing tractors and other farm equipment. The room at the south end of the building was a storage room for chicken feed, tools, saddles, etc. There was a pot-belly stove in this room until about 1973. Once a year a pig was killed, salami made and hung in this room to cure before being transferred to the basement of the house for storage.
 - i. Stable: At one time, a room located to the north side of the stable was used as a bedroom for working men; later it was used as a tack room. There is also an addition to the southwest corner of the stable.
 - j. Bocce Ball Court: This Court runs the full length of the north end of the winery and fermenting rooms and was the main source of entertainment for the working men (Cupertino-Monta Vista Courier, Volume 27, Number 11, November 14, 1973). It was later used as a rifle shooting area for target practice.
- B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: Vincenzo Picchetti came to the Santa Clara Valley from Italy in 1872 at the age of twenty-four (Tole, page 1). For the next ten years, he worked as the foreman of the vineyards and winery of the Villa Maria for Jesuit Fathers, located below Stevens Creek (this land is now known as Villa Maria Park). Some time during his ten years at the Villa Maria,

Vincenzo sent for his brother, Secondo, in Italy, and together they purchased 160 acres of land on the western Montebello slopes, overlooking Arroyo de San Joseph Cupertino (Beard, page 3). In 1889, Frona Eunice Wait described Santa Clara County as "one of the most beautiful and fertile counties in the State. The best wines of Santa Clara are produced from grapes grown upon the eastern side of the valley close up the foothills. The vintage is lighter than that from the western side, but the grapes are finer and wines therefrom have naturally a more delicate flavor." (Wait, Frona Eunice. Wines and Vines of California, A Treatise on the Ethics of Wine-Drinking, 1889, p. 192).

Secondo and his wife moved to the western slopes of Santa Clara Valley and began clearing the land (circa, 1879) and the old house was built. About 1882, Vincenzo returned to Italy to marry Teresa, the girl he left behind, and when he returned, he continued working at Villa Maria for several more years (Cupertino Chronicle, Vol. 19, 1975, page 15). In 1884, Secondo sold his half interest in the acreage to Vincenzo. With Secondo's departure to San Jose, Vincenzo, Teresa and their newly born son moved to their ranch house (the "Old House"). Working men were boarded on the second floor until the present main house was built in 1886 (Interview, Irene Picchetti). In 1888, Mrs. Picchetti's sister, Louisa, arrived from Italy to assist with raising the children and chores (Reese). The ranch was like a miniature park with chickens, geese, ducks, pigeons, pheasants, peacocks, sheep, hogs, cattle, deer, raccoon, canaries, and a wild badger. In the grounds around the home were orange, lemon, and pomegranate trees. There is a lake on the property which used to be full year around but since the 1906 earthquake, it is dry during the summer months (Tole, page 5).

The young vineyards of Zinfandels, Carignane, Petite Sirah for red clarets, and Golden Shasta for White Sauternes which the Picchettis planted, became mature and began producing. The produce was sold in bulk to local wineries until about 1896, when the two-story red brick winery was built into the side of a hill at the upper end of the main yard. A creek ran directly behind the winery and was used in the production of the wine (Reese). The wine was bottled and sold under the label "Picchetti Bros." Irene Picchetti still has one of the original labels which reads as follows:

"Alcoholic strength 1 Gal
12 to 14% by volume
California Sauterne Wine
Produced and Bottled by
PICCHETTI BROS.
Rt. 1, Box 820, Cupertino, Ca.
Bonded Winery No. 148
14th Adm. Dist. Calif."
"Tax Paid by stamps affixed to Case"

The Wine Institute of San Francisco lists the Picchetti winery as Bonded Winery No. 148. It was considered a small family winery with wines that were frequently of outstanding quality and always distinctive in flavor. Unlike many mass-produced wines, the Picchetti wines aged naturally for at least three years, a process generally used to create finer wines. "They created a wine that was still alive and produced a sediment in the bottle which did not affect the flavor" (Beard, page 8). Elio Picchetti, grandson of Vincenzo, reputedly still holds the recipes for the wines (Tole). The lower area of the winery is still filled with redwood storage wine tanks and oak casks for aging. Just inside the cellar is a large wine cask which was imported from Europe to be exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition of 1904. It is hand carved with grapes and legends connected with wine making. Only the grapes and leaves remain visible, however, because the legends have been painted over.

A brandy still was located in the Blacksmith Shop and operated until Prohibition (Interview, Irene Picchetti).

The Garage, probably the latest building built on the property, was constructed from lumber taken from the barracks at Camp Fremont (Interview, Tisch Picchetti).

Vincenzo and Teresa raised four sons: Antone, born 1882, John, born 1888, Attilio, and Hector (Beard, page 4). After Vincenzo's death in 1904 at age 56, Antone and John took over the management of the ranch. Attilio and Hector opened a livery stable which later became the first Nash Automobile Agency in San Jose (Cupertino Chronicle). Virgil Picchetti, grandson of Vincenzo, was killed while serving in the European theatre in World War II. The post for the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Cupertino is named after him (Crist, page 2).

The Picchettis were instrumental in planning for the Montebello School, which was constructed in 1892, and contributed \$250 for its construction. Vincenzo served on the first board of trustees and supplied a room for the teacher at his ranch. Since its inception, the school board has always had a Picchetti member (Cupertino Chronicle, page 16).

During Prohibition, the brothers were forced to sell acres of vineyards to meet expenses, and when Prohibition was rescinded the Picchettis could not afford to update their equipment to meet the new government standards and compete with the corporate wineries. Added to this was the modernization of farming techniques requiring expensive mechanization. This resulted in the end of the Picchetti winemaking for commercial market, although they still continued producing for their own use. In 1963, they stopped making wine (The Wines of America, Leon D. Adams, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1973) and by 1971 the winery was closed after seventy-two years of operation. (Cupertino Chronicle, page 18). The family boarded

horses and slowly sold off the acreage they once tilled (Butler, The Valley of Santa Clara Historic Buildings 1792-1920, page 115). It is now owned by Mid-Penninsula Open Space District which purchased it in 1976.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Secondary and published sources:

Adams, Leon D., The Wines of America, Boston, 1973.

Butler, Phyllis Filiberti, Valley of Santa Clara Historic Buildings: 1792-1920, San Jose, 1975.

Cupertino Chronicle. Local History Studies. Vol. 19. California History Center DeAnza College, 1975.

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Garrod, R. V., The Saratoga Story, 1962.

Wait, Eunice, Wines and Vines of California, A Treatise on the Ethics of Wine Drinking, 1889.

2. Primary and unpublished sources:

Beard, Lisa. "The Pioneer Picchetti Family of Cupertino." Unpublished Report, California History Center, DeAnza College, 1973.

Crist, Rosemary, "Montebello Ridge: Its Vineyards and Wineries." Unpublished Report, California History Center. DeAnza College, 1974.

Mitchell, Mary. "Montebello Ridge." Unpublished Report, California History Center, DeAnza College, 1972.

Reese, Bob. "History of the Wineries #1467." Unpublished draft of report, California History Center, DeAnza College.

Tole, Raymond. "The Picchetti Family." Unpublished report, California History Center, DeAnza College, 1973.

3. Interviews:

Interview with Irene Picchetti and Josephine Picchetti, August 1978, at the home of Irene Picchetti (Mrs. Andrew H. Tedesco), 345 S. Genevieve Lane, San Jose, CA.

Telephone interview with Tisch and Elio Picchetti, August 1978.

4. Photographs: There is an excellent collection of Photographs in the possession of Irene Picchetti.

Prepared by Robert Bruegmann
Project Supervisor
HABS

Summer 1978

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara. The 1978 summer project, the second year of a three-year project in Santa Clara County, was completed under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS; Kenneth L. Anderson, Jr., Principal Architect; and Robert Bruegmann, Project Supervisor (University of Illinois, Chicago Circle); with Jack Schafer, Architectural Foreman (University of Cincinnati); and student architects Robert E. Clarke (University of Notre Dame), Barbara M. Friedman (University of Pennsylvania), Julia H. Miner (Yale University), and John B. Murphy (Texas Tech University), at the HABS Field Office in Saratoga, California. The drawings were edited in the HABS Washington Office during the summer of 1979 by architect David T. Marsh. The historical and architectural data was researched and written during the summer of 1979 by Jan Cigliano, an architectural historian on the HABS staff, at the 1979 HABS Field Office in Santa Clara, California. Photographs were taken by Jane Lidz, summer 1980.

RN: That's what we would presume, but we have a hard time finding any evidence of that. My sense is that it was designed that way at the start but quickly they moved fermentation to the building next door. We call it the fermentation building today.

CS: On this map we're looking at it's called the pressing house.

RL: And we did find an old press in there. And fermenters.

CS: So you think this change was made perhaps at Repeal?

RN: No, I think it goes back much earlier than that. We have very old photographs of the crushing station, at the press house, and those go back before Prohibition.

CS: (After looking at these photos later there is no question about this. The building next door, recently restored by the Stortzes, with the old crusher at the top of the building and the engine below which powered it through a series of belts, performed the task normally performed by the top floor of a traditional California gravity flow winery.)

RN: The engine we have there now was moved onto the property in the 1930s. It came from another property. But it did replace an engine that was already there.

CS: What was the general condition of the structure of the winery?

RN: It was sound. We found that out from the engineering work we had done. But there were no utilities, the roof was falling in. All the pane windows had deteriorated and were boarded up. The floor upstairs had rotted because of water damage from the roof.

CS: Had that floor been insulated with dirt or sawdust?

RN: No. There were very heavy floor joists, which suggested that they did expect a lot of weight above it. There was fir tongue and groove flooring on top of them. But we saw no evidence of holes having been drilled through the floor above to transfer wine. Nor did we see areas that had been worn where liquids might have been spilled.

CS: I'll follow up on this with the Picchettis in our next interview and get the use of these areas straight.

RL: At some point they had housed workers up there on the top floor of the winery. There are people who work around here today who, as kids, remember staying there.

RN: Another interesting aspect of the building, although no member of the Picchetti family remembers anything of the sort, but it is our belief that the building was originally half as big as it is now. We think it was built in two distinct sections.

CS: Yes, I recall your showing me that several years ago. The south half has exposed joists, and the north half has the joists covered and there are the metal braces going through the building.

RN: There are really different construction techniques involved, and improvements, in the northern half that are not in the southern half. We do have photos of the winery that go way back that show it as it is today, so this was not something that happened in later years. I think it was before the 1906 earthquake.

We know that the house that we're sitting in, the big farm house, was built in 1886, and it was enlarged in 1893. It seems to me that this was a period of expansion. The enlarging of the

farmhouse was to provide small bedrooms for family members who were coming from Italy to help on the ranch. There was also a large dining room to feed the crews that were on the property.

CS: As far as history is concerned I think you're quite right. Economic conditions up to 1893 all over the country would have encouraged expansion. That was certainly the case in this valley, although there was some hurt in some sectors of agricultural production. Then after 1893, after the great crash and with the depression, such expansion would not have made sense. There was actually reverse immigration for the next few years. That was from 1893 to 1898.

RN: I think that the expansion of the winery took place when the farmhouse was first built, around 1886. At that point they would have moved out of the original homestead house and expanding the winery brings the northern part of that building very close to the homestead house.

CS: So you think the north half is the new half.

RN: Yes. I would think that the first part would have been the part further underground.

CS: That's right; it would have to be. Otherwise it doesn't make sense at all. The slope is to the north. You simply can't imagine them digging it out the other way.

Inside the cellar itself is there evidence to support this hypothesis?

RN: Yes, it's obvious. There are different design features. It's very obvious from an architectural standpoint.

CS: What was the date on the old homestead house.

RN: We think it was 1874. The brothers came and built that house and started clearing the land and planting the vineyards. They sold grapes for a couple of years and then started making wine. That would place the original winery in the early 1880s.

CS: That also fits the history. Between 1878 and 1885 there was a great boom in planting and huge profits made in selling wine. Prices and demand were way up after the depression of the mid-1870s was over.

RN: Histories say the winery was built in the 1890s, but I think it was before then.

CS: I have it at 1896, but I was just following family recollection. That was not a good year to be building a winery. Credit would have been very tight and grape prices very low.

RN: I think the first part of the winery existed before this house was built. At least the first half of the winery was built early.

CS: Perhaps that family tradition relates to when the winery was expanded and finished. If they had the savings, and with prices low, there would have been reason to expand capacity so as not to be compelled to sell for the first price offered them by wine merchants. That was the situation in 1896, and it is a possibility, if they had the reserve resources to pull it off. That is the reason Greystone was built in Napa in 1889.

Was there any wine in the place when you took it over?

RN: No. Some barrels had some residual vinegar in them. We did strain some of that and saved it.

CS: Years from now, with this DNA work being done by Professor Meredith at UC Davis, they may be able to look at that and tell you exactly what went into it.

RN: Everything in the cellar was covered by a couple of inches of mold. There were lots of fittings on shelves, and horse harness.

CS: What did you do with all that stuff?

RN: The tanks themselves were dismantled, except for the one very special carved cask which came out of the Pierre Klein estate¹⁶ in 1908.

CS: It was soon after then that Klein leased the place and moved off the property.¹⁶

RN: That cask has a history too. It is said that it was back at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

CS: Klein's wine was not at St. Louis, but the cask might have been. I think it is more likely to have been at the Atlanta International Exposition in 1897. I know he exhibited his wine there.¹⁷ And then there was his great victory at the Paris Exposition in 1899-1900.¹⁸

RN: We saved all the equipment that was down there, and the fittings. There was a gas-powered transfer pump, which sat on an old wooden cart with wheels; we have had that fully restored. It operates now.

CS: (Later I inspected this equipment, which had been carefully stored in picking boxes in the stable. There was also larger equipment there, including fairly large pieces of the old still which was formerly in what was euphemistically termed the "blacksmith shop" in the old days, probably during Prohibition. That building it being restored at this moment.)

Let's move over to this house now, but first let's start downstairs in the cellar.

RN: There are two cellars in this building. The house itself was built as a rectangle. There were actually two matching buildings built on the property at the same time. They had the same square footage, both two-story structures. This one was finished as a home. The second one was to be finished as a home for Vincenzo's brother, but that never happened. The second one continued to be used as a barn and today no longer exists. The Open Space District tore it down.

CS: (Looking at an old panoramic photo of the area this second building can be clearly seen, to the southwest of its twin.)

RN: This house had four rooms downstairs and four upstairs. And it had a sort of outdoor kitchen and porch. Baking was done in the little building we call the wash house. The house was expanded in 1893 and that added an indoor kitchen and some more small bedrooms upstairs. And this dining hall.

So there are two cellars. The one under the original section of the house is today set up for wine storage. There were large oak ovals there, about a thousand gallons each. They were pretty much wall to wall down there. I would say that their storage capacity down there was about 10,000 gallons.

¹⁵ Jimsomare today. See Homem interview.

¹⁶ *American Wine Press and Mineral Spirits Review* (January 1, 1910).

¹⁷ *Pacific Wine & Spirit Review* (November 7, 1897).

¹⁸ *San Jose Mercury*, 8/22/1900.

CS: Is there any question in your mind about this being part of the original cellar?

RN: There has been some speculation, to romanticize the situation, that it was a Prohibition cellar, where the wine was hidden, but I don't believe that. The tanks had measurements on them, numbers, and this doesn't suggest to me that they were not part of what was accounted for.

CS: It's outlandish to think that a place like that would have been dug after the house was built.

RN: No, it was not an afterthought. There was an access from upstairs in a closet under the stairwell. But that was a typical layout. But there was very clear access from the outside. I think that was just available storage.

CS: Do any of your old pictures show that outdoor access?

RN: Yes. We have a photograph I think was taken in 1893, which I think was to celebrate the completion of the house, the new addition. And it is clear that there was outdoor access then.

CS: Were those casks there when you came?

RN: Yes, they were there, but they were empty. They're still there. We use it as storage area for our library wines. The access to the place is also suggests that they used it regularly. There is a ramp going down there, rather than steps.

CS: Can you get those casks through the door?

RN: I think not. I think they had to be assembled right there. There is even some indication that there was some sort of a track going down there.

CS: I get it. They could get 20 regular barrels into one of those casks. They could be doing everything with a pump and 50-60 gallons barrels.

RN: And they also could have used gravity flow from the main winery down to there.

The second part of the house was built a few years later, so there was a continuous foundation on the original portion, which isolated the original cellar. So there is a distinctly separate cellar under the newer portion of the house. It was there that they stored cheeses, hung salami, kept canned goods, and that sort of thing. There wasn't much in there when we took over.

CS: How long had it been since the house had last been inhabited?

RN: The Picchettis sold the property to the Open Space District in 1975 or 1976. The two sisters had lived here. They moved out at that point, and it was vacant until the Park District put a ranger in here to live because of the amount of vandalism. They came in and fixed up a kitchen and one bedroom downstairs. So there was a ranger here for a few years before we took it over. He was probably here no earlier than 1980. So the place had been empty for about five years. There never was any substantial improvement to the property, for years. The house was really in poor condition. There were bee hives in the walls. The windows were broken. There was no old furniture left from the old days.

CS: Let's talk about the pressing house, as they call it.

RN: To me that is a fascinating building. It was built as a rectangle, and in the back was the crushing equipment. Originally there was a conveyer system that brought the grapes up to the crusher, which was up at the highest point. Then there was a flue system that brought the must down into the fermenters below.

CS: This goes along with the idea that they didn't use the upstairs of the main winery as one would have expected it to be used.

RN: At some point they built a lean-to section to the east of the main building, and that covered the area where the press was. It was fully enclosed. But the construction was quite weak and by the time we got here the roof had collapsed on that lean-to extension. The main building was also in terrible condition. There was a lot of deterioration on the back part of the building from all the water that came off the hill. I don't think it had been used much since it was last used. That was probably when the last grapes were crushed here.

CS: Did you see anything to make you think that as production came to an end there was a sort of miniaturization of functions, a scaling back and concentration of functions for a much smaller production?

RN: We never saw anything like that, nor that any modern equipment was brought in in the forties and fifties. But then we may never have seen any of that and the newer equipment might be what they were able to sell off, the favored items at auction. But there was no sign of it.

CS: What about the old homestead house?

RN: In front of the winery building. What we see there is what most people would probably call a cabin structure. It had redwood siding, 1x12 material, with some studs inside, but very few. It wasn't insulated, no interior walls. I know that it served as a bunkhouse in later years. I also know that it had a different configuration than it has today. There were areas that once existed which don't exist today. And I've been told that by Tish Picchetti. There is a back part of that structure which, again, I'll call a lean-to, which was a later addition. I think that it was built from materials that came out of Fort Fremont in the Palo Alto-Menlo Park area after World War I. It was dismantled after the war. There were a lot of barracks. It was a very active facility during the war, but afterwards it was shut down and a lot of local farmers dismantled those buildings. I think the buildings were sort of early prefab. So there are a number of these buildings that have survived on some of the old ranches. I think part of the homestead house came from those materials.

CS: Why?

RN: There is also a garage on the property that historically has been identified as having come from that fort. And the windows that are in the garage are the same as the windows that you find in part of the homestead house. I think they got what materials they could and built the garage and had enough left over to add a little piece to the old building, now a bunkhouse.

CS: What about the so called blacksmith building?

RN: It really might be more correctly called the still house. That's where the grappa was made. And the brick structure still exists where the still was. But they also did some blacksmith work in there. It was set up as a shop and there was a forge. I also have wondered if they used it to heat hot water for the winery. It was definitely the site of the still. In the process of cleaning out the buildings we did finally decide we were finding a lot of the parts of the still. We've reassembled a lot of pieces of it. But we have never really tried to reassemble the whole mechanism. There was also a concrete pit there that we think was used to work on tractors, such as you'd find in the old garages of the 1920s

and 1930s.

CS: (Later I examined the pieces. It was a fairly large still, not just a little pot still for a few gallons a day. This probably was used to produce fortifying brandy for the production of sweet wines. It was large enough to have been fabricated elsewhere at a place where such things were manufactured.)

There was a couple of moments in history where such a thing was very profitable. The government usually taxed brandy as brandy. But if fortifying brandy were not taxed at the rate of beverage brandy, but waited to tax the final sweet wine product, there were great profits to be made from sweet wine production. This happened in the 1890s and again a few years before World War I.

What about the wash-house?

RN: That's a building that sits just north of the main farm house. We think it was built at the same time as the main house. It housed washing trays for clothes, and there was also a brick oven there for summer baking. Even that building was enlarged, I think, at some later date. I think that the first bathroom was there. I also think they made cheese there. There was an old cheese churn and separator. It's about 300 square feet. The end where the washing tubs were had a wood floor.

CS: They didn't dry fruit there.

RN: No. There was a dehydrator, but that was taken down by the park district. We can see that there were numerous outbuildings and coops by looking at old photos. And you can see that some materials were recycled from others structures.

CS: How about the barn?

RN: That's an interesting building that shows up very early in the photos. Like the other buildings here it evolved in size from the dimensions of the original structure. It still has some wonderful horse stalls, where the work horses were maintained. And they had the large open center area, where the hay would have been loosely kept. There is still the trolley system above where the hay forks would go along out the end of the barn and bring in the hay up above. That was operated by a horse that was hooked to one end of the cable and would walk back and forth.

CS: Are the lofts still there?

RN: There were no lofts.

CS: I don't understand. Why bring the hay in overhead? They had to just drop it down on the floor below. It sounds as if they built the thing to look like a barn and then didn't make it function like one.

RN: There is a half wall between the center part of the barn and where the horses were. And there were cribs for the food and you could toss the fodder over the half wall into the cribs that ran along the wall on the stall-side.

CS: I don't see why they didn't just bring it in the door and dump it. We have to walk around and take a look at that. I've never been in the barn.

(Afterwards I examined every structure, except the still-house, where workers were involved in the restoration.)

RN: I think that the garage building was the last built on the property. I think it was built after

World War I. I think some of the material came from that Fort Fremont we were talking about. It was used as a garage to house automobiles and trucks.

CS: I wonder how long the stables functioned as stables.

RL: They boarded horses here until recently. They were housed in the barn. So it was used up until the fifties. But I sense that they used work horses up until World War II.

RN: We found the large remnants of the still in the barn. And there was also some wine related equipment and tack for the horses.

RL: A lot of that leather stuff was stored in the wine cellar, which is strange, since it is so damp in there.

CS: What about the landscaping and the gardens?

RN: To the east of the house and in the northern corner we discovered the original stone outline of the garden area. When we came it was all overgrown. You can see it out there now. And to the west of the house, beyond the hedge that lines the driveway, going out toward where the chicken coops were, that was the family orchard. There was an assortment of fruit trees there for their own use. We have planted some apple trees there, a couple of apricots. But when we got here most of the trees were dead. There wasn't anything particularly exotic as far as we could see.

To the east of the house there was a cover in the arbor area. There was another oak tree that is gone. There was originally a very nice arbor; it had a nice rustic look. That extended from the front of the front porch out to the east. It was quite big, but it was gone. What we found was more modern and in very bad condition. It was just made from 4x4s with prune or apricot trays on top of it to provide the shade.

We know that the fountain is quite old, from old photographs. It was spring fed, gravity flow. Now the water comes from a well, with a little pump on it.

RL: When we came all the water was gravity flow from springs.

RN: There was also an area just to the south that had a nice barbecue. The mechanism to raise and lower the grill still works. We have restored that. There was a bocce ball court in front of the press house, next to the old homestead house. We found the balls in the barn. But this wasn't an elaborate court. They drove the wagons on it in front of the press house. This is a working area, where they played bocce ball now and then.

CS: I'll talk to the Picchettis some more on how these facilities were used. But I needed to talk to you first to find out what to ask about.

How big is what you took over from the Open Space District?

RN: We leased a total of nine acres. Six acres covered all the building area and the three acres made up the old Zinfandel vineyard.

CS: So, those prune trees out on the hills east of the house, they aren't on your property. It's up to them to keep them up if they are going to survive.

RN: That's right. But the front end of those trees are on our property.

CS: That simplifies my task in talking about the rest of the land. Has the District done anything with these old surviving orchard trees?

RN: No. We do have a goal to lease additional parts of the land for the eventual development of vineyards. That is still an idea, but not an economic reality now.

CS: What was the arrangement you made on the land with the District.

RN: We were to restore the buildings in exchange for the use of the property. It did not have to be a restoration to the original condition, such as one might restore Fort Ross. It provided for adaptive use. That meant that such a thing as the interior of the house could be changed so that we would have a reasonable place to live. The winery building could be changed so that it would work as a winery. This is an understood standard of restoration. Beyond that there was no specific budget, no amount we had to spend on this or that. And that's how it has proceeded.

The term of the lease was for 25 years, until 2008.

CS: Do you have an option to continue?

RN: No. The District was restricted by legislation to the 25 year limit. This relates to real estate law that says that if you have occupancy beyond a certain period of time you develop interests that extend beyond the interest stated in the leasehold.

At the time there was some speculation about our going back in later and renew the lease annually, so that there would be a continuing 25 years. But none of those changes have occurred.

Restoration Projects

CS: Who is paying for the restoration of the still house.

RN: That's money from a state grant. When we envisioned the work to be done here it was always part of the equation in our minds that we would do some of the restoration with grants. It's been our responsibility to secure those grants, and we've been fortunate in that regard. I think we've raised about \$325,000 in grants for the property. We've had two different grants from Santa Clara County's historical heritage commission. And two from the state.

CS: Let's talk about restoring the winery.

RN: When we came on the property in 1983 the first thing that we undertook was to put a new roof on the winery building. Then we worked on the restoration of the interior of the farm house. In 1983 we made wine in Livermore, over at Fenestra. The next step on the winery building was to put in some electricity and a water line. In 1984 we put a cement floor in the cellar and drain lines. We got it to the point where we could start functioning as a winery.

We did some repairs of the floor upstairs and fixed up the windows, and got the doors functioning. We also fixed the stairs into the place.

CS: There is no stairs system between the upstairs and the cellar is there?

RN: No, there is not. It's hard to understand how exactly that worked.

The next thing was to fix the cupola up on the roof.

CS: Now that was for ventilation. Surely when they built that they thought some wine production was going to take place on that upper floor. That's particularly important where there was going to be fermentation taking place.

RN: A few years later we undertook, with some of the cost taken care of with grant funds, we redid all the underpinnings of the upstairs floor and put down a new floor. It's the same kind of floor that was there originally. We took down the entire brick wall on the south side of the building and rebuilt that, with a landing dock and a handicap access lift.

CS: Are you taking on debt to do this or are you taking on more partners.

RN: We're taking on debt. We had to get construction loans, which are very difficult to get because of the fact that we had a leasehold interest instead of a deed to the property. This means we couldn't get any long term financing. We're constantly taking out these loans and paying them back.

I'd say that the winery building was finished by about 1990, but we're making wine right along.

It's interesting that we had the place bonded before we had a concrete floor.

CS: How possible? That seems to me always to be the symbolic requirement of moving an old facility into the modern world and a bond.

RN: We were going through the bonding process and we were putting the roof on at the same time. The BATF man came out to make a site inspection and we were in the midst of construction and he was being asked to bond the premise, which included the fermentation building, which was falling to the ground and has dirt floors, no foundation and no electricity, no water. I really believed that it just wasn't going to happen yet. This was the summer of 1983. And remember we were transferring the old Locatelli bond from the previous Sunrise operation. So they are looking at us as an ongoing business at this point. Frankly, I think he envisioned the construction we were undertaking was going to culminate in a far more finished product that it actually did. So he signed off the papers and we were bonded while construction was still going on. There was no concrete floor, and there was no coming to check on the length of the bolt on the lock, the security of the windows, all those things that are part of the nightmare of getting bonded.

CS: You don't have a tax paid room, do you?

RN: No.

CS: So you didn't have to jump through that hoop of physically isolating one.

RN: We went through the process very smoothly. One of the hangups was the fact that it was a historic building and there was an interesting tie between the BATF and the state office of historic preservation. There was some box he had to mark on his form, the BATF man, that said the state agreed that we were not ruining a historic building in the process of bonding it.

CS: The Open Space District could have signed off on that. Aren't they down here looking at you all the time?

RN: Yes. But from the BATF's standpoint it had to be the state, because they ultimately had jurisdiction.

CS: Yes, the district is a creature of state legislation.

RN: But they have separate administration.

CS: You made wine here in 1984.

RN: Yes, we made the Picchetti Zinfandel here, and some other wines, too. There wasn't a lot of equipment involved. We moved in our small 50 gallon cooperage and a few stainless steel tanks. We had a circulating pump, but not much in the way of bottling equipment. Our capacity that year we probably listed as about 5,000 gallons.

CS: Is there anything that you used out of the Picchetti past to use in your winemaking operation?

RN: No, there really wasn't.

CS: So you didn't try to restore anything here, as you had at the Locatelli place.

RN: No. But the carved cask it restored and maintained. And we have saved all that old equipment. You'll see it in the barn. We did restore the old wine pump and the engine that ran the crushing equipment. We don't use it to run our crusher, but it does run now.

CS: But the pump would be electrical, wouldn't it?

RN: No. It was gas driven. We had a little one-lunger motor on it, what they call a hit-and-miss engine that runs the pumps, and that is all on a cart with wheels.

CS: Let's move to the main house itself.

RN: We weren't living here yet when we were putting the roof on the winery. But we quickly discovered that we couldn't undertake this work without being here. We were living in San Jose at the time. He got the plans down for this place, and the engineering done, and we came in and did the interior of the house ourselves, with a contractor. We had to refinance our home to get the money to do this. We had to put \$50,000 into the house, and it took \$20,000 for the roof on the winery. We redid all the walls, new floors, new electrical, new plumbing and cabinets. We got a functioning bathroom, and then we moved in. That was in October, 1983. We moved pretty fast. We started in May. Things weren't completed at that point; there is still a lot to do. It's an airtight space that we could live in.

CS: How old were your two kids then?

RN: Justin was just going to start kindergarten and my daughter was going to start second grade. Then over the years we finished everything up. We did that ourselves.

CS: You were really living here that fall. Did the kids go to school here?

RN: Yes. We enrolled them here before school even started.

CS: That's they key. That's the thing that tells really where you think you live. Where are the kids enrolled in school.

RN: The other buildings just sat for a while. For now we're just cleaning up the property. It's under ten feet of weeds and there are remnants of farming piled in every corner. Piles of rotten wood. We got

the garage cleaned up so that we could have a shop. And we were starting to make applications for grants. Very shortly thereafter we got a grant from the county to put a new roof on the homestead house. At the outset we're concerned about roofs, there was so much deterioration everywhere; water had been doing so much damage.

CS: When did the parking lot go in?

RN: I think in 1985. We also put in a 10,000 gallon tank out there for water in case of fire. We paid for the parking lot to start with but the district put in the fencing around it. We got a break then, in an odd sort of way. Montebello Road gave way and the county had to put a temporary road through the Picchetti property. So they went right through the parking lot. As part of the deal, when they had to restore the property back to its former condition, to get the temporary road out, the road into the parking lot has been improved, and they flattened out the parking lot for us and put gravel on it. So we got a residual benefit there.

CS: Next time we'll talk about wines and vines.

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November 30, 1993

Winemaking

CS: In this last session I want to get the story of winemaking here. We left off with the 1983 vintage over at Fenestra in the Livermore Valley. What happened in 1984?

RL: That facility here was not ready yet, so we devoted a lot of time, energy and money to putting the winery in shape. We were putting in concrete floors in the cellar, new electrical and we brought water in. We started without water and with a dirt floor.

In 1984 we harvested the Zinfandel from the estate vineyard, which gave us about two barrels, maybe 120 gallons. We have really increased the production there over the years.

CS: Did you make the Picchetti Zinfandel in 1983?

RL: No. I don't know what happened to the grapes that year. We came here in October. I think they were eaten by the birds and the deer. The fencing was not in good shape then. I don't think there was any 1983 Picchetti Ranch Zinfandel.

CS: What was the acreage then?

RL: Three acres, but not completely full. There were lots of blanks.

CS: What was the percentage of fullness, or blanks then?

RL: Maybe two-thirds full.

CS: While we're talking about the estate vineyard, have you thought about expanding it, or are you filling blanks?

RL: We've always wanted to expand it. We also have thought about planting some Pinot blanc and Pinot noir. But that has just been thinking. But what we have done in the Zinfandel vineyard, we

have planted St. George rootstock, in anticipation of grafting cuttings from the original vines and filling in the blanks, within the existing fenced area. We researched doing bench graft cuttings, but you have to do about a minimum of 5,000 to have a commercial nursery do that for you. So we can graft whenever we want. I guess the guys up a Jimsomare have been doing this now for a couple of years. On the old Zinfandel vines. And they have had good success with it. So what we need to do is do it.

Back to the 1984 vintage, we continued to do the Arata Cabernet that year. But I think that was done in Livermore. We really didn't have the facilities yet. And we fermented the Zinfandel upstairs in the winery, in what is now the tasting room.

CS: The way I hear it from the Picchettis, that may be the first wine that was ever fermented up there. But I really do think it was used for fermentation in the early years, in the 1890s. It's just that no one remembers it.

RL: I thought that was their original intention.

CS: Well, they think so, but no one knows.
The roof was on then, right?

RL: Yes. The roof went on in 1983.

CS: You later brought the Cabernet over here?

RL: We still had all the wines from the 1983 vintage over there in barrels. When we completed the winery, at the end of 1984, we took care of that. I think we bottled the Chardonnay in Livermore.

CS: How were you going to sell the wine?

RL: We still had some of our wholesalers in place, prior to moving here. We had very little retail trade up at the Locatelli place.

We opened the tasting room here in 1985. We saw that as a major element of our coming sales. That was always the plan. The first tasting that we did was outside, before the building was complete. That was in the fall of 1984. I have a book with all the data from those tastings, and a copy of the invitations, here.

CS: How did you get this going? How did you let people know?

RL: We had developed a mailing list from the years before. We did have tastings up there about twice a year, not nearly so often as we have them here. It was probably a mailing list of about 1,500.

We had a very good turnout. And we put a sign out on the road to attract Ridge customers. It was March 23 and 24, and we sold \$2300 worth of wine. That's a bad day in the tasting room now.

CS: I first came up here in late 1985 and I was impressed by the visual aspect of the tasting room. It looked good.

RL: At first we didn't have windows in the tasting room. In May 1985 we had a Cellarbration, to dedicate the new barrel aging cellar. And in December of that year we had a "Wine, Windows and Song" tasting to celebrate the new cellar windows.

CS: Did you have any people working for you?

RL: We didn't have any full time employees. From 1983 to June of 1984 we did have a full time person, Joe Diaz. But he did the roof on the winery. And he had part time help with that from Emilio Lopez, from Ridge. He has worked here now for us for the last four years. He's our regular cellar man

now.

CS: Let's move on to the 1985 vintage.

RL: We did the Arata Cabernet, the estate Zinfandel, and that's when we started getting grapes from the San Ysidro Vineyard near Gilroy. We did Pinot noir, our first Pinot blanc, and Chardonnay.

CS: How about you Sonoma sources.

RL: That had started to dry up in 1980 and 1981. We had done Chardonnay and Pinot noir from Iron Horse¹⁹, and in 1982 they decided they were going to use all their grapes.

CS: That's when they started upping their Champagne production.

RL: And that was a long distance to transport grapes and to deal with growers and check vineyards.

We also did a Petite Sirah in 1985 from a little vineyard on Quito Road in Saratoga. Harry Bellacitti's vineyard. Fellom Ranch uses some of their grapes. So do a lot of home winemakers. It's right near Pollard Road.

CS: How much did you make in 1985?

RL: About the same as we're doing now, about 2,400 cases, that's about 5,000 gallons.

We also did a 1985 White Riesling from San Ysidro. We did about the same in 1986. And we added some Pinot noir from Dutton Ranch in Sonoma. That's also in the Forestville area of Sonoma. We like that area for Pinot noir. That's not too far from Iron Horse.

At that time we were having one of the cellar workers from Ridge helping us, washing barrels, and such, on weekends. He stopped by looking for extra work. Lots of guys from up there did that. Romero Garcia worked for us for a couple of years.

CS: You find these Hispanic guys pretty steady?

RL: Yes. Very dependable. When they say they'll do something, they do.

In 1987 we stayed with the same wines, except for the Dutton Ranch. We were disappointed we couldn't get them again.

CS: How were you making Pinot noir?

RL: I learned to make that wine from Keith Holdfeldt. When he left in 1982 I consulted with Lanny Replogle, at Fenestra, and with David Noyes, the winemaker at Ridge.

CS: But those guys don't make Pinot noir.

RL: Well, lots of the time I didn't take their advice, especially on the Pinot noir. I remember Lanny wanted me to ferment it by inoculating a one corner of the fermenter and let it move slowly to hold down the temperature. But now one of our techniques is to have a hot fermentation with Pinot noir. We get up to 90 degrees.

We added stems back then, probably until 1989. Now, sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. But the crusher we were using at that time allowed plenty of stems back in without our trying. I came to believe that if you added stems back they should be dried, not green. Sometimes we add a couple of five-gallon buckets to each fermenter. But earlier we'd add 50-75% stems back. Now, maybe

¹⁹ BW 4874 (1979) near Forestville, on Ross Station Road.

20% at most.

CS: How about Chardonnay?

RL: By that time we were barrel fermenting. Up at the Locatelli place we did it in huge concrete containers. After 1983 we had a drastic improvement in our Chardonnays. Same with our Pinot blanc, both with French oak. But never 100% new oak. Back in those days we had less new oak. But in 1983 we had a lot of new oak, maybe too much. About 1988 we started having a real new oak program, where we plan out our replacement system.

CS: Do you do *sur lie* aging in the barrel?

RL: We started that in 1985. We were pretty early. We didn't in 1983 because Lanny would have done it back then.

CS: I can understand that the chemistry professor wouldn't think much of that approach, at least in theory. But he does it now, I think.

RL: I think that I was influenced in that by David Noyes and the wines he was making at home then. I really liked working and learning from him and Lanny. It made for a good balance between the scholarly chemistry side of things and the hands-on approach of David Noyes. We paid Lanny for his consulting services. And we paid Noyes by letting him make some of his own wines here. I still call David. Like last year when I had trouble with the 1992 Picchetti Zinfandel. There was a stuck fermentation. The sugar was really high. So I guess we're going to have a late harvest Zin from that. So we'll see if there is still a following for that out there.

CS: Now he is really making good white wine up at Kunde Estate. Do you still make a Pinot blanc?

RL: Yes. And it's still basically the same process as Chardonnay. 100% barrel fermented, through malo-lactic, spontaneously. (That variety goes through very easily.)

CS: If it's really Pinot blanc and not Melon, as so much California Pinot blanc is.

RL: Well, Paul Masson planted San Ysidro and there is reason to think it's the real thing.

CS: It's a maybe, unless someone really checks it out. Paul Masson himself had Pinot blanc vrai from his 1896 imports, but those vines there aren't likely to be related to the vines he planted up on La Cresta. People, particularly the University, don't like to talk about it because they don't want to have consumers confused, the way they confused people with that damn AxR-1 rootstock.

RL: We made a really good 1992 Pinot blanc from the old St. Charles Vineyard.²⁰ San Ysidro has pulled all the Pinot blanc and planted Chardonnay. Congress Springs used to get their grapes from there. Mistral has also pulled the Pinot blanc, and Pinot noir.²¹ We also made a Pinot blanc in 1992 from Paul Masson's old Pinnacles Vineyard in the Salinas Valley.

CS: I think that probably is true Pinot blanc, because the Novitiate got their wood from La Cresta sixty years ago.

.How about your stylistic approach to Cabernet and Zinfandel?

²⁰ Above Bear Creek Road, planted by the Novitiate in the 1930s.

²¹ This vineyard is right next to the San Ysidro.

RL: Except for 1992 we always ferment Zinfandel on its own yeast. I was worried about the high sugar and used a pure yeast strain. I wish I hadn't. Normally I like to shoot for about 23.5° Brix on the sugar. That's on both the Cab and Zinfandel. I also learned from David Noyes about the importance of pH and total acid and not just rely on sugar level. The pH on Zinfandel often is not very high and it often doesn't quite complete the malo-lactic. That seems to be true of other old Zinfandel vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains. You take a risk but you learn that nothing is going to put it all the way through. And we give it some SO₂ at bottling, but not very high levels.

In 1987 we did an extended maceration on the Cabernet. But I hate that. It goes on for at least twenty-one days. It's too scary for me. We did it for a couple of years, and it did work.

CS: What happened in 1988?

RL: That was a good year. Our wines were really good. Particularly the Cabernet. Still Arata grapes.

CS: Are you still getting Arata grapes?

RL: Yes. But he died last year. His wife is still there, with the same vineyard manager.

CS: How big is the Arata Vineyard?²²

RL: It's only about three acres now. He lost part of it in an easement suit back in the early 1980s. It was planted in the mid-1960s.

CS: Can you call the grapes from there "Santa Cruz Mountain"? Is it high enough?

RL: Yes. It's right there at the contour line. It's higher than Kathryn Kennedy's, but she was let into the appellation on a later OK from BATF. The grapes certainly have the characteristics of Santa Cruz Mountain Cabernet. They planted some pine trees at one end of the vineyard. Maybe we can get them cut down now.

CS: Whether you want it or not you're going to get pine needles in the fermenter. Anyway, it's not natural to have conifers growing at that elevation in the valley.

RL: One thing I wanted to do back then was to make a late-harvest Semillon down at San Ysidro. But we were never able to get it. David Noyes was interested in that too.

In 1990 we introduced a Pinot noir from Napa Valley, from the Rutherford area.

CS: That's a pretty warm area for Pinot noir.

RL: That's right. But we got a good price and the wine was good. We wanted to make a red table wine in a lower price range. And we did eventually label it as Pinot noir. It's a nice wine that we sell for \$8 per bottle. We did it in 1991 and 1992 also, but we didn't do it this last year. We also made Sauvignon blanc in 1988.

In 1990 we also made a carbonic maceration nouveau wine. Pinot noir. It was also from this Rutherford place, but the sugar was a little high, about 23°. We sold it as a nouveau wine, Pinot noir, and bottled it in November. But I don't really like those wines much. They have a sort of chemical flavor.

CS: Roz won't drink them. We had some 1993 Beaujolais for Thanksgiving that my son imported, and she wanted to know where the real wine was. But the other people at the table sucked it right

²² Just below the Villa Montalvo in Saratoga.

up.

RL: Mitch Cosentino²³ also used to buy grapes from that Rutherford vineyard.

In 1991 we switched from San Ysidro to Mistral for Pinot blanc and Pinot noir. San Ysidro was over-cropping their vines anyway.

CS: Mistral is the vineyard Augustin Huneeus used to own.²⁴ I did the research for the San Ysidro appellation for him and his wife.

RL: The fellow from New York who now owns it planted some Italian varieties there. Nebbiolo, Dolcetto and Sangiovese. We made a nice little red table wine from those grapes in 1991. Very light and fruity. Tart and dry. High acid.

CS: I don't think it's warm enough there for those varieties. You're not going to get a Barolo out of that vineyard. Any place noted for its Pinot noir and Chardonnay is not going to become famous for its Tuscan powerhouses.

You should think up a good proprietary name for it. I've got one. How about Rosetta? People would have a subliminal positive reaction because they've heard of the Rosetta stone. Mysterious, interesting, etc.

RL: Ronald wants to do a Bella Luna label.

CS: That has to be for a white wine. You can't call a red wine Bella Luna.

RL: I should also mention doing Rancho del Pino for Chardonnay, right here on Monte Bello Ridge. That was in 1990. It's two miles above us here. There are about 1,500 vines on about an acre. It's owned by Phyliss and Bart Bartkowski. We have continued that. It makes a nice Chardonnay. In 1992 we also did the Beyers Ranch Livermore Chardonnay. That's a lower priced Chardonnay. The ranch is owned by Wente Bros. We had it crushed and pressed there and had it transported the juice here. It was a good deal. We sell it for \$10 a bottle. The Rancho del Pino was \$20 a bottle. This year we finally sent off wines for competition. The Beyers Ranch took silvers and golds all over the place. It got a "best" in a regional competition at the California State Fair. And the Rancho del Pino took nothing.

CS: What did you do this year.

RL: We did those wines again this year. But no other new wines. The Arata Cabernet, Picchetti Zin. Beyers and Rancho del Pino Chardonnays. We didn't make a Pinot noir. Pinot blanc from St. Charles.

CS: How many more years do you have on the lease here?

RL: Fifteen years.

CS: Do you think you'll go all the way?

RL: Yes, but that's it.

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²³ BW 5127 in Oakville.

²⁴ The president today of Napa's Franciscan Vineyards.

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