

Ridge Vineyards

In the Santa Cruz Mountains perhaps the most obvious success story of the modern wine revolution has been the growth of Ridge Vineyards since its founding in 1959. This growth has been a matter both of size and reputation. The winery's vineyards high above the Santa Clara Valley, on Monte Bello Ridge, are the largest in the viticultural district today. No other winery in the district produces as much wine. So far as quality is concerned, others in the district might contend for the palm of having produced the greatest wine in modern years, but no winery has produced as many great wines.

The wine operation began in 1959 when a group of friends from SRI International (Stanford Research Institute) combined to buy an eighty acre portion of vineyard land on the Ridge. In 1962 the winery received its bond.

The first set of interviews on Ridge is among several of these original partners: *Hewitt and Suzanne Crane (HC, SC)*, *Charles and Blanche Rosen (CR, BR)*, and *Frances Bennion (FB)*. Her husband, David R. Bennion (1929-1988), was the winery's first winemaker and it is in his memory that the D. R. Bennion Trust was established to help preserve the winegrowing history of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Howard Zeidler was another partner, but dropped out of the venture in 1967. (He later came in as a stockholder.)

Other partners and shareholders were added over the years. In 1969 Paul Draper came to Ridge Vineyards and in 1971 became the operation's winemaker. He is still the head winemaker today.

After Draper became winemaker, Bennion continued as Ridge president until 1984. In 1986 the winery was sold to a Japanese businessman.

These first interviews took place in Menlo Park at Frances Bennion's home.

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March 9, 1993

CS: Let's start by talking about how the original partners got together, before the idea of a winery had taken shape.

SC: As I perceive it, four sets of lives came together at SRI. At first it didn't really have anything to do with wine or an interest in wine and food. I think it had to do with the land rush and making money from buying land.

HC: I came to SRI in 1956. Howard Zeidler had already been there for seven or eight years. Dave Bennion came two months after I arrived. He and I started working together in a laboratory that was run by Howard Zeidler. Dave and I got very close. Charlie Rosen came in 1957, and soon the three of us were interacting.

CS: What were you doing?

HC: Building a thing called a magnetic logic computer. Howard wasn't really part of that trio, but when it came time to buy that piece of land, we needed more financial support. And that's how he got involved.

SC: We knew the Bennions already. But the first time we met the Rosens was when SRI had its annual party. It was at the Paul Masson mountain winery. And we drove up there together, the Rosens and the Cranes.

CS: I guess it was symbolic that you would get to know one another that way at a historic Santa Cruz Mountain winery.

FB: The first time I met Blanche Rosen was at Doug Engelbart's house in Palo Alto. He was the inventor of the "mouse" for computers. I think that was in 1958.

SC: I first met Fran and Dave at an SRI dinner dance. Fran had just given birth to Eric.

CS: So you all became friends, and this didn't have anything to do with a shared interest in wine or a desire to acquire real estate.

SC: It had nothing to do with wine. We were young. It was a social thing. We did bring each other into things that we liked.

FB: Folk dancing was one thing.

CR: We Rosens didn't have much interest in dancing, but we did share an interest in the outdoors and back-packing. That came a little later. But it is interesting how we got along. Here were three very diverse couples. Dave Bennion came from Utah. Fran Bennion is a native Californian. The Cranes were from New Jersey. We were from New York and Canada. But we had very similar values, so our social relations were very good from the beginning.

CS: Did you have any interest in wine in these earlier years?

CR: My wife and I had really been in the food business before we came out here. We ran a little resort hotel sixty miles north of Montreal for a few years, in the snow country. So we had an interest in food and its preparation that went way back. To this day my wife is a very excellent cook.

My wine interest was that I actually made wine, the old fashioned sweet type, way back. I made small batches of wine in a sort of Manischewitz style.

CS: Like with Concord grapes?

CR: Yes. But I had zero background in anything to do with wine in the style of French or German table wine. That is, coming into this particular relationship. We might have a bottle of wine on some festive occasion, but it was not something we had regularly on the table with dinner.

FB: Dave came from a Mormon family in Utah. They had a small subsistence farm. They barely scratched a living out of it. They learned how to make the best of whatever produce came from the garden. Every piece of fruit was treasured.

When he came to Stanford he had never tasted wine. I think that the first time he ever had any wine was in 1952, before we were married. We went up to the Sierra Club lodge at Claire Tappan, and we had mulled wine there on New Years Eve. And that was also some of the first wine I had ever had. We never had wine at home.

In 1956, after our first child was born, we were looking for a piece of land to buy out in the country. When we were first married we had lived on two and a half acres in Los Altos Hills, right next to what would be Interstate 280, but then it was all orchard. We were caretaking the place. We had a wonderful garden there. Dave was a great farmer and everything just grew wonderfully. We started looking for a piece of property after the baby was born. There was an acre nearby that was for sale for

\$5,000, but that was too expensive for us then. So we went over the hill, further and further away from Menlo Park, looking for land. One of the pieces we found was in 1957 on Monte Bello Road, owned by a Mrs. Berg. We made an offer on that property, but it was turned down because we wanted half the water rights from across the street and she didn't like that idea. Meanwhile, across the street from her was Mr. William Short. He was growing grapes. He had cleared forty acres and had planted a vineyard on St. George rootstock. We immediately liked him. He was really a very magnetic personality. He got us very excited about the idea of growing grapes. By 1957 we had an interest in the idea. I think that Mr. Short sparked something in Dave.

CR: But Dave was not really a wine drinker yet. Not in 1957.

FB: No. That's true. But he told us about the Picchetti place down the hill. That's when we first went there, in 1957.

CS: How about the Cranes and wine.

HC: We had no particular interest in wine at that time. Manischewitz was about the only thing I had ever had.

SC: Hew and I at that time were very shallow in our interest about wine. But the curiosity did start to appeal to me greatly. I was fascinated immediately by the grape and the business of turning it into wine. Eventually, I got to enjoy wine a lot, but I brought nothing to it. I think that the development of my interest in food came from my relationship with Blanche Rosen-- and Dave Bennion.

CS: So, looking back at this moment in the mid to late fifties, you did not then think of yourselves as being creatures of the early wine revolution.

SC: Absolutely not. Then, the joy was the outdoors and the land. And there was the curiosity. In those early years I didn't feel I was playing any kind of role in anything. My role was to stay home and take care of the children. On the weekends there was a lot of work, and it was more lonely than it was fun.

CS: Fran, you talked about going to the Picchetti place before there was any move to buy the Short property. What was going on?

FB: We went in and we did buy wine. We had to bring a gallon jug. They'd ask "black or white?" And you would put your jug under one barrel or the other. We took them home and put them into fifths. Some of it was really good and some was pretty bad. It wasn't until some time later that we made the correlation that when the barrels were full, the wine was usually going to age well-- and when they were close to empty- not so good.

CR: I don't think you were buying that Picchetti wine in 1957. It was later.

FB: How do you know that?

CR: I was with Dave when we first bought wine there, and it was later.

FB: Well, we weren't wine drinkers then, so maybe we just visited in '57. I do remember Short told us about the place. But later we all did go and buy wine there.

HC: I recall that when we did start to sell wine years later, for three and four dollars a bottle, it flabbergasted the Picchettis because then you bought it there for \$1.25 a gallon.

CS: That's right, \$5.00 a case.

CR: And you had to shoo the flies away.

CS: Boy, that's so true. I only bought wine there once, maybe in 1962 or 1963. But it was pretty primitive.

FB: In 1957 when we were turned down up there we bought property, 25 acres and an old house, adjacent to San Mateo Memorial Park in an area near Pescadero. It had about a dozen apple trees, some quince trees, some walnut trees, and it had some old Concord grape vines. And in 1958 Dave made some dry Concord wine.

CS: That's interesting, because David Bruce made his first wine from Concords up in Oregon at about that time.¹

Let's talk about buying William Short's land up there on the Ridge.

CR: Being city folk, my wife and I wanted to have a piece of California mountain land. And to tell you the truth, Sue, making money out of it was far from our minds. But we drove around all over the place in our car and the more we saw land up around Skyline the more we liked it. One time we went down to Cupertino to a realty office. There was an older lady there and she said that she had something nice to show us. So she dragged us up this dirt road, Monte Bello Road. She showed us the land beyond Short's place. It was owned by an old Italian family. Up beyond our place. It was past the gate going over the hill to Page Mill Road. But it was many hundreds of acres. And the man was really trying to sell the whole thing.

CS: This wasn't Trentadue.

CR: No, they bought a piece of that later. They leased part of that to us later. They wanted \$200 per acre. But it was hundreds of acres.

On the way down the lady said that we should stop at this place belonging to Mr. Short. So we went into this little broken down house and Short was sitting there in an old chair, surrounded by books and dogs. He looked us over and said, "Yes, I'd sell the place." And by God, when we went out on that promontory and saw the rest of the Santa Clara Valley below us, we knew damn well we wanted that property. We didn't care that there were vines there; that had nothing to do with it.

CS: Who was on this trip?

CR: Just my wife and I.

CS: And you didn't know that Fran and Dave had already been up there looking around.

CR: No. Not at all.

So, we came down and very shortly I contacted Hew Crane and Dave Bennion and said that this was a sort of beautiful place up there. So I wanted them to take a look at it.

CS: You knew that they were interested in this kind of thing.

¹ See David Bruce interview.

CR: I don't remember that I knew that, so I can't say that that was the reason I contacted them. But I did talk to them and soon they went up. But Dave immediately knew the property because he had been up there. When he heard what it was he said, "Oh, so Short now wants to sell?" And he was immediately interested.

CS: When did this first trip take place?

HC: The first time we went up was February of 1959. So it was before that. We drove up there during one of those winter storms and we actually could not open the door of the car in the wind. I asked myself, "What are we getting into?"

FB: I have here a document titled "A Joint Venture," dated February 6, 1959.

CS: So when did the Rosen trip take place. This is the event that begins Ridge Vineyards. What year? Was it before or after the 1st of January?

CR: Probably in December.

CS: OK, so we'll say it gets started in late 1958.

CR: The decision was made fairly rapidly. As soon as the others had gone up there and had seen the place. And then we approached Howie Zeidler, because we wanted someone else to share the cost.

CS: Tell me more about your relations with Howard Zeidler.

CR: He was in charge of the group that Hew and Dave were working with. And he had money. He was a bachelor.

HC: And he was a very outdoors kind of guy.

CR: So then came our negotiations with Short, which were very short. The only thing he wanted to be sure of was that whoever bought the place, he said, "I want you to take care of our vines." He had spent an enormous amount of sweat on them. He had planted them manually, digging the holes by hand. He had spent a tremendous amount of physical energy on that place and he said, "I'm going to sell it to you guys. You look sturdy. I want you to take care of it." And he was very taken with the fact that Dave had been a farmer and would probably know something about how to take care of the vines.

CS: What was the price?

CR: It was \$600 per acre, 80 acres, \$48,000. We put \$10,000 down.

CS: Before we go on I would like your impression of William Short. I'll put a reference to a good biographical obituary in the bibliography of this set of interviews. But I would like your impression.

CR: He was a cultivated, well-read, very interesting gentlemanly man, who somehow had found his way to the top of this mountain, after being involved all his life with urban, political, and economic affairs. You probably know something about his activities in World War I. When we met him he was fairly old but still vigorous. But he was definitely reaching a point where he couldn't stay there by himself.

CS: What had he done to that land?

CR: He had planted perhaps 25 acres of vines, in the hardest way possible. Which means digging the hole by hand and watering by pail. He had no water distribution system. He had to get the water from a spring that was several hundred yards away from the vines. He had to carry it himself. I never saw a horse there.

CS: About how old were the vines when you went onto the property?

CR: Ten years. The majority were Cabernet Sauvignon. And he had a couple of acres of Chardonnay. There were two rows of Pinot noir. And there was a little less than an acre of Ruby Cabernet.² That was it.

HC: A number that I remember was that there were 23,000 vines.

CR: He had had a terrible time with the deer. He fought them with dogs and guns. But there were no fences, like the Picchettis.

SC: I remember that he got up in the morning and sprayed with ZIP. It was something that was supposed to keep the deer away. But it didn't.

FB: His plan originally was to clear and plant 40 acres, on St. George rootstock.

CR: And what was there were all on Rupestris St. George rootstock.

FB: They had all been grafted in the field. Field grafts.

HC: The first thing we did when we went up there was to put up a fence. The deer had been killing that vineyard. I remember him saying, apart from the money that would have been involved, "Italians don't use fences." I really don't know what he meant. But that sticks in my mind.

CS: Does anyone recall any influences on Short?

CR: I only discussed anything like that with him two times. Dave may have had much more discussion than I did. He mentioned that he had been in touch with people at UC Davis. He also mentioned some old-timers that had worked on the hill who helped him plant the vineyard.

CS: I'll bet one of them was John Gemello. He had worked up there earlier. And he knew Charlie Rousten very well.³

CS: Let's stop here and get the operation working next time.

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March 24, 1993

CS: What did you do to the place during the first year, 1959?

CR: Here is an early item from my diary. Saturday, June 6: Dave, Charlie and Howie Zeidler tied grafted vines to stakes. Hoed around the vines. June 13: Tied grafted vines, pulled suckers. These are typical early entries in that first year.

² A UC Davis vinifera cross developed by Professor Harold Olmo and released in the 1940s. See *Wines & Vines* 6/1/1948; *Wine Spectator*, 5/1/1985.

³ See Gemello interview.

CS: What about the fence? That was stimulated by your reaction to the condition of the vines from the work of the deer.

HC: Even in that first year it bothered us that an extensive planting should be allowed to go to ruin. But we had no specific plans to do anything. We thought that we should save some portion of the vineyard. We couldn't afford to fence the whole place. Following the harvest of 1960 we finally settled on fencing the central eleven acres.

CS: What about these vines you found there. Did you have any first leaf vines?

HC: No, not at all.

SC: I want to point out that during these first years no one was there full time. Dave was still at SRI. Was he still on five days after 1959?

FB: He was still working five days a week then. That was through 1962.

SC: So anything that we did up there, it was almost only weekends. And for me, I hardly went up there at all. I had one child and was getting ready to have another.

HC: And it was no easy thing to get there. There was no Highway 280. No Foothill Expressway. It was not an easy thing, and then when you got there Monte Bello was a one lane dirt road.

FB: One lane from the school up to the top of the vineyard.

CS: When did it get paved?

SC: Early seventies.

CS: Tell me about the 1959 crop.

HC: The crop in 1959 totaled about six tons. Except for the small amount that Bennion took for his experiments, and small amounts given to home winemaker friends who helped pick, the rest was sold to Mario Gemello. At that time we thought that we were getting a pretty good price at \$120 per ton for Chardonnay and \$90 for Cabernet Sauvignon, picked and delivered. \$90 also for Ruby Cabernet. We delivered the crop in our station wagons packed in grape boxes.

CS: Hew, you have some more on the fence now.

HC: That fence was no better than its weakest point. The deer would patrol the fence and find it. It took us several years to de-bug that first fence. We started with eight foot steel posts driven two feet into the ground and we attached nine strands of barbed wire to them. For the eleven acres that made about 2,500 feet of fence and four miles of barbed wire. Wherever possible we made it so that the deer would have to jump up-hill. Even with this handicap they could jump between the top strand of barbed wire and the high wire we put on. Locals had told us that deer had to be trained to jump through a small space such as that. Tufts of fur showed that they had jumped between the top strands of barbed wire. We then installed poultry netting to seal the area above the ground. But the deer found soft places in the ground and began digging under them. Eventually we had to reinforce the fence with poultry netting right down to the ground. The only part of the original fence still standing is along Monte Bello Road. The remainder was taken down section by section as we extended the area of vineyard.

CS: How did the 1959 vintage go?

CR: On September 5 a group of us picked a ton of Chardonnay. Then we picked another ton the next day. The sugar was 23° Balling. There was a lot of deer, bird and hornet damage. On that day the Cabernet Sauvignon was 17.5° degrees sugar. We delivered 95 boxes of grapes to Gemello in our three station wagons.

FB: That night after we had picked we went back to the Loma Mar house with our two teacher friends and we crushed some grapes and made the Cabernet in big crocks. No, that must have been later, after we had picked the Cabernet. It wasn't Chardonnay. But we did go swimming in Stevens Creek Reservoir that day, and it was full, in September. Which shows how much rain we had had and how early we were able to start picking in 1959.

CR: October 24 we picked 125 boxes of Cabernet Sauvignon and 65 boxes of Ruby with a sugar in the Cab of 24.5°. And we paid \$60 for labor, so we had hired somebody to help us pick.

CS: Somebody made some wine here. Tell me about it.

FB: We had a party, and we even made some home movies of it. We had two "naked virgins" in those pickle vats, doing the crushing. Our kids. It was the Bennions and these teachers from Pescadero doing this. The "naked virgins" were both potty trained. We were going to go on a vacation then, so we punched down the cap a week later and Dave rigged up a system of wooden blocks and bricks to keep the cap submerged while we were gone, so that it wouldn't have to be punched down, and the cap wouldn't be standing out in the air and get acetified. We were gone for more than a week.

CS: So the first Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon estate wine was a submerged cap fermentation. (Hearty laughter by all)

FB: When we came back and we tasted it with our friends who had helped us pick the grapes, everyone was shocked that this wine was really so tannic, so seemingly totally undrinkable.

CS: Did you bottle this wine pretty soon?

FB: First we put it in a 25 gallon oak barrel.

CS: What happened to this 1959 wine? Is there any left?

FB: I think I still have some. Maybe only one bottle.

CS: Some day you have to drink it, to see how this "undrinkable" thing turned out. Believe me, down the line people would want to know how this first Monte Bello Cabernet Sauvignon turned out. This was Bennion's wine, right. This wasn't a joint home winemaking venture yet?

SC: Yes, that was Dave's wine. Later we made wine as a joint venture at our homes.

CS: How about the people who helped you?

HC: It's interesting that Lee Carrasco and his friends predated us up there.

SC: He was a resident of San Jose and had come from Mexico. He had been working for Short up there before we came. When he started working for us, then we got all his relatives to work for us too. Brothers, cousins-- they were a major source of help to us.

CS: After the vintage what did you do to the place in the next year?

CR: We began to reclaim that old winery.⁴ We also began putting in wiring. And we did some plumbing. There was electricity in the barn and Short's house already.

CS: What had that little house been before Short had it?

HC: We know it was built in 1895. Dave showed me an old map from the late 1800s that showed Monte Bello Road going right past that house. Apparently that was Monte Bello Road then, the path in front of the house and the winery.

CS: So, where is that map? In those boxes of Dave's. Have to start digging in there.

CR: Back to some things we did the next year, here are a couple of notes. January 20: Started work on the fence. February 28: Put in approximately 125 trees along the fence line. Those were conifers. March 21, 1960: Inspected fence. Fence now completed, except for a few details. Major pruning.

CS: Any planting in the dormant season 1959-60?

CR: No, I don't think so.

HC: In the summer of 1960 we had to get electricity to the pump at the spring. It was a nasty job.

CS: Why did you have to have water? You weren't irrigating or making wine.

FB: For the house. We had a caretaker now. It was Norman Council, a graduate student at Stanford in creative writing. He lived in the house during the first few years.

HC: Next year we did a lot of work on the old cellar at the place, underneath the barn. Dave and Charlie were starting to think about the place as eventually being a winery.

But the water situation had really been critical. About 250 feet from the house there was a horizontal limestone cave that fills with water. The cave was dug years earlier by someone looking for mercury. Next to the cave there was an old gas-driven pump, which struggled to bring water to the house. I think that pump was a close kin to the old car in the movie "Mr. Hulot's Holiday." To compound the problem, the pump was far enough from the barn so that we never knew when it had stopped. So we had to replace what Dave called our "one-lunger" with an electric pump. Stringing the line for that pump was one of the most grueling jobs I can remember. Howie Zeidler and I did it in the summer of 1959. We had to dig holes for the poles with a manual post-hole digger. The last pole was a stripped willow tree, next to the barn. It still is used, although the original poles have been replaced. Every year or two the tree had to be heavily pruned to remind it of its role around there.

CS: What did you store the water in?

FB: There was a tank on the hill behind the barn.

HC: Clearing out the muck and weeds that were clogging the water cave was a job that fell to Dave. He relished it. He did it in his sexy, black "monokini" bathing suit.

FB: There was also a lot of poison oak involved. He got a terrible case.

⁴This "lower winery" was run before Prohibition by J. C. McCaughern, who acquired the land here some time after the turn of the century. After his death in the 1930s the land went through several hands, eventually in 1948 to William Short. The "upper winery" was acquired in 1969. This was the original Osea Perrone plant.

CR: It took us years to get rid of it.

SC: They thought that as long as they took a shower when they got home, they would be fine. But it just didn't work.

CS: Did you have a tractor then?

FB: We always got someone else to do the tractor work. But often they couldn't do it when we wanted them to.

CS: This is 1960, the first year you really have to keep the vineyard in shape all the way. How did you do it?

HC: There was a man called Voss, down below, who had the quarry down there. He did a lot of our tractor work then.

FB: It never was really satisfactory.

CS: When did you finally get a tractor?

CR: I bought the first little one for \$500. It was at least 25 years old. You had to start it by cranking it, like an old car. That was some time in the early sixties.

Here's an item from August, 1960: rewired the barn for lights and crusher-stemmer and switch for water. We got the crusher across the bay at a little winery, towards Fremont.

CS: I suspect that it was from Mayock's Los Amigos, maybe the Riehr place.

FB: We also got some equipment from Eugenia Andriano's winery in Los Altos Hills.⁵ Her daughter lived with her, Edna. They had boarders, four little houses. That was before Highway 280, but they were right there and it was going right through their property. They had to sell all their equipment. We used to live right down the street from them, on Purisima. The state built them a new house, which they hated. We lived there on Purisima from 1953-56.

CS: They were making wine then.

FB: Yes. She had been to Italy and was a friend of Maria Montessori. She had brought a lot of toys home for a Montessori nursery school. She ran a nursery school there, with her daughter.

I just thought of something else about the 1959 vintage. We had left the stems on the grapes, and I think that was the reason, because of the heavy tannin, that we picked the grapes off the stems the next year when we made wine.

CS: Tell me about the 1960 vintage.

(Long pause and a searching through notes.)

FB: I don't remember much about it. We were remodeling this house and preoccupied with that in the fall. We moved here at the end of 1960.

⁵ See Gemello interview.

CR: I have notes from 1962, but not from 1960. Wait, here's a note on the miles we drove on Ridge business that year: Bennion 800 miles, Crane 320, Rosen 640, Zeidler 320. This gives you an idea of how much time was spent up here by the partners. For the Cranes and Rosens it was about 40 miles per trip. For the Bennions, coming down from Loma Mar, it was much farther.

FB: Here's an item from 1960. On June 16 we paid John Moore \$60 for pruning. And we spent some money on repairing the fence. And we planted a lot of fruit trees, out on the knoll.

CS: I hope he'd finished his pruning long before you paid him.

FB: Here's some information on the harvest itself. November 9: 4.45 tons to Gemello, at \$130 per ton. And we sold grapes to Hugh Kennedy for home winemaking. He lives in Portola Valley. And here are some payments for picking grapes.

CR: Here's a note where we sold Martin Ray one ton of Chardonnay in 1960.

CS: I'd say that the 1960 Cabernet harvest was pretty late if you're paying Mario in the second week of November. It sounds as if you got something over 5 tons of Cabernet that year.

FB: There are lots of expenditures here for building materials for the house and the cellar. And here are several payments for pruning and disking.

On October 11 there was a fire at the house, and we spent \$23 to fix up the damage. And here's an expenditure for shells for the gun-- for the deer.

And there's an expenditure for the gate on the access road. That's the way we could get over to Skyline without going back down Monte Bello Road. That's now Open Space land.

There's an interesting story about getting across that land in those early years. We had keys for that gate to get across there and we were driving across there one day with the kids. I can remember being challenged several times by one of the owners up there, Mr. Burns, and his sons. On one occasion he came up to us on horseback with his rifle and asked us to get off the property. But Dave got out and told him we had every right to be there, since it was a public road. So he told us to be sure to stay on the road. And he followed us on his horse all the way down the road until we were off onto Page Mill Road. This sort of thing happened several times to us up there.

CS: Let's go on to the 1961 season.

HC: This is when we really got going on rebuilding the lower winery. First we had to clear out the old cooperage. We did leave one 3,000 gallon tank in place for water. And we also renovated some smaller 1,000 gallon tanks to use as fermenters. Each of the partners had an outdoor hot-tub made from those old tanks.

CS: Hold on! We've left something out. When did you start thinking about this place being a real winery? You don't need thousand gallon fermenters to make up your home made wine. There has to be a moment in time when you decide you're not going to simply sell your grapes to Gemello.

HC: Well, it's clear that by 1961 the thought was pretty well established. But I'm sure that after that first harvest Dave was thinking seriously about it. And Charlie surely was by 1960. By 1961 we were on the way with this physical conversion of the lower winery.

CR: In the first years Dave made some wine by himself. And I made some. Dave's first wine was so heavy that everyone who drank it, and didn't know anything, said we'd be crazy to get serious about this. But we also were having some interaction with Martin Ray. It was mostly Dave. We sold Martin Ray that Chardonnay and he was always talking to Dave about the "Chaine d'Or," this land above the Santa Clara Valley with this great winegrowing potential. Mr. Short commented on that,

also. It took us about two years before we came to realize where we were in relationship to that potential. I think that Dave picked this up from Martin Ray. And I had many conversations with Dave and other wine people about the potential of this land. And then that first wine, after some time, was starting to taste a lot better. By the end of two years I can remember sitting with Dave and talking about this being one of the best areas for Cabernet Sauvignon. Martin Ray was getting the highest prices for his wine from the same kind of land, just to the south.

CS: Well, the tipoff for me is your getting those fermenters ready in 1961. By then you were moving in that direction.

CR: But it wasn't in our mind right away. We didn't know that that ink he made the first year would age. We didn't really know much about wines aging.

FB: I think that 1959 was an exceptional year. There was lots of water-- the Stevens Creek Reservoir was full in September-- and lots of sun-- we picked early.

CS: Well, as a matter of fact 1959 was a very good year for Cabernet in California. It wasn't one of the great years, but very good.⁶

FB: I recall drinking some of that 1959 wine in the early 1980s and it was good, but still very tannic. But I think there's only one bottle left.

CS: I suggest you open it in 2009, its 50th anniversary. We'll all be there.

HC: Here are some notes I put down on that first wine. Dave's first wine experiment was with the 1959 Cabernet he made at the house in Loma Mar, east of Pescadero. The wine was fermented in a twenty gallon crock and aged in a ten gallon barrel. The grapes were crushed by foot, without stemming. The resulting wine was so tannic and biting that the next year Dave decided to stem not only the Cabernet but, out of ignorance and fear, even the Chardonnay. He made the 1960 Cabernet here at the Bennion place in Menlo Park.

CS: This was your folks' house, Fran?

FB: My father had died and my mother was going to sell it; it was too big. And the Loma Mar place was twenty-six miles from Dave's work, so we moved here.

HC: The Chardonnay in 1960 was made in the Crane's backyard. And was aged in the Rosen garage in Atherton. Martin Ray took the majority of our Chardonnay crop in 1960. Mario Gemello bought the Cabernet; he and his father, John, came up to the vineyard to get a look at the grapes beforehand. We fermented the little that we kept back for ourselves. Dave Bruce and Dan Wheeler took the majority of the 1961 Cabernet. We didn't make any of our own wine that year. But we got back a portion of the wine they made as payment.

CS: It occurs to me that you are talking to Martin Ray at about the same time that David Bruce is. He tells of a great vintage dinner up there in 1958.⁷ Fran, how early do you know Bruce?

⁶ James Laube, in his *California's Great Cabernets* (San Francisco, 1989):64, rates 1959 as 87 on a scale of 50-100, good to very good, with wines that were "elegant, balanced, complex, enduring."

⁷ See David Bruce Interview.

FB: He and I went to grammar school together, Addison School in Palo Alto. Later we all went to Stanford and we got into folk dancing with him in the late forties. Dick Stark also went to grammar school with us at the same time.⁸ His parents owned Stark Bakery on University Avenue.

CS: What is the first wine thing you can remember together with David Bruce.

FB: I recall having dinner at his mother's house, near Dan Wheeler's place above Soquel.

CS: Could this have been the time that David's son got lost up there and he met Dan Wheeler?⁹

FB: No, I don't think so.

CS: Well, anyway, somehow before the fall on 1961, somebody in your group got together with David Bruce to set up this deal whereby he makes Cabernet with your grapes. I mean, he just doesn't show up one day with a pickup full of boxes.

FB: I think that Martin Ray may have had something to do with getting us together on that.¹⁰ We did have dinner at Martin Ray's on a couple of occasions, I think a dinner and an afternoon affair, as well.

SC: I can recall that. I think it was in the mid-sixties.

CS: You all were never involved with anything about the Mt. Eden operation.

HC: No, not at all.

CR: But I think it was before we were bonded, before 1962.

CS: So, let's talk about the 1961 vintage.

CR: We supplied David Bruce with grapes and he gave us back part of the wine.

SC: Martin Ray did that too.

CS: So that was also the deal on that Chardonnay with Martin Ray that's recorded here.

FB: Here's another item from 1961. December 15: \$155 from Dan Wheeler for Cabernet.

CS: Well, the next thing is getting the winery bonded, but I'm not totally clear on the process whereby the decisions are made to set this process in motion.

FB: In 1959 Hew and Dave were writing their book. Shortly after that, maybe six months, Dave was talking about some frustrations at SRI. I think this was in 1960. This helps move toward the winery idea.

CS: So in 1961 you all knew you were going to move ahead and get the place bonded.

⁸ Richard E. Stark founded the Page Mill Winery (BW 4756) in 1976.

⁹ See Dan Wheeler interview.

¹⁰ On March 25 I discussed these events with David Bruce. He had talked to Dave Bennion several times and they worked out the deal of Bruce's making the 1961 Cabernet on shares. It came to about four barrels of wine, half of which went back to the Ridge partners. It was all bottled by the whole group at one event. There are still quite a few bottles of this 1961 Ridge Cabernet around.

CR: Oh, yes.

CS: So after you decided to get bonded, what did you do?

FB: I remember that it was certainly frantic getting the permit on time before the vintage started. It was really a last-minute thing and really nerve-wracking.

HC: In the beginning it is all tied to the cleaning up of the old winery. Dave and Charlie led and they asked Howie and me if they could go ahead with it at their own expense. We felt that we would like to share the expense but that we didn't really have the time to get any more seriously involved.

CS: What about the actual bonding itself?

HC: We had to go through the BATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms of the US Treasury Department), and the state. So we had to go down to San Jose and it was something of a funny story. Santa Clara County had been a big wine county, but in those years they had become experts in taking wineries out of existence, but they had very little experience with new ones starting up. It became a very elaborate process. We had to go down and be interviewed and get fingerprinted. (And I remember a year later, when David Bruce had to go through the same process, I was called as a reference for him.)

There were endless forms to fill out. Alcohol and bad money went together in the government's eyes back then. They wanted to know exactly where the money was coming from for this operation. We also had to satisfy the health inspector. We had to give them exact plans on everything, and particularly how many doors and windows there would be. Ingress and egress are very touchy matters to them. Basically, a winery is supposed to have only one point of entry. We also had to put up a \$5,000 bond to guarantee the payment of the tax on the wine. The tax from our first vintage was \$75, at 17 cents per gallon.

CS: That looks like 441 gallons. But that's what you sold, not what you produced. It's the business of tax paid goods, and keeping them physically separate. So that would be your first fiscal year's sales.

Were there any physical ramifications of this bonding process.

BR: We had to have a concrete floor. The cellar floor was dirt before then.

FB: It's funny, because the old Italians would come up and tell us not to put in a concrete floor. If we did the wine wouldn't be any good.

HC: Picchetti said that the reason they went out of business was because they had to put in a concrete floor. He said that without that they probably would have kept going. In the spring of 1962 we put ours in. We hired a cement finisher for the floor and a mason to put up the cinder block wall. We were really impressed by the truck-driver who brought up the cinder blocks. The road didn't phase him at all. We figured he'd be a raving idiot when he got to the top, so we had some wine and something to eat ready for him. But he wasn't phased by it, and to cap it off he pulled his own fork-lift up behind the truck.

FB: I have a whole page of numbers here for expenditures we made in the summer of 1962 getting the place ready. The ready-mix cement cost \$107. Here, we got some large equipment from Gemello's. Here, on 9/13/62, checks for the bonding, \$291 to the Federal government and \$504.44 to the State of California.

CS: Now you're legal. Next we'll have a really commercial vintage.

April 7, 1993

CS: Let's talk about the 1962 vintage.

CR: September 29 we picked 1400 pounds of Chardonnay. And we gave 400 pounds of that to our friends who had helped pick it. Kennedy, Gould, Nanevicz, Miller, and a couple of others. The winery got 1007 pounds. It made 75 gallons. October 6 we picked Cabernet Sauvignon and Ruby Cabernet. Dan Wheeler got thirty boxes. And we also gave grapes to our friends who helped us again. We had 4000 pounds for the winery.

CS: That would fit the 400 gallons I have down, which should have come from about 2.6 tons.

CR: We made a Cabernet Rosé from 1894 pounds and we made a Cabernet Sauvignon using 2100 pounds.

CS: I'm looking at your first newsletter, December, 1965, announcing your wine, with prices, from the 1962, 1963 and 1964 vintages. There is a Cabernet Rosé, bottled 4/4/64, for \$2.00, a Cabernet Sauvignon, bottled 2/22/65, for \$3.00, with the notation, "Young, but very drinkable now; will improve with age." The Rosé reads, "Our first wine; only a little left."¹¹ There is also a White Riesling, bottled 3/21/64, all sold, and a Chardonnay, not yet bottled, with the notation, "This wine is still unpredictable."

Where did you get the White Riesling?

SC: From Vine Hill.

CR: We never got it anywhere else. But we didn't own it yet.

CS: Was this from Dr. Schermerhorn?

FB: Yes.

CS: I wonder when he planted that vineyard.

FB: Early 1950s, and he got lots of his cuttings from Martin Ray. He also had some red grapes around his house, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot noir. He had fifteen acres of Sylvaner, Chardonnay and White Riesling. Joe Nanevicz has a map of the place and he'll send me a copy. He also said there were a few Pinot blanc scattered among the Chardonnay. Dave was emphatic that he didn't want any Pinot blanc in the Chardonnay. Gordon Gould, who was a home winemaker we knew, was our contact with Schermerhorn. He taught at Stanford Medical School.

CR: Gould was the only one among us who had a biochemist's view of what happens when you make wine. Later, of course, Leo McClosky had it down as well.

CS: How much White Riesling did you get from Vine Hill in 1962?

FB: About 200 pounds.

¹¹ Corrected for inflation, using constant dollars, these wines today would be priced: Rosé=\$8.84; Cabernet Sauvignon=\$13.26.

CR: Here are some stats on the grape chemistry.

Cabernet Rosé= 23.5* sugar. Ruby Cabernet= 19.5* sugar. The Ruby was blended into the Cabernet Sauvignon.

FB: Here's an interesting note in the 1962 account book. Martin Ray paid us \$187 this year for grapes he had bought in 1960.

CS: All the Ridge wines were made up on the hill in 1962?

CR: Yes.

CS: Let's follow this wine before we go ahead to the next vintage.

HC: Before we could sell it we had to come up with a label.

CS: Let's hear your notes on that, Hew.

HC: It was in early 1964 that we started to think seriously about a label for the first wines. Dave and Fran had met a San Francisco architect who recommended a young commercial artist, Jim Robertson. He was enthusiastic about designing a wine label. Maybe more important, he agreed to take his fee in wine. Fran and Sue made several trips to San Francisco and he spent a Saturday on the ridge with us to get to know us better. During this time we were compiling lots of different names for the winery. One was "El Camino Vino," our joke name. We wanted a name that would distinguish us from a valley winery, that hinted at where we were. We also wanted a clean label, with no pictures, no curlicues, no fancy words, nothing from French or German. Also, we wanted the label to be informative. We were ahead of our time in emphasizing completeness and honesty with a wine label. Ridge Vineyards was a good choice. It was easy to say and it described our location. Jim Robertson liked it too, and he suggested that we use Optima type. It had just been developed in Germany, but we were the first on the West Coast to use it. It has since become very popular.

Our label for the 1962 Cabernet won an award for industrial design.

CS: How about the possibility of using the word Monte Bello as a brand name?

FB: It was out of use but it still was the brand name for a Napa winery. They had an office in San Francisco, and Dave and I went there to talk to them. They really weren't very nice. They said they were going to sic their lawyers on us.¹²

SC: I can remember when we were looking for paper for the label. We wanted some texture, not glossy, and Jim made us aware that this would be a big problem for us. And there was also the question of having two labels, front and back.

CS: Did the '62 have one or two labels?

FB: We always had two labels in the beginning.

SC: And eventually the two labels became one label.

FB: The reason for the back label was that we realized that we weren't really sales people. We

¹²The Montebello Wine Co. traces its line back to the Perrone winery on the Ridge. But at the end its winery premises were in Napa at the old Esmaralda Winery built by George Schoenewald. That building was torn down in 1977. See *St. Helena Star* 10/27/77. For the company's operations see: *Wines & Vines*, 8/1/34, 2/1/43, 8/1/60.

didn't know at first who was going to sell the wine. Dave thought we were going to have to put enough information of the label so that the wine sells itself.

SC: But, Dave wanted to do it that way anyway. It wasn't just that he wasn't a salesperson.

CR: We sat around and talked about a lot of things after we were bonded concerning this new label. Part of what we were concerned about was what we saw was happening in California with wine. We talked a lot about the honesty factor here. We were going to make an honest label, and all the information that a real wine lover would want was going to be on it. And that's why Jim came up with that very simple label. I was for putting a lot more on the back label. Acids, sugars and the like. We were going to tell where the grapes came from, how much of each, how the wine was made. I don't think it was whether we could sell the wine ourselves; it was who we were aiming the wine at. That's one of the reasons we ended with the big double label, to get everything on it we wanted.

HC: At first it was two labels, and they were lined up together. And I can tell you it took us years to learn how to put a label on a bottle. We used extra thick paper and that meant it didn't bend so well. You had to be very concerned how the paper would roll and whether it would hold. We put them on by hand for years. We actually had a rack on which we could put thirty or forty bottles. But we had to line up those two labels just so. Eventually we combined the two into one double label. I think we were the first ones to do that.

SC: But it was an innovation at first to put the two labels together, so they almost butted up to one another.

(At this point Fran Bennion brought out a '62 Cabernet bottle to illustrate the label's placement .)

But the big problem was the paper. It was too thick.

CS: I remember back in the sixties when I was collecting labels, we had a terrible time getting those Ridge labels off, with their heavy strips of glue.

HC: I once heard of a person who identified a Ridge wine at a blind wine tasting because he could feel the way the glue was put on and knew it was Ridge.

CR: It took years for us to get the right glue.

FB: I also wanted to say something about the little basket on the label. I remember one day I was at Jim's office and he said that he had been looking through some old books for some artistic touch to put on the label and he found this little basket full of grapes, and we all liked it and we used it.

CS: I note that the statement by Dave on the back label is not there, with his DB and the date, as it was in later years, nor on the 1964, but it is on the 1968, so I guess that started between 1965 and 1967. In 1968 there is the big, single label.

SC: Emulating the two labels.

BR: I recall one time we were sitting up on the hill and Dave had told us that Monte Bello was not going to be a possibility for the winery name. So we started talking about other possibilities. I think it was in the fall of 1963. I remember Fran telling us that her mother thought that the winery should have a modern name. It was a modern winery run by engineers and scientists. The name had to be clean, not with a lot of connotations. And at that point someone brought up the idea for Ridge.

FB: At first we thought Ridge was too stark. We thought about Stony Ridge or South Ridge, or something like that. Slowly it took over, why not just plain Ridge.

CS: When I first saw a bottle in Bosley's wine room in Willow Glen I was really taken aback. That was probably in 1965. But it certainly caught my attention. I spotted it on my own. And I read the instructions on how to get there, so sometime later in the year, probably during the summer break, Roz and I drove up there and looked around.

SC: I was concerned at first that people would misunderstand it, maybe think it was "Rich" Vineyards. But the name was important to us because we wanted it to indicate that the bottle did not have valley wine in it. Not just Santa Clara Valley, because the big thing at that time was Napa Valley. We wanted that label to say that we were on top of this mountain.

CS: So, let's go ahead with this wine and sell it.

FB: First, when looking through these account books here there are several mentions of Ed Van der Riet and commissions for selling wine. I think that Ed was our next caretaker after Norman Council. There are several entries here for commissions to him.

CS: So, he's now living in the little house up at the winery and he's also out hustling wine.

SC: Here's a letter from Dave to us, October 2, 1964. He's talking about commissions. He's talking about our paying ourselves commissions when we sold wine to others outside the group. He talks here about changing his earlier position on that question.

CR: Well, it was suggested, but we didn't do it.

FB: He also talks about what we pay the group for wine we buy. He says we should pay nothing or regular prices. He says that Charlie (Rosen) is probably right, that we should charge ourselves regular prices. Then he says he wants to reverse himself and that we shouldn't pay ourselves commissions for sales. He doesn't want to get involved with sales. He says we should just take orders at appropriate occasions and turn them over to Ed.

CS: Is there any other way that you sold wine?

CR: Not at first. But I had a very effective group at SRI and I'd make collections from all of them and get the wine down to them.

SC: We were all bringing it down on weekends, filling orders. To Stanford, to SRI.

CS: When you're selling the Rosé and the White Riesling there is no sweat about whether it's ready to drink. But what about the Cabernet? What if your friends took a bottle of that '62 and just wanted to chug it down, right away?

CR: We told them that they should hold it for a longer period.

SC: I think there was a great deal of curiosity, that they were buying something homemade by their friends. It was sort of, "Me too, I'll have some too." I don't think there were any wine connoisseurs among them that thought they were getting something momentous.

CS: By the time that the 1963 vintage was for sale, that's the first I bought, there was simply no question in anyone's mind that I talked to that this was wine to lay down for some time. I finished my three or four bottles in the late seventies, interestingly, with no comment in my cellar book, while the

1967, which I finished in 1983 is noted "grand."

SC: Well, there were a few people like you who were at that point of appreciation.

FB: At the memorial services for Dave a man brought me this bottle of Cabernet Rosé, 1962. It was the first bottle we sold and we had all signed it for him. He gave it back to me. Hew wrote on it, "Thanks for being so kind." It was Ward Douglas.

CS: I saw him give it to you, and I thought I knew him from seeing him up here over the years.

SC: Looking at this back label, we should remember how long it took and how we agonized over getting this message across in as few words as possible, and with exactly the right words.

CS: I'm looking at this bottle, and I thought that these first ones were Duraglass, but this one is not. It's a regular old bottle. In fact, that code on the bottom indicates it was made in 1951.

CR: That tells you the story. All our original bottles came from an outfit in San Francisco that resold old bottles.

HC: I have some notes here on the early bottling. In the early years we did all our bottling with hand siphons. The wine was placed several feet above a table and the wine was siphoned down to the bottles. The bottle was filled to a level a little above what the final level would be and then a rubber syringe was used to draw off the extra wine and brought the level down, instead of filling it up.

CS: There's a logic to that. There would be less oxygen contact.

HC: This was our method of bottling until 1967. Then we acquired an old multi-head, stainless steel, siphon filler machine. And boy, was that exciting.

CS: Did you bottle and label at the same time?

FB: We just siphoned it through a tube. We didn't have any kind of machine. That came later. We put the kids to work. Eric ran the corking machine. And we had a label machine that you had to turn away from you with your right hand.

CR: It wasn't a label machine; it was a glue machine that you used to put glue on the labels.

FB: Since there were two left-handed children, Sima (Rosen) and Eric, they were always turning it backwards, when they got that job. We finally wouldn't let them use it. Sima was rather artistic, so she was given the job of lining up the labels. She had a very good eye. The other kids always had jobs. They also put on the capsules.

CS: Did you have one of these little electric buffers, like an electric pencil-sharpener?

CR: Yes, that's it. I remember that machine very well. It was German and we couldn't buy a second handle when it broke. We were always griping about the cost of the lead capsules.

CS: Did anything happen on the place during the 1962-63 year, before the vintage, worth noting?

HC: Didn't we take those vines out from behind the winery? That may have been 1964 or 1965.

CS: When you would replant, you put them on trellis?

HC: Yes. Always.

CS: They were head pruned when you got there. Did you put a trellis on the old vines?

CR: Yes.

CS: So, we can jump to the 1963 vintage. I see production here of about 1,000 gallons, which is quite a jump up.

CR: We picked Chardonnay, 1500 pounds, and gave some of it to our picker-helpers. That was October 12.

CS: This isn't yet to the point where you're having these mobs of pickers up there? The big party-scene.

HC: No, not yet.

CR: We also picked 850 pounds of Cabernet Sauvignon, mostly off the ground. There must have been a wind storm. On October 19 we picked 5800 pounds of Cabernet and gave away 700 pounds. On October 26 we picked the remainder of the Chardonnay, 1450 pounds. On November 12, quite late in the year, we picked the remainder of the Cabernet, 2130 pounds.

FB: That was a very cool summer. I was pregnant with Karl and I was dreading the summer, but it was a cool year. The grapes were very late. Karl was born October 11, and we started picking the next day.

CS: Let me ask you about the Cabernet. Even in the earlier years it was moderately drinkable. Did you make some conscious modifications in the winemaking process?

CR: The main thing was that there was a rain storm, and it took a long time to get them in.

CS: And rain will water down the grapes some.

FB: And we had to pick the vineyard in small pieces, just the sections as they became ripe. I have a note here that we bought a crusher on October 7 from De Bella for \$75. And we bought boxes from Mrs. Andriano that year. And we also bought some barrels from De Bella.

HC: He had a place in San Francisco where you could buy winemaking stuff. That's where we bought those old whiskey barrels.

CS: I guess that takes care of 1963.

HC: In later years we started getting lots of people up there to help us pick. It was right out of *Tom Sawyer*. Picking grapes for eight hours a day is work. Picking grapes for a couple of hours is fun, particularly when you have a party afterwards. In exchange for the labor, we supplied the wine. In those early days at Ridge picking day always looked something like an outdoor drinking orgy.

Experienced pickers can average about a half ton per day. So to get ten tons you'd need twenty experienced pickers. However, when you had them working for just a couple of hours, it took about eight times as many people. That's about 150 people to pick ten tons. Until 1973 we usually had one major picking day for our own Cabernet grapes. It worked pretty well until 1972 when it finally got out of hand. We had twenty tons and ten of them had to be harvested on the main picking day. Far more than the 150 who signed up appeared on the hill. People were begging for knives. It became a minor comic-tragedy.

To add to the confusion a Los Angeles TV producer, a friend of Ridge, asked if he could come up with a small crew to record the picking. A few days later we enjoyed seeing "Picking At Ridge" on the six o'clock news.

SC: The lead for the piece was, "Why are these people doing something for nothing?"

FB: Also in 1963 we sold ten acres to Thomas J. Levasseur. We decided we needed some money, so we set off two ten acre parcels. He was involved in tracking satellites and he put all that equipment up there.

CS: I know where that is. There's a quonset hut and a big disk and some other equipment.

HC: That's where the Ruby Cabernet was.

We never sold the second ten acres.

SC: Our first letter from Dick Foster was December 27, 1963, that led to his buying a piece of the land. That was in 1964.

CR: Initially we sold him twenty-three acres, and then he gave us back seven when he came in as a partner in 1967.

HC: The Levasseur piece was bought back by Ridge at the end of 1986. Foster's acreage was farther south, above the road.

CS: Foster is going to be at our next session, so we'll be able to pick up from here.

FB: In the next years Dave was getting increasingly disturbed at SRI. He got one job involving Russian computer systems, and he decided that we were way ahead of them, but that was not what the sponsor wanted to hear. He stayed on until 1967, but after one of these episodes with the government, when he said something to the effect that he would not want to go up in one of those space things, he asked SRI for one day a week off. He really expected to be fired, but they gave it to him. I think it was in 1964. Before that he was putting in many more than forty hours a week, but after that he really wasn't putting in any extra hours. Later he went to three days.

CR: And when he cut back at SRI and finally left, well, we were going to have to start paying him a salary.

SC: I remember him figuring out just how much he would need to live.

HC: And it was so low it was ridiculous, so we upped his estimate.

CS: It doesn't look as if much changed during the next year, 1963-64.

CR: Here are some numbers from the 1964 harvest. October 3, 675 pounds, with sugar at 23.5, acid at 1.08, pH at 3.2. By that time we had set up a little laboratory.

October 10 we picked 605 pounds of Chardonnay and gave 200 pounds to our picker-friends. Also we picked 120 pounds of Cabernet Sauvignon. It was hot and very smoggy, with the smog rising like a yellow-green cloud rising from the valley, up as high as Martin Ray's vineyard to the south.

The White Riesling from Schermerhorn at Vine Hill was 3660 pounds. Sugar was 20', .84 acid, pH 3.6.

CS: Those are strange numbers. I think the pH was too high.

CR: On October 24 we had a huge crew. Total Cabernet was 4795 pounds and we gave away 1795 pounds. Ruby was 1045 pounds. And the next picking of Cabernet we had 3500 pounds.

This year we got 4200 pounds of Picchetti Zinfandel, and gave away 750. The sugar was 23.5°, but overnight it got up to 25°, acid 0.75.

We started thinking about Zinfandel when we would buy it in bulk for ourselves from Picchetti.

FB: He'd ask us if we wanted "black or white." When the barrels were full it was excellent. We discovered it was not so good when they were getting empty.

CR: But the clincher came with our visit to Dan Wheeler. We were astonished at the quality of his Zinfandel. Thereafter we came to the conclusion that this could be a great wine if it was made with the same care as with the Cabernet. And we decided that we'd make it unblended.

Actually, when the Picchetti Zinfandel casks had just a little bit of vinegar in them, they really smelled good, when it was a heavy wine with high alcohol.

FB: Here are a few other items from 1964. From Andriano we bought barrels and a crusher. Also boxes from her. We paid \$67 for corks that year.

HC: I don't think that by that time there was any question in Dave's mind about his destiny. Running a vintage winery was going to be his thing. And he had to risk all to try. That's when he started cutting his time at SRI. Then in 1967 he took a temporary leave-of-absence which turned out to be permanent. So Ridge was being run then by a drop-out, PhD electrical engineer.

CS: So next time we'll get together and Dick Foster will be with us.

CR: Just a word about Foster. He was a very successful businessman, who wanted to grow grapes and have a winery. He looked around and found us. And he was the only one of us who came in with a real knowledge of French and German wines. And he had a good cellar.

* * * * *

The next Ridge interview included *Richard (Dick) Foster (DF)*, who had come up from Southern California to take part in this session.

April 26, 1993

CS: Dick, how do you get into the Ridge operation?

DF: It begins in 1961. My wife and I had arrived here from Long Island in 1958 and we were wine drinkers. We found that there were a number of small wineries here in California that we had never heard of when we lived in New York. In addition to taking a course in wine appreciation from Nate Chroman at UCLA,¹³ we started to track down various of these small producers. We were particularly impressed by Martin Ray's wines. In 1962, at Martin's invitation, we went up and took lunch with him. He tried to persuade me to become one of the Mt. Eden investors there and buy some land from him, since I had shown an interest in the idea of growing some grapes and making some wine. But fortunately I was sufficiently suspicious, well, let's not say suspicious, but I didn't want somebody else

¹³ Nathan Chroman was a Southern California lawyer who gave wine courses at UCLA for many years, starting in the 1950s. He later became the wine columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*. Since leaving that position he has continued writing on wine for various publications.

doing all the work, doing the planting and making all the decisions.

So I looked first in the Santa Barbara area, and couldn't find any suitable land. I wanted to be within a couple of hours of Glendale, where I lived. But I had bought and tasted enough of Martin's wines to come to believe that this area was indeed a *Chaine d'Or*. This was an area to make great Cabernet wines in California.

Then, in the November (1963) issue of *Wines & Vines*, there was a small classified ad saying that twenty acres were for sale on Monte Bello Ridge, and that it had some vines. I responded and made a date to come up in December to have a look at the land. It was a memorable trip because I had my brother-in-law along. He picked me up and going up the mountain, after he struck the part that was gravel, around one of the bends came a kid in a pickup truck and he side-swiped Lou's almost brand-new car. It was a disappointing introduction to the area.

We arrived at the top and I met three men who took me into the little house there. They had a fire going in the little stove.

SC: All the wives were there, with some babies. We were very expectant, wondering who these Los Angeles "dudes" were.

DF: We also tasted some 1959 Cabernet that Dave had made. I solicited a bottle to take back with me. I was considerably impressed with it.

CR: Not only were you impressed, but you impressed us. We really didn't know how good the stuff was. Martin Ray was the only one who had ever told us it was so good. It was pretty harsh at that point. You had a history of telling what good wine was.

CS: How long had you been drinking wine at that point?

DF: We had given up liquor back in the early fifties. At that point we drank nothing but wine. In New York it was almost entirely foreign wine. When we moved out here we bought some California wines, but we continued to buy French wines, building our cellar.

We looked at the area they wanted to sell me, contiguous with the portion that Le Vasseur had, about twenty acres, with access to Monte Bello Road.

I came up a couple of more times and walked the whole area and negotiated with them for the 22 point something acres. There were a few Pinot noir vines still hanging on against the deer. But it was mostly rootstock in various stages of disrepair.

Next season I gave an order to the Emmollo Nursery near St. Helena for 2500 Cabernet Sauvignon vines, bench grafted to St. George rootstock. My son, who was going to St. Mary's College in Moraga, in the East Bay, helped me put them in. We got the fellows from the quarry down below to help also. They bulldozed the land for us. I decided not to use the terraces that were there; they were pretty well broken down anyway. The following winter of early 1965 I drove up in my Jeep, which I had acquired, and went up and got the vines. It was probably February, and we buried them. A couple of weeks after that we planted about five acres with those 2500 vines.

I planted them differently from anything I'd ever seen because I felt that one of the drawbacks to California wine was that it was too intense. Cabernets were too dark and were too tannic as the result of the extra exposure to sunlight here. So I wanted to grow them high, like table grapes, with the bunches underneath the canopy. I got steel posts, which were fairly new at that time, and I planted the rows sixteen feet apart, but with twice as many plants in the row as was common.

CS: What was that measurement?

DF: Four feet.

CS: So it was the same as eight by eight, which was still pretty close for those days here.

DF: But there were two plants at each point, trained up on a single cordon at the six foot level.

CS: So it's really two by sixteen, which is more like the equivalent of five and a half foot centers. That's very close. Almost Burgundian.
Are those vines still up there?

DF: Oh, yes.

CR: And they're producing fairly well.

DF: So we put steel posts coming up and a post going across the top to make a sort of pie shape, or T, and there were four strands of wire across the top of the T, so that the vines spread out when they got to the top and to make a canopy, with the fruit hanging down underneath.

CS: Did you have a deal to sell the resulting grapes to Ridge?

DF: No, not at that time. It took me a couple of years to find out that their wines and their principles for wine production would produce a product that would make me want my grapes a part of Ridge wine. But a good sign of what I thought was with the 1964 vintage, which was an excellent wine; I bought a thirty gallon barrel and Dave put up a barrel for me, which he kept up there until it was ready for bottling. I bottled it in December of 1966, a little later than the regular bunch. I did the same thing in 1967, along with a small barrel of Picchetti Zinfandel.

CS: When do Foster grapes become part of the Monte Bello crush?

DF: Not earlier than when they were eight to ten years old. Before then they went into what was labeled Santa Cruz Mountains. I think that was 1970. The vines came along slowly because there was no way to water them except as we did as a family, with my wife and both the boys. We'd stretch out hoses and had a wand at the end which we poked down in the ground and ran in a couple of gallons of water into the root area for the first two years. By 1968 we didn't have to do that after the heavy winter rains that year.

I also went to France on a vacation earlier and lined up sources to taste from, both in Burgundy and Bordeaux. These were wines I wanted to purchase in the English manner, to bring back in cask and then bottle here. On that trip I met Al Brounstein, later owner of Diamond Creek Vineyards. He and I had made arrangements to meet in France and to visit two Bordeaux properties, first growths, and ask for cuttings when the vines were pruned. We made arrangements to do that, which was really illegal, and they were flown to Mexico on Air France and Al Brounstein had a private license and he went down to Tiajuana and loaded them up. This was in the days before drug smuggling and he just flew them up to Burbank.

CS: I've done that in my suitcase, but this is a little bigger operation.

DF: So I got some Merlot and some Cabernet Sauvignon, but they were not packed separately. So I took them up to Emmollo, and he made bench grafts. The proportion was probably two-thirds Cabernet and one-third Merlot, but we couldn't be sure.

CS: What were the two French vineyards?

DF: They were both first growths, but I'm not supposed to tell. But one of them at that time was a second growth and the other was in Graves.

CS: I think I can guess which they were.

CR: Another thing that Al got was our old tractor. We told him it wasn't any good, but he took it anyhow. Brounstein learned a lot about winemaking down here. He spent a fair amount of time at Ridge watching how we made wine.

CS: What was the connection?

DF: I knew him as a wine drinker in Southern California, probably at Nate Chroman's class. In fact, I made a little investment in Al's Diamond Creek land.

CS: What was your impression of the Ridge operation in these early days, before 1967.

HC: You don't have to be kind.

DF: We spent many weekends at Ridge, during all seasons of the year. I would be up here almost every other weekend. I'd fly from Burbank to San Jose; I just left the Jeep there and an hour and a half after I left home I was on the ground in San Jose. We slept out on the point. The other families were usually up there also. I went to home winemaker dinners with people like David Bruce and George Burtness. Many of these people were at the same stage as we were, or getting there, making wines in a similar fashion and working to improve them. I was impressed by the 1964 Zinfandel from Picchetti, from which Dave made some Rosé. He took the original skins from that and put them back into the vat with the regular '64 Picchetti Zin. This helps explain why that Zinfandel was such a blockbuster wine.

CS: Was that a commercial wine?

DF: Yes. I have a few bottles left, with a white capsule. Perhaps the first and only time we had a white capsule on a red wine.

HC: I don't recall the original motivation behind that Rosé.

CR: We were always short of money and we knew that the Rosé would sell quickly. And what are you going to do with all those beautiful skins? Dave just said to toss them in and we'll make a really big wine. Mario Gemello had told us about doing that. He always said, "we never waste any skins." He would make Chardonnay and had a lot of skins and he would toss them into his red wines.

CS: He never told me about that. But that's an Italian tradition in Tuscany. They'll put the Trebbiano skins right in with the Sangiovese.

Somebody said there was something special about the 1966 vintage.

CR: In those early days our idea was to try and make use of the natural yeasts on the grapes. We used a small amount of SO₂, about 25 parts per million, which would kill off the wild yeasts but only stun the good wine yeasts on the grapes.

CS: Without adding any outside culture?

CR: Right. That was the ideal, but a little later we got smarter, as the result of some problems. And this was one of them.

If you have a vigorous wine yeast going it overwhelms the other bugs in the fermentation. It's a geometric kind of thing. We didn't have starters to get the fermentations going, as we would later have. This was one time that the old winery was pretty cold and there was no starter, and the Cabernet in 1966 got stuck. The fermentation would not go through. Later we put together an

apparatus to measure volatile acidity and we could monitor it.¹⁴ But with this wine there was still some residual sugar, but it was probably making too many of the wrong things.

We got rid of that Cabernet by introducing it in small amounts into succeeding vintages.

CS: Was there a 1966 Cabernet?

HC: I think there was one barrel.

CS: So what did that experience teach you?

CR: For me it showed that at least part of this natural approach was poppycock. The way to make sure the fermentation went properly was to add a proper starter. After that, what Dave did, he still used the natural yeasts off the vineyard, but we started a large starter before the vintage began. So we had something vigorously growing when the crush came. We always made our own. Later we began buying special commercial yeasts and did some experimenting with them.

CS: How did you do your chemistry then?

CR: I did the chemistry at first. I did volatile acidity, acid, sugar and alcohol. There were four tests and we had a very modest lab. Later Leo McClosky really did some high-tech testing.

CS: How did Dick Foster affect you people?

CR: He was the only one to start with who really knew anything about French wines. Dave had begun to learn about them. I hardly knew anything at all about them; for me, my introduction to good wines were the wines we made at Ridge.

Dick came along and began to tell us things, and more than that, he had a cellar. Every time he'd come he'd bring some fine wines. He wanted us to work for more balanced, less rugged, more Bordeaux-like wines. These wines he was bringing us were to educate us.

CS: What did you show them, '59s and '53s?

DF: Yes, '53s. And '55s and '59s.

CR: He persisted in telling us that was the way we should go, and I would say that Dave and I rather resisted that. Until Paul Draper came, and he was an aficionado of Bordeaux wines. Dick and Paul talked the same language. They wanted to get away from the big heavy, rugged wines.

CS: But to me the 1967 Cabernet was a bit more delicate.

CR: By accident.

DF: The elegance was what I was looking for and what Paul looked for when he came.

CS: Let's go to 1967. To me the story here is new sources of grapes; Dave has left SRI.

FB: In 1967, that summer, knowing that Dave would never take a vacation, I was invited to Vermont by our neighbors to stay on their farm, and I took the four kids on the train and went east for the summer. Dave spent a lot of that summer chasing around California looking for grapes. He got the idea to go down into the Paso Robles area.

I talked to Benito Dusi a couple of weeks ago and I guess that Dave was just driving along the

¹⁴ See McClosky interview.

highway and he just came in and started talking to him to talk about the grapes around there. And he talked him into letting us have some grapes for that fall. The following year Benito said he got a deal that was too good to pass up from Paul Masson. So for the next seven or eight years he sold to them. But we did get Dusi grapes that one year, and then later, of course. We also got grapes from Vine Hill. He took his sleeping bag and did a lot of traveling around that summer.

CS: Tell me about Leo Trentadue.

FB: He owned the property above our place. People had been vandalizing the old winery on the property there. People had actually been living in it. There were stoves and bed springs; it was a real mess. Then one Fourth of July we went up there and found that somebody had started a fire inside the winery.

CS: What winery?

FB: This was the upper winery.

CS: So Trentadue owned the old Osea Perrone winery.¹⁵

SC: And the surrounding land.

FB: We had made overtures to Trentadue to buy the winery and a small piece of land around it, and he would always say NO. But after this one incident where vagrants had built this fire inside the building, he gave in. He sold us five acres and the winery.

CR: That was going to be the new winery.

FB: But before we could do that we got one of our stockholders, who was an architect, to come up there one day-- it was actually snowing-- and we were sitting at the table in the kitchen at the lower winery and told him we wanted to expand. He took a look down there and said that it was unstable ground. But we told him about the winery up the hill and he was immediately interested.

We went up there and he was fascinated. He said that for half the price we could get twice the space, if the place was solid. So he brought his crew of young architects up there to take measurements and to see how this would work for storing wine. One thing he was amazed at was that there were two lower floors, mostly under ground, and then there were the upper two floors. And there was solid insulation between those two floors and he couldn't find any crack in it, but there was a one foot discrepancy. So he actually ripped a board up and found that it was insulated with a foot of dirt.

CS: That was common in the 19th century. Much better than sawdust, which also was common.

HC: There was another reason. To keep the fumes away from the crew that slept on the upper floors.

CR: There was only one piece of science that was right there. Dirt is a poor insulator but it does have mass so it would regulate the swings of temperature. And one thing that was absolutely necessary for our barrels was to keep the temperature constant.

SC: I need to make a correction here. When we were going to enlarge the lower winery we did call in two architects. One was Aaron Green and one was John---- I can't recall his name. First we had him look at the lower winery and then Aaron Green came, because of my friendship with some others

¹⁵ See Sullivan, *Like Modern Edens*, 54, 168; *Pacific Wine & Spirit Review*, 9/30/05, 11/30/08, 3/31/14; *Vintage Magazine* (July, 1973): 27.

he had worked for. But I thought we brought him to the upper winery because we were planting the Trentadue land. We had already negotiated the lease. He went up with us and saw the winery, got excited about it, and we went on from there. I don't think it had entered our heads yet to own that winery.

CS: So, when did you buy the winery?

CR: When Paul came he was up there.

HC: I think we finished the deal in 1969.

FB: Here is the title company guarantee, July 10, 1968. And we had to determine that the winery was actually on the property, and we made it by just a few feet. Otherwise it would have gone to the Open Space District.

HC: The fence was actually on their land.

CR: You look out the back of the winery and that's the District land.

HC: Leo didn't want to sell the place, but he also knew that the winery was being wrecked. I remember that the offer we gave him, the last sentence went, this offer is conditional on absolutely no further damage to that structure. It was our condition. He knew it was going down hill and he kept stalling. So we said, any further damage and it's finished.

SC: There was another sentimental wish of his. That was the harvesting of the chestnut trees. There were two huge trees, and with this whole deal he still wanted to be able to come back and harvest the chestnuts. Which he did.

FB: Here are the papers on it. A lease, October 1967. Lease of about 30 acres. Purpose, planting a vineyard. Use of the winery is conditional on a survey showing the winery to belong to the property. That's another story.

CS: It's a 15 year deal, but you buy it before then.

(I'm looking at a 6/1/68 projected list of expenditures for the first fiscal quarter of 1968 which includes:

Acquisition and closing-- Vine Hill Vineyard.....	\$.48,000
Acquisition and closing-- Trentadue 5 acres.....	8,000
Trentadue Winery, rebuilding.....	15,000

So, the planting of that land takes place in the winter or 1967-68.

HC: Sue and I were up in Sonoma to a big old bed and breakfast place, Madrone Manor. The next day we took our bicycles out and we passed a big nursery and something had happened and they had something like 5,000 vines left over, bench grafts. So we rushed back and told Dave and he quickly went up there and made a deal. They were good vines. We stored them at a place in Portola Valley, Walter Jelich, an apple farmer. We put them in his cooler until we could plant them the following spring until we could plant them the following spring.

CS: Let's get back to the Trentadue Zinfandel grapes from Geyserville.

CR: That was in 1966. On October 1 we got 27 boxes averaging 38 pounds. They had 26% sugar and .55 acid.

CS: Ouch. I'll bet you had to drop some tartaric acid in there if they went through malo-lactic. That is really low acid. You could end up with .45 acid; that's a 19th century number for California.

CR: At that time we didn't even have any. (Lots of laughter from all)

CS: What about the first grapes from Jimsomare, the Schwabacher connection.¹⁶

CR: We got Zinfandel from the old vines there in 1967. There were perhaps an acre or two of very old vines.

CS: Was there any sign of Cabernet Sauvignon, or other red Bordeaux varieties? Pierre Klein won a gold medal at the Paris Exposition in 1900 for his Cabernet produced on that land.

CR: All Zinfandel.

CS: I see. These were planted later, probably around Prohibition. Did these look like, perhaps, fifty year old vines?

CR: Yes. But they were very neglected at first, with no fencing.

FB: Dave and I had sort of a fleeting knowledge of James Schwabacher back in the forties and fifties. He was involved in the music department at Stanford.

CS: That's how I knew him. He was always at the Bach Festival in Carmel in those days.

FB: One day he appeared up on the ridge on horseback. And that's how we really got acquainted with him. But we didn't know there were vines on his property then.

CS: So this was in 1966 and you got their grapes in 1967.

CR: About three tons of Zinfandel.

CS: When does Jimsomare become more closely connected with what Ridge is doing?

FB: James Schwabacher was very resistant to the idea of planting more vines.

CR: He didn't want to spend any money.

HC: Ridge paid for the Cabernet vines that went in. And then he'd pay back against the crop. So he didn't put up a nickel out of his pocket.

CR: But it cost them something to plant them. That was probably in 1970 or 1971.

CS: After 1967 do you keep getting Jimsomare grapes right along.

CR: I don't think they went to anyone else.

¹⁶ Down the hill from the Perrone Winery (Ridge) was the MiraValle Winery of Pierre Klein, world famous for its Cabernets at the turn of the century. The land was later purchased by the Schwabacher family and they called it Jimsomare, a combination of their children's names: James, Sophie and Marie. See Sullivan, *Like Modern Edens*, 54-55, 58, 75, 99, 149, 168. See p. 76 for early articles on MiraValle.

CS: And I wonder where those Zinfandel grapes went before you got them.

CR: Probably Gemello.

CS: I'll get Elmano to set me straight on all of that.

Let's go to the 1967 vintage.

CR: Here are some tonnage figures:

4700 lbs. of Zinfandel from Jimsomare, 21% sugar, .675 acid.

2000 lbs. of Cabernet franc from Matheny (Pourroy/Congress Springs)

3385 lbs. of Zinfandel from Picchetti, 21.5% sugar, .79 acid.

960 lbs. of Cabernet franc from Matheny (most of the above had gone to pickers who were home winemakers and were helping out in the harvest)

20% sugar, .70 acid.

CS: I'll copy down the gallonage here from all your sources for the 1967 vintage.

<u>Varietal</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Gallons</u>
Cabernet Sauvignon	Ridge	1296
Cabernet franc	Matheny	80 (Saratoga)
Ruby Cabernet	Ridge	210
Zinfandel	Picchetti	370
	Jimsomare	187
		280 Rosé
	Trentadue	214 (Geyserville)
	Dusi (Paso Robles)	390
Chardonnay	Ridge	298
	Vine Hill	204
White Riesling	Vine Hill	<u>498</u>
	Total	4027 gallons

And here is the Ridge wine inventory after the 1967 vintage, by vintage:

x/y=x= bottled gallons; y=gallons in barrels

	<u>1963</u>	<u>1964</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>
Chardonnay			156/0	0/64	0/502
White Riesling			210/85	0/315	0/468
Zinfandel			0/447	0/520	0/1160
Zinfandel rosé				0/60	0/280
Cabernet Sauv.	334/0	164/20	0/308	0/480	0/1375
Cab. Sauv. rosé		56/0			
Ruby Cabernet		90/0		0/50	0/210

On the top of the sheet I got these data from there is the statement, "BCRZ partnership ended as of 31 July 1967; RIDGE VINEYARDS, INC. took its first breath on 1 Aug. 1967." What's the background on this?

CR: As usual, we needed money and we wanted to enlarge our plant and operations. We had met the new people through Carl Djerrassi. He was a professor of chemistry and one of the people responsible for the development of the birth control pill. He was and still is at Stanford. By that time he was quite a famous person.

We had met him through a land deal that we had over on Bear Gulch Road, also in San Mateo County. He had purchased about 100 acres from a group of us, which included the original four people who started Ridge. But this didn't have anything to do with Ridge.

We talked to him about what we were doing at the winery and he had a healthy respect for what we were doing. He called us "The Syndicate."

HC: I can tell you why. Carl held a strong line against smoking, coffee, and, for some reason, peanut butter. He was not a wine drinker, but he didn't object to it. And he did drink some of our wine and liked it. He really was amused by the image of our group projected by the vehicle that Dave was driving at the time. It was a large van that looked like an armored Brink's truck. It was painted bright yellow and had an impressive side ladder that went up to a rack on the roof. Djerrassi thought the thing looked like a Hollywood gangster vehicle and started calling us "The Syndicate."

Djerrassi was one of the prime movers at Syntex in its earliest days. Some time in 1966 we approached him with the idea of joining us in developing Ridge into a fine California chateau winery. He liked the idea and particularly liked ideas that aimed high. He talked to his longtime friend, Alexander Zaffaroni, to see if he would be interested as well. He was a power at Syntex and had an excellent wine cellar. We also knew that Dick Foster was a possibility, and that a winery of his own based on his land he had bought from us was an impossibility.

So we worked out the financial arrangements by which Dick, Carl and Alex would join us as partners. The infusion of capital allowed us to make a big increase in production in 1967.

CR: Carl and Alex came in but they did much more. Alex had a huge following of people from Mexico and South America, and people over in Italy. Through him and friends of Carl, many of these people invested smaller amounts in Ridge.

CS: You mean at this time, in 1967?

CR: Very shortly after that. And any time we ran short of money and needed more investment, either Carl or Alex would get on the phone and there would be money coming in.

HC: For example, there was Robert Maxwell from England. That's how he came in.

CR: These guys were really our financial backbone.

CS: How were the shares divided up with these new people coming in?

HC: The three of us, Bennions, Cranes, Rosens, bought Howard Zeidler's share. The three of them came in equal, Foster, Djerrassi, and Zaffaroni. There were seven of us, for a moment, then there are six, so the three of us have four units and the three of them have three. Later we became all equal.

CS: But where do these smaller hunks of money go, in terms of equity?

CR: The little guys put in cash and got shares.

DF: At one point each of us had one sixth of a share in the corporation. But as more came in we gradually ended up with about one tenth.

FB: I remember when we first met Zaffaroni. We had dinner at his house and he took us into his cellar, which was full of French wine. The only wine that wasn't French was Ridge. That was before he became a partner.

CS: So, this injection of capital is going to make it possible to more than double production.

CR: And also to begin the physical expansion of the operation.

HC: I have a copy of an interesting letter here. It indicates in 1974 that Stanford itself was considering putting money into the operation. But it didn't happen.

CR: There's another financial matter related to Carl and Alex. In 1970 the CEO of Syntex wanted to put in some money, but he wanted security, but we didn't have any that wasn't already tied up with the Bank of America. So we worked it out by his purchasing Vine Hill from us.

CS: Remember that you haven't bought Vine Hill yet, so far as our tape is concerned. But I guess we can do some dramatic foreshadowing here.

CR: So we sold George Rosencranz the vineyard. And he had the option to buy in to Ridge, giving us back the vineyard at Vine Hill.

HC: Of course, we continued to operate the vineyard. In 1971 he exercised his option and sold Ridge the vineyard and he became a stockholder. In 1973 we sold it to someone who thought he could develop it, but the county said NO and we got it back again. Finally, in 1974 Dick Smothers, who owned the adjacent vineyard, bought it from us. By that time it had become a tremendous effort for us to operate a vineyard so far away.

CS: What do you mean by "the adjacent vineyard?"

HC: The big house there and the vines around it were the Schermerhorn place. That was on one side of Vine Hill road. Our vineyard was on the other side, facing Highway 17.

CS: For years you could look up into the vineyard as you drove down into Scott's Valley. Now it has returned to nature. What a mess.

HC: Smothers had bought the main Schermerhorn place already. And then he bought ours.

CS: You know, we don't have your purchase of Vine Hill on the record. Let's go back and do it.

HC: We had been buying Vine Hill grapes for years. For a number of years Dave, on his own, with some home winemakers, had been buying grapes there.

CR: They were farming it and getting the grapes for themselves.

HC: And Dave was part of that group. And then, in 1967, Ridge bought it to insure its survival. There was really a sort of land buying panic in the Santa Cruz Mountains then. That was with the infusion of money that came in from the new partners.

CS: I wish I knew when Dr. Schermerhorn died. This idea of two Vine Hill properties is also confusing.

FB: Well, he was alive when we bought the vineyard.

CS: Did you buy the whole thing?

SC: No, just the seventeen acres.

HC: Vine Hill Road divides that land. We bought the vineyard next to Highway 17. On the other side of Vine Hill Road was the Schermerhorn house and the other vineyard. Smothers bought that first, and then bought ours.

FB: The grapes around the house were red grapes. Across the road, ours, were white grapes.

CS: Aha! So now I know why Clinton Quistorf is up there in the fifties planting red grapes. I couldn't figure how to reconcile that diary entry with nothing but whites grapes up there.

FB: There weren't red grapes.

CS: That's not important. It just clears up a question that I couldn't answer. It's not all that important.

Let's change gears here and talk about the process by which Ridge Vineyards becomes an importer of French wines, chateau produced but bottled here.

DF: At the same time I was in France helping to arrange for those cuttings we brought in, the fall of 1965, we had met an importer of German wines and he gave me the name of a man in Gevrey-Chambertin as a grower of old-fashioned style red Burgundy of good stature. We visited him and I tasted from his barrels and bought a barrel or two of Aligoté and five or six barrels of assorted red Burgundies. I bought these for myself.

CS: You are buying yourself almost 300 gallons, 1500 bottles, of red burgundy from one vintage?

CR: I told you this guy was a wine nut.

DF: So we then went to Bordeaux. We had an introduction to a young Englishman, Anthony Sargent, who was working for Alexis Lichine. We got to Lichine's, Château Prieuré in Margaux, and met him. He was representing Dourthe Freres, and the next day we went to their place and tasted. I bought six or seven barrels there, everything from a generic 1964 Pomerol to a barrel of Château Cheval-Blanc. But we didn't get that one because this was the year when Cheval-Blanc decided they were going to do 100% chateau bottling.

We had lunch with the Dourthe family the next day. Late in the meal a bottle was brought out with the label covered and Anthony wondered if I could identify it. I was pretty sure it was a Château Latour and said I thought it was a 1947 or 1949. I settled on 1947, and that was it. So everyone at the table beamed; they had a customer from California who could identify such a wine. That's the only time I've ever done that in my life.

When we got back I told my friends here that I was going to have a lot more wine than I needed. I had a friend up here, George Linton¹⁷, who brought it in for us and charged us 2% for handling the paper work. We brought the barrels down to Charlie's (CR) and everybody got together and tasted them. The barrels were in fine condition and we could use them again.

We also knew that Ridge needed more volume and we didn't have the grapes or the money to expand as much as we wanted to then. So we decided to do this to boost up sales. So we did that for

¹⁷Linton was the founder of Connoisseur Wine Imports, first in Richmond and later in San Francisco.

the 1966 and 1967 vintages, from Bordeaux and Burgundy. There was also some 1966 vintage Port. We bottled these at the winery and then used the barrels. These were two year old barrels of French oak.

HC: Back then the law said that a winery could import wine up to the amount of their production. At that time the importation of barrels, rather than bottles, of wine into this country was so bizarre that there was an episode that you all may remember. The first barrels came in and sat on the dock in San Francisco; they didn't know how to release them. We took a trip up there and they were sitting in the sun. Dave got on the phone with Washington and worked endlessly trying to get them released.

CR: It cost us more to have those barrels shipped to my garage than it did for them to get from France to California. When we got the barrels there was a little bit of air space. So I bought a couple of tons of quartz stones, we washed them, and we brought up the wine level in the barrels with them.

CS: That's an Old World trick.

CR: We thought of that ourselves. But what we didn't think about was getting the stones out of those barrels. We spent untold hours on that. We shook them out.

CS: You could just take the head off and dump them out.

DF: When we brought in the 1967 wines we also brought in about 300 cases of 1961 Château Lynch Bages.¹⁸ I think we sold them for about \$36 per case.

HC: Three years later that wine was selling for more than \$300 per case down in Los Angeles

FB: Remember, the first shipment arrived in Los Angeles, and they insisted on measuring the amount of wine in the barrel, instead of just charging us for the size of the barrel assuming they were full. But no, they pumped the wine out to measure how much was in the barrel. And, of course, it was less than it would have been if they had just charged us by the barrel size. Dave was furious because the wine had been aerated and took months to recover.

CS: Let's go to the 1968 vintage.

DF: I was a member of the Hollywood branch of the International Wine & Food Society. We took annual trips to different parts of the Northern California wine country. So I suggested that it would be interesting to go to the Santa Cruz Mountain area. We put together a schedule that put us at Ridge on a Saturday morning in early October. There were about 20-25 people involved.

So we took part in the picking that morning. I'd say we picked enough to make two barrels. That night we had a dinner in the barn. It was really cold, I recall.

Narsai David did the dinner for us. He was working at the Pot Luck Restaurant on San Pablo in Berkeley.

CS: Hank Ruben's place. We loved it there.¹⁹ Narsai was famous then for making those Middle Eastern fruit soups for Hank.

HC: He was shocked by the lack of facilities there to put out his elegant dinner.

¹⁸ A very popular Fifth Growth of Pauillac.

¹⁹ Since then Narsai David has operated his own restaurant in Kensington. In recent years he has had a syndicated food column and a regular radio show on wine and food.

SC: But he had been there before and catered a dinner for Carl Djerassi. My recollection was how cool he was under the conditions.

HC: Djerassi had had a couple of dinners there for the National Academy of Sciences, and for the Pugwash group.

CS: Well, at least once Narsai had a fit, whenever it was. I'll kid him about it. He and I went to Cal together and roomed in the same living group. He was a cook and I used to wash dishes.

CR: Did he ever wash dishes.

CS: Are you kidding?

DF: The wine made from the grapes they picked was made separately. Dave kept it separate all the way and we sold it to them for about \$40 per case. We also did about six or eight cases of magnums. I think that was the first time we put up magnums. Most members bought a case.

CS: Have any of you ever had an opportunity to taste that cuvée blind with the regular Monte Bello Cabernet release?

DF: I don't think so.

So, that became a tradition, and they came up in 1978 and 1988. They picked and had dinner, but there was not a special cuvée made.

CS: Are you coming up in 1998?

DF: I hope so.

CS: Any anecdotal memories about that vintage? This is probably the most famous wine Ridge ever made.

CR: That year we had a party for the ACT²⁰, before the vintage. From my diary on June 5, "Over 100 thirsty people had a ball today. The weather was not perfect. But wine and food conquered all."

SC: We had this party because all of our families were very caught up in ACT. This was not a fund raiser. This was a party we threw for them.

CR: On June 16 we had our first concert at the winery. "Many will think and talk about it for long after this day is just another day."

FB: The kids climbed the Aleppo pine and watched it from the tree and the rest of us sat around under the tree.

CR: We always hoped that we could have concerts and things of that sort on a continuous basis.

HC: We'd out Masson Masson.

CR: But without so grand a facility.

²⁰ The American Conservatory Theater, an important San Francisco repertory group.

FB: I finally did get the use of a tractor one day for three hours and got the hillside terraced above the lower winery so we could have people sit and observe a concert.

May 30, 1968 we had a picnic fund raising for Eugene McCarthy's candidacy.

CS: That would be just a few days before the California primary, running against Bobby Kennedy.

FB: I see here that Roz and Charles Sullivan came up that April 30.

HC: Speaking of politics, in 1974 we got some new investors, mostly people who were interested in the winery and not just for the money. We had twenty new stockholders and raised about \$300,000. We now had as stockholders three members of Nixon's "enemies list" and a Nobel laureate.

CS: I have to go now. Dick, do you have anything else we could tag on here?

SC: We have a tape recorder and we can keep it going on through the day. Maybe we can make him reflect some more on the past.

DF: Well, here's an item that's special. One time I was working up on the property with my son and we came on a six foot rattle-snake sunning himself. But we used to catch smaller ones up there in the spring quite often. Another time alone I walked down from the winery to my section of the property and as I made the bend there was a large mountain lion. He looked at me and went over that fence with plenty to spare.

FB: I recall Dave bringing a big snake down one time and we cooked it up for breakfast. Tasted like tough chicken.

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The next Ridge interview included *Eric Bennion (EB)*, Fran and Dave's son, who worked at the winery in the seventies.

May 19, 1993

CS: Let's talk about Paul Draper. How did you get to know him?

FB: We met him at a dinner party at George Burtness's house. George got us together then so that we could meet. Fritz Maytag was also there.²¹ Paul was a bachelor at that time.

CS: How does he become involved in the operation?

HC: This is a controversial issue you've brought up, for Paul, but not for us. Most of the credit for reconstructing the inside of the upper winery goes to Paul. He officially became Ridge winemaker in 1971, at least that's my opinion. That was the year of our first vintage at the "new" winery. He could read several languages and was able to get into many of the old texts on winemaking in these languages. Dave was impressed by Paul and Paul was looking for new opportunities.

In the summer of 1969 he took responsibility for bottling the French wines that we had imported in barrels. He also helped out with the 1969 vintage, especially with the Cabernet Sauvignon. We were really impressed by his knowledge, style, efficiency, and dedication to fine winemaking. Charlie, Dave and I spent several of our weekly breakfast meetings trying to decide whether we could afford to hire Paul. And we knew that if we did it would represent a major

²¹ The principal in the Anchor Steam Beer Brewing company, and the founder of York Creek Vineyards on Spring Mountain in Napa.

psychological shift for Dave, who up to then was solely responsible for the winemaking. But he was comfortable with the change. In fact I think he was a little relieved. He needed everyday help and we couldn't give it to him. Also, way down deep inside, Dave really didn't like the way we were continually increasing production. He knew he had to do it, but he would have rather been making just a few thousand gallons of the greatest Cabernet possible each year, and not a drop more of anything else.

CS: Except maybe a little Zinfandel.

HC: We really couldn't afford Paul, but we decided that we couldn't afford not to hire him. He seemed to be just the person to bring the new winery on line in a style to our liking. It's my view that Paul shared the duties of winemaker in the 1970 vintage with Dave. He took charge of the wines after they were moved to the upper winery after the main fermentation. That was the last vintage at the old winery.

Now this question became an issue when David Darlington wrote his *Angels' Visits*, which included quite a bit of information on Ridge. I have two documents here that illustrate the issue.

SC: Actually the controversy came before Darlington and the book.

CS: What is the issue? What is the controversy about?

HC: Here I have Paul's response to Darlington's first draft of the book.

"Note, page 220. This issue of when I was hired and under what terms is very important to me. Charlie and Hew contacted me about the job when I returned from Chile."

That is not the way I remember it.

"Dave had called Fritz (Maytag) earlier, when I was still in Chile to ask if I would take the job. Fritz, who thought that was a bit bizarre, told him that I was the one he should be talking to."

Whether Dave ever called Fritz, we have no information.

"Hew and Charlie offered me the job, not Dave. So I was never aware whether it was Dave's idea or theirs."

When Paul was offered the job, it was the complete concurrence of all three of us.

"I was not hired to bottle the Montrose. (Meaning, the French imports of red Bordeaux.) It was never mentioned in our talks."

CS: Was he paid for his work there for bottling and for the 1969 vintage?

HC: I'm sure he was.

CS: Was he paid for working the 1970 vintage at the old winery?

HC: Surely.

CS: So, he was working for you. So, at this point the job is a job.

SC: Yes, but without the specific responsibility as winemaker.

FB: That's it, because I remember Dave was always checking up on Paul and there were always loose ends, especially at the beginning.

CS: I'm trying to get the wording down. So far Paul has simply said, "You hired me." The question is, for what? ---- the job.

SC: At that point in 1969 and 1970 he did not have the responsibility as winemaker. He was not there seven days a week during the vintage, and Dave was doing much more than just sharing the tasks.

CS: Let's get the time clear. You mean both the 1969 and 1970 vintages.

FB: Certainly the 1969. Probably the 1970.

HC: Let me go on with Paul's words:

"Dave needed help and would I come to work for Ridge to look after the day-to-day winemaking."

CS: That doesn't necessarily mean being the winemaker.

HC: Let me go on:

"I started in August 1969, was in the hospital with peritonitis for two and a half weeks, was working full-time again by September 1. The harvest began on September 20. I worked 60-80 hour weeks during the crush. . . .It was the most chaotic and difficult harvest of my career, despite the small tonnage. I continued to work full-time after the harvest. I was hired once in August 1969 and worked full-time from that point. I think that in Hew and Charlie's minds they still didn't know whether I would stay once I saw the chaos and the part-time crew. They were finally convinced the next spring when I took charge of the crew formally at a meeting Hew describes in his history."

He's mixing two things up. That is when we rented the restaurant for a meeting.

CS: Tell me about this meeting.

HC: We were really concerned about Paul then. He was at least ten years younger than any of us. He had a great amount of winemaker experience and he was really hard-working. But he had still not established his proper role in boss-worker relationships.

This all came to a head at the 1972 vintage. It was an intense time, what with working on the upper winery. And we had a particularly rambunctious group of workers at the time. So we let it all hang out at this meeting he talks about.

The major issue for some of the crew was their powerlessness. That was a condition reflecting

the times.²² They wanted to make decisions and not just take orders.

We were sympathetic to the principle, but good intentions are no substitute for knowledge and experience. We knew that Dave would take no nonsense in such matters. But Paul was still not comfortable being THE BOSS. We had lots of good kids working at the upper winery, but they were totally inexperienced. They were arguing that they could easily look things up and find out as well as Paul when and how to do things. We just bit our nails and held our breath through the whole discussion. This concentrated piece of nonsense made its mark on Paul and he knew very well that top-quality wines could not be made by committee. We never had another problem in this area again.

From that time on our planning meetings included Paul routinely. We made him a director in 1973 and an officer in 1976. And we arranged stock options so that he could eventually become an equal stockholder with the rest of us.

CS: But I'm still not clear on the issue from this. You say he "still" had not got the boss-worker relationship straight in 1972. This implies he was the boss. He was the winemaker in 1972. No one has ever said he wasn't. What's the issue here? We're talking about whether Paul was winemaker in 1970.

CR: Let me talk to this. When we worked at the lower winery in the first years it was obvious that with Dave we had a man for whom every detail was a point, and time was not. When you're only making a thousand gallons of wine, you can go back to the same barrel over and over to taste it. But when you begin making much larger quantities, in a rush, it's almost impossible to do it that way. You have to be better organized. Paul showed us when he bottled the French wine, and even more so in the first vintage (1969), that what Dave lacked in organizational ability, Paul had. Hew and I, and Dave, recognized this. And we had to make more wine if Dave was going to work full-time and still support his family.

CS: You had been making more wine since the injection of capital in 1967.

CR: But not enough. I watched the numbers closely. It's still the same today. You have to reach certain levels of production to support certain amounts of management and supervision. We all saw that Draper would be a great addition. We felt that Dave wanted him to join as his helper, or co-winemaker. But he did not initially want to let go of the position of making the basic winemaking decisions. Paul really knew how to organize things and get things done. He was always first interested in the best way to do things. How much it cost came later. But what Dave initially thought was that he would be sharing the winemaking job with Paul. But it gradually became apparent that it was not going to work out that way. Paul wouldn't accept the junior position.

CS: The issue is over what happened when.

CR: Paul and Dave must have had a discussion at some point after 1970 and Paul became THE winemaker.

HC: In 1969 Paul was a worker. In 1970 I think it's fair to say they shared the winemaker's job. It seems to me maybe one took the whites and one took the reds. In 1971 Paul was the winemaker.

CR: I would agree with that.

FB: I'm looking at the ledger here. It concerns who got paid what. We had dozens of workers. There was even David Noyes²³ then.

²² This was at the time of the anti-Viet Nam war fever and the McGovern candidacy for the presidency, which a large number of the Ridge people supported, both management and workers.

²³ Noyes is today in charge of winemaking at the Kunde Estate near Glen Ellen, in Sonoma.

CS: Back then?

HC: We hired him on as a high school kid. He was a very quiet young man.

FB: His father was a very dynamic physicist. He was thrown into a bunch of sixties people, who are just the opposite to what he is. But he became imbued with the thing that winemaking was what he wanted to do.

SC: When he first came to us he had been making mead.

CR: Eventually he went to UC Davis and came back as a junior winemaker. He was up there about the same time as Stephen Kistler, who has his own winery in Sonoma.²⁴ And there was Paul Staiger, who now has a winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains.²⁵ He didn't work there, but he was a very frequent visitor, a sort of protegee.

FB: Let's get back to the point. There was a paycheck to Paul on January 24, 1970. There is not another one until September 13, 1970.

CS: He worked in 1969. Then didn't work, and was hired on for the 1970 harvest. The question is, what was he hired as in September 1970? You guys think it's co-winemaker. right?

HC: That's close enough to be fair.

FB: He went back to Chile in the spring of 1970. I have a letter here from Dave to Paul 5/11/1970 addressed to Santiago, Chile, talking about containers for the possible importing of wine from Chile.

CR: That explains the phone call to Fritz Maytag while he was in Chile.

FB: Here is the note from Fritz on Anchor Steam Beer stationery giving Dave the information on how to contact Paul in Chile.

HC: That's the gap.

CS: I see. Dave makes the call and this leads to a very permanent arrangement for the 1970 vintage and thereafter.

HC: Here's the way Darlington wrote a passage in his book in the first draft:

"A wine that Draper made in his first year, the 1970 Ridge
Jimsomare Zinfandel. . . ."

Paul changed this to "A wine that Draper and Bennion made together. . . ."

CS: That makes perfect sense, given what was said in 1972. That was a reflection on the previous twelve months, in which the word "still" is used, which implies that in this period, since the 1971 vintage Paul was THE winemaker.

²⁴ Kistler Vineyards, BW 4899, founded in 1979.

²⁵ P and M Staiger, BW 4649, founded in 1973.

CR: What's important about all this is that in this transition period there were, in 1970, some very great wines made. But there were great wines made before. And Paul made many great wines after he was in charge, on his own, after 1970.

CR: All three of us, Hew, Dave and I, wanted to hire Paul to take up the slack.

CS: Here's a question for you. Eric start dragging out bottles. When does the famous DRB (David R. Bennion) sidebar stop going on the label to describe the wine in that bottle, to be replaced by PD (Paul Draper)?

Ah, here is a 1968 Ridge White Riesling, with DRB bottled 9/70, written 4/71. No PD on the label. Here is a 1969 Ridge White Riesling bottled 4/71 with a PD comment 5/72. We can see the transition taking place for white wine. But the 1969 Ridge Monte Bello Zinfandel has a DRB comment 4/71; he made the wine, he's writing it up. And then we have a 1971 Ruby Cabernet bottled with a PD writeup in 1974. He's the one who made that wine and brought it along. It looks as if these two guys are deciding, you write this one, I'll do that one, based on what they did with the wine.

Here is a 1969 Lodi Zinfandel, DRB writes it up 4/71. Here is a late harvest Zin 1970 from Occidental, and Paul writes it up 5/72. 1970 Fulton Zinfandel, PD 5/72. 1970 Monte Bello Cabernet, PD writes it 1/73. And here's a 1970 Monte Bello Chardonnay, bottled 6/72 and written up by DRB.

Wait a minute. Here's a 1968 Pinot blanc written up by CR 8/71. What is this, Charlie?

CR: I don't know who CR would have been.

FB: I can remember Dave saying that he was taking responsibility for some of the 1970 wines down below, and that Paul had some that were at the upper winery. I think that is the way that they did their co-winemaking in 1970.

CS: What was Dave's function as you see it from, say, 1971 to 1976?

FB: It's hard to say. 1969-1972 were really intense years. Dave was hardly ever home. There were lots of times in the early years when Paul would just leave on Saturdays. Dave always had to tie up loose ends. Paul had girl friends. Until he got married there were lots of loose ends that needed tying up.

CS: You are talking definitely about the period after 1972.

FB: Yes, until he got settled down with his wife, Maureen. And then he moved up to the vineyard. He was married in 1975 right after the vintage.

HC: In 1977 he and Maureen built their current house near the winery. In 1979 their little girl (Caitlin) was born.

SC: Paul and Dave had a different outlook about work. Paul lived in San Francisco and he had another life. He chose to keep that life. He wanted this to be a five-day-a-week job. For Dave it was seven-days-a-week, all the time.

CS: Paul would have been up here on more than week days during the vintage.

SC: But for Charlie and Hew, they came into it on the weekends, since they had full-time jobs outside the winery. Dave was up there and for us, that was what we saw, seven days a week. We saw the other two. Dave could not cope with Paul's being able to make this separation in his head. Dave reacted to this, perhaps over-reacted.

CR: And as the years go by others come up there to do other jobs.

CS: Leo McClosky comes up in 1971.

CR: He had very little to do except with Paul. He was always part of the upper winery staff. There was always a division between the upper and lower winery staff. Down below several of the people who are still there started taking over big chunks of the things that Dave had supervised. Dave still retained a great deal of say-so and supervision. He was the president, the CEO. He was the boss, but he was delegating things to others.

CS: Did he get into marketing with his freer time now?

HC: Not much, ever.

CS: He traveled a lot, seeing people about Ridge wines. Tastings and such. He went to Southern California a lot. But I guess it's better to call that public relations than marketing.

CR: Marketing people were responsible for marketing.

EB: I worked at the winery in the vintage of 1976. Earlier I had worked at the upper winery when the first vintage was brought up there, topping barrels and such. This was after the 1970 vintage and I worked with my father, mostly. There was no one else up there.

CS: That sounds like the 1969 vintage, not the 1970.

EB: It could have been. But I do remember when Paul came because I really liked him and he used to play around with us. I was twelve or thirteen. None of our parents would do that. I do remember that big break when people wondered whether Paul was going to come back. I remember I really wanted him to come back because he'd play with us. But I know he was away.

CS: That fits. That sounds like the 1969 wine, and then the hiatus when he's gone in 1970.

EB: But when I was up there in 1976 Paul was running everything. If I had a question and I asked my dad, he'd say I should ask Paul. The lower winery was more under my dad then.

CS: What was going on there?

HC: Tastings, wine sales.

EB: But in 1976 they were still doing the bottling down there.

CS: Who was in charge of that?

CR: Paul.

CS: How long did this bottling down there go on?

EB: Until the early eighties.

CR: Yes, that's when we put the storage building and bottling room up there near the winery.

CS: What about all that stainless steel up there?

HC: There was a first batch soon after Paul came. The second batch was in 1976, four new stainless steel fermenters: two 1,000 gallon and two 3,000 gallon tanks. And there was a 6,000 gallon blender. Paul worked on these to design them so they would be just right for us. They all went on that slab behind the winery, with the cover over it.

CS: Tell me about the changes in the corporation in the later years.

HC: In the early eighties there was too much chaos. We needed somebody to straighten this out. We were already famous, so we didn't need someone to bring us fame. In fact, we needed the opposite. We wanted someone who would preserve it. We couldn't afford a Silicon Valley CEO salary, but we needed someone who could read a balance sheet. So we put it together and we came up with the solution. We had to get a retired guy as CEO.

We put the word out and within a few weeks we had several people apply. So we had this fellow come up in his jeans who had just retired from Owens-Corning, as a vice-president. Bill Curtiss. This was in 1983. I think we told him we couldn't pay much, and we said maybe 50K. And he said that was what he was thinking. Dave is not CEO anymore, but he remained on the board of directors. The new man is up there every day. Curtiss had no background in wine; he was a solid businessman.

FB: Here is a copy of the Board minutes. Curtiss became president on February 1, 1984. It was confirmed at this meeting on February 10.

SC: We asked Dave what he wanted to do, and he said he wanted to be out on the road looking for grapes. And he was also still doing PR. But Dave never really did PR. He was PR. Dave was the essence of Ridge in peoples' minds. Dave and Paul both did these tastings. They'd divide them up. I don't think that Paul and Dave chose to be at the same function. They'd work it out between themselves. Dave only wanted to be at events where he felt comfortable. He didn't want to be at fancy ones where he had to be in black tie. He wanted to be more on the growers-doers level. Paul agreed.

CR: I should add that there was a lady up there named Wilma Sturrock. Dave found her. At the time when we were looking for a CEO to run things, she was a potential candidate. She was, and is, the best manager that Ridge ever had. She took care of everything. She began to manage things before Curtiss came. But she couldn't become CEO then because Paul wouldn't have it, then. But the day-by-day running of things up there was in her hands. And is to this day. Later she was officially made President, after the sale.

FB: She had lived at Jimsomare. That's how we found her. She was a caterer for the Schwabachers. And she did it for Ridge, too. Dave wanted someone just like that.

CS: How long does Curtiss stay on?

HC: Until the sale.

CS: What were you guys doing then?

CR: Now we were meeting maybe only once every two weeks. We were still making policy decisions, like, should we sell the place.

HC: A very important thing we did in those years was to have a meeting so those two could talk. Dave and Paul. Much of what we did was to set a stage so that they could still work together in the same room. Paul wanted to be president then.

SC: He said so.

HC: He and I had several talks about this. Being the president, I told him, was not your thing. He didn't know anything about finances and all that. He had to be our famous winemaker. That was it. He finally understood it.

SC: But before Curtiss got the job he did make phone calls. He wanted the job.

HC: He saw it as an honorific.

CS: He didn't see it as a drudge job.

HC: I don't think so. He was interested in the idea of being president.

CR: Paul is a first class winemaker and a first class PR man. He is the best as a representative for Ridge. But if he were in charge of nuts-and-bolts it would have been a disaster. But no one in the industry was better at representing a high class winery than Paul Draper.

FB: Dave used to say that David Noyes was making the wines.

CR: But he was trained at it. You can't underestimate Paul in that.

CS: How much of a difference in these later years did Leo Mc Closky make?

CR: He was absolutely essential. Critical. He was our guy to look down a microscope and see a problem and tell Paul what to do about it. Paul was very dependent on Leo's expertise.

HC: We had a whole vintage that we had to re-bottle. Leo caught it. It was a Cabernet, but I'm not sure which.

CS: Later on when he's getting into this flavor thing, are you aware of what he was doing?

CR: Absolutely. Not only aware; we were the ones who authorized him doing it. And we bought him the equipment. He sold us on the idea.

HC: We let him share some of the equipment we bought for his own private consultation with others.

CS: He loved the idea of being attached to Ridge but free. He looks back on those times lovingly.

CR: He was able to get his PhD by being able to work at Ridge and doing his thing.

HC: And we couldn't really afford him full-time. It worked both ways. It was a perfect matchup.

CS: Next session we'll get that place sold.

* * * * *

June 9, 1993.

CS: There are a couple of things I want to talk about before you sell the winery. First, it's pretty obvious that among the small premium wineries Ridge was a pioneer in getting its wines on the shelves of East Coast and Midwestern bottle shops. The BVs, the Inglenooks were already there. But among the Souverains, Mayacamas, and such, Ridge was a pioneer. How did it work? I was in Chicago in the early seventies at a good restaurant. I could buy a Louis Martini or BV wine, but Ridge was the only small premium winery on their list.

FB: A very important first contact took place then. There was this fellow who came up to help pick grapes here in the early days, Tony Newcomb. He was a musician and he got a job teaching at Harvard after he went to Cal. . He always wore gloves when he picked, since he was a concert pianist. He took a couple of bottles back there with him, which he served at Thanksgiving to some important people on the Harvard faculty. So when he came out here again at Christmas time he took two cases back with him. This was in the mid-sixties, probably 1968. I could find out for sure, since he now teaches at Berkeley. So within a couple of months back there in the Boston area we were developing a good market. (FB added at a later date: Newcomb took back a 1964 Cabernet Sauvignon and a Zinfandel Rose. He dealt with the Brooklyne Mart in Boston who got wine from Classic Wine Importer, their wholesaler.)

HC: The same thing happened at Princeton, and pretty soon we were selling wine there. I think that the universities were a big part of our entry into markets, in general, here and in the east.

SC: That was our clientele at first and they became our emissaries.

CR: And there were others. There was one fellow who had a big retail store in Washington, DC. He came here and went home and ordered a lot of wine. Word of mouth got us started back there. But let me tell you that getting the wine back there was a pain in the neck.

HC: It was a process for us, learning how to do it.

CS: When are you set with a distributor in place?

FB: We had a distributor in place there in 1971, Robert Z. Haas of New York City. The first letter I have in our file setting up this wide distribution back there is in May 1971. He put wine into New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and several other states.

CR: Frederick Wildman was also very important for us back there in the early years.

HC: For a while Ridge was his only California wine. I think he took Schramsberg too.

CS: I think their first wine went on the market in 1968 or 1969.

CR: We were shipping back there before Paul came.

SC: But the very first shipments were to take care of people we knew. Wildman came after that. These people were our ambassadors. They'd go back there and tell about this little winery they had discovered. For some it was the fact that it was a little winery that really had good wine. For others I know it was a little one-upmanship.

CR: And Carl Djerassi, one of our earliest financial backers, had a bunch of wine drinkers at the American Academy of Science.

SC: But I don't think it was so much Carl as it was you guys who put it across to him. In the very beginning it was all those people who sat up on the hill on Monte Bello and loved it and the wine and took the message home.

CS: I just happened to think of a famous shipment you made back in the seventies. It was labeled "Cold Shock," or something like that. Dave gave me a couple of bottles. I think they were 1974 Cabernet.

SC: We had a bottle last Sunday night.

CS: I used that on a television show one time. They asked me to bring along some weirdo labels. (At this point Fran brought out a full bottle of 1976 Late Harvest Amador Zinfandel with the red words "cold shock" stamped on the label.

SC: This was a truckload that went cross country and there was an unexpected snowstorm and the truck was stopped and the wine froze.

FB: It didn't all freeze at once. Apparently the driver didn't realize that there was something on board that needed to be heated. So they brought the whole load back and put it in the barn. I remember that they unloaded it just as it had been in the truck and you could tell which was the most damaged, the stuff on the outside of the pile. We priced it accordingly.

SC: But we found out that the Lytton Springs Zinfandel really had been moved ahead in its ageing. We ended up selling it for a dollar or two per bottle. Then after we found out how good it was we, the owners, took loads of it home. We drank it as our everyday drinking wine. Many of the bottles cracked and exploded. But the rest of the stuff was damn good.

CS: I'll bet this late harvest Amador Zin is still OK. With its 15.4 % alcohol. But it only has .2% residual sugar.

HC: In lots of the frozen bottles there was a heavy sediment that was thrown.

FB: I have a letter here on New York distribution in 1975 that is interesting.

For the last two years Ridge has produced between 17,000 and 18,000 cases. Now we have to begin to sell that quantity. From our past experience we believe that we can sell about half that amount in California, or roughly 9,000 cases. It is fiction to read the sales figures per state for California and to apply them directly to sales potential for Ridge. But it does give some indication that cannot be ignored. We believe that if the New York market receives increased attention on Ridge wines, both from Wildman and ourselves, we should be able to develop a market for 1200 cases per year or more. We base this figure, as well as the estimates for New Jersey and Connecticut, on the statistics of the sales that Haas has been able to provide for Freemark Abbey. In New Jersey we would expect 300-500 cases per year. And in Connecticut 300 or more. In Washington DC where Calvert sells our wine and distributes it to six or seven other stores through the Les Amis wine of the month channel we made two orders totaling 665 cases averaging \$29.90 per case. In Calendar 1973 Wildman purchased 547 cases. . . .In 1974 656 cases. . . .

CS: Who wrote that.

FB: It wasn't David.

SC: That could have been Tom Heller. He was in charge of sales before Donn Reisen.

FB: I have some letters here from fairly early asking for wine. Quebec in 1970. Ohio in 1969. I'm not sure whether we shipped wines to them. Here's an order from Chicago in 1971.

HC: I recall a shipment to Alaska. We hauled up as many cases as we could get into a station wagon and they flew it out from San Francisco Airport. It was a distributor up there.

CS: What about the idea of combining shipments with other wineries? Sue mentioned that earlier.

HC: It was an economic thing. We took a lead in it and we were dealing with a warehouse across the bay in Fremont. That fellow went around and organized a lot of the small wineries who wanted to send wines to New York. He did all the paperwork. This was in the seventies. I don't recall the other wineries. But they were the David Bruce type operations.

FB: Here's a letter from Nebraska. It shows the requirements some states had. We thought Wisconsin was the worst. But Dave writes back in 1972. He says, "it's almost unbearable." It was much worse.

CS: That's strange about Wisconsin since there's a very old trade in California wine and brandy there that goes way back, particularly brandy.

HC: The bottom line was that we had to do just as much to get things through as the largest winery. There were the same forms and the same amount of work had to go into it. It was terrible. It was the same with distribution as with the IRS. And we have to go through the whole thing for fifty different states. It was unbearable.

CS: One last item on sales. How about the Advanced Tasting Program (ATP) and the Cabernet Program (CP)? That's still going strong.

HC: I think it started in 1975. The ATP was over 1,000 people getting wine before we knew it. It was really a "cash cow." The CP started in about 1980. By the time we sold the winery there were 3,000 people receiving wine every month on those two programs.

CR: And they were paying straight retail. It was really a very important part of the business. But these people also got advantages, such as first "dibs" on the rarer wines and invitations to special events such as ATP-Day in the Vineyard, and picking.

CS: Let's talk about selling the winery.
Did you have anything going before you actually made the move with the Japanese?

CR: In the early days there was some transfer of stock among the stockholders, and some sales to outside people, but there was always a question about the liquidity of the equity.

Carl Djerassi had made friends with Bill Hambrecht of Hambrecht and Quist, who had been involved with all kinds of wine deals. We thought about going public, but there were only a couple of wineries that actually had gone public at that time. Chalone was the big one here. We found that it wasn't the easiest thing to do, to go public. But we did investigate the possibility of being bought out by one of the big guys. There were approaches made in the matter. Seagram talked to us. And Hiram Walker. But that didn't go anywhere.

But it all came to a head finally at a Board of Directors meeting when we passed a resolution agreeing that we were going to try and sell.

CS: This is after Curtiss took over.

CR: Oh, yes. Way after.

CS: So it's like maybe 1985.

CR: Yes.

Carl Djerassi had all these contacts all over the world. And he had contacts in Japan with Otsuka who owned a pharmaceutical company there. Carl took it on himself to phone Otsuka to tell him that the place was for sale. And that's how it started.

CS: So it was one buyer and that worked out and that was it?

SC: No. There were others.

HC: Nestle-Beringer was interested. Paul was interested in that connection.

SC: At some time earlier, it was not at a board meeting, Bill Curtiss came to us and told us that within a certain period of time he wanted to step down. Do you remember that.

CR: But it wasn't relevant to the sale.

SC: But I remember that he brought up to us this question, "Where do you think you'll be in five years?" And that's when, at his house, I remember the meeting now, and we started thinking about looking for a buyer.

CR: But we were talking then about a way in which four families and about 100 people, the other investors, could somehow extricate themselves. Way before Curtiss was even there it was always in the back of our minds. We all had our kids and nobody wanted to stay with it. Not one of them. But he was not a crucial person in moving us in that direction.

SC: But I also remember that it was Curtiss who brought us that intermediary, John Fisher.

CR: But he brought in Fisher after we had decided to sell the winery.

CS: Did he have any connection with Djerrasi?

SC: No.

CS: Then what's the connection with the Japanese and the sale?

HC: Let me back up a bit. Getting ready for the sale, two major events happened. It started three or four years before. I'm not even sure if it was conscious. One of the people who was brought in by Mario Rosati, our lawyer, as an investor came from an investment company in Boston, Tom Stevenson. They put a lot of money in the winery and he used to come out every year. He was investing in all these electronic companies, but he thought this Ridge thing was the most fun he'd ever had. He wanted us to shift from a local accountant to one of the big companies. He said that this was very important for the future. This was several years before the sale.

CS: And he was thinking ahead to the day when it would be sold.

HC: No one said it, but the idea was to get our accounting on a firmer footing. And we did go with one of the "Big Ten" accounting firms. Then when Bill Curtiss came Tom Stevenson really had somebody to talk to who was a businessman.

CS: Was he on the board?

HC: Yes. He had put in a half million dollars from his firm. So they really got the books looking better. Then, when the possibility of selling came on, that's when John Fisher came in. He had been in on the deal when Chalone²⁶ went public. And the Callaway²⁷ deal when it was sold to Hiram Walker. So Fisher started putting stuff together for us. This was quite some time before the final sale to Otsuka, which happened very quickly at the end. This went on for the better part of a year. There was an awful lot of stuff that had to be put together to make a package for a deal, if there was going to be one. This was in 1985.

CR: And when Dick Foster agreed that it was time to sell, that moved us along.

HC: And Djerassi had his big foundation sponsoring the fine arts and he always needed money. But Tom Stevenson right to the very end was saying, "I don't know why we are selling." He did not want to get out.

Then there was a third event. There was a change in capital gains tax that was going to take place in 1987. So when it came down to the finish, the Otsuka people came to us on approximately December 12, 1986, and we told them that if the deal was done by December 31, it's a deal. If it wasn't, we start all over again. Mario Rosati said that this was probably the fastest sale of any American property to the Japanese in the history of California. There were papers being hand carried around all over the place. It was a day-to-day deal. We made it by one day. But Otsuka had said to his guys to buy it. And that was it, as far as he was concerned.²⁸

CS: Let's get the narrative down. Djerassi knows Otsuka. What happens then?

CR: Djerassi called him and Otsuka decided to come and visit us. He flew in, looked us over and decided to buy right then and there.

HC: It is also worth noting that just at that moment Ridge was getting a lot of really good publicity in Japan. When he and his crew came I can remember sitting up in Paul Draper's living room, and it was just at this time that there had been a barrage of incredible Ridge publicity. And they knew all about it. One item, we had just been selected as the wines for United prestige flights from San Francisco to Tokyo.

CR: Then he hired a lawyer and a wine consultant here.

CS: Right, this is a personal thing. He is buying it not for his company. It was to be his personal chateau.

So the real action begins in December.

FB: I remember Dave coming home after one of those meetings. He wondered if Charlie and Hew were ever going to speak to him again; He had insisted that they raise the ante another half million. And they eventually went along with him.

CS: What was the final price?

CR: About \$10,000,000. And then it was split up by shares.

²⁶ *Wines & Vines*, (October 1983): 28.

²⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7/3/1981; *Wine Spectator*, 7/31/1981.

²⁸ For the public story of the sale see: *San Jose Mercury*, 1/1/87; *Wine Spectator*, 2/15/1987; *Practical Winery*, 5/1/1987; *Wines & Vines* (February 1987): 18.

FB: Here are some items that I want to read.

In 1986 they met with Hiram Walker people talking about possible sale.

CS: That makes sense. The Callaway purchase gave them a white wine operation and they wanted a red wine place. In 1988 they bought Clos du Bois for that purpose.²⁹

HC: And Suntory was a possibility. They were involved elsewhere and Fisher was in on that.

CS: They had bought Chateau St. Jean for white wine in 1984.³⁰ They're also involved with Firestone in Santa Barbara County.

FB: Here are documents from people who may have wanted to buy the winery. One was dated June 4, 1986, and the other was August 6, 1986. Hiram Walker and Suntory.

HC: Here is a November board meeting with a list of possibilities from Fisher. Nestlé³¹, Brown and Foreman³², Korbrand³³, Moët-Hennessy³⁴, Seagram³⁵, Suntory, Hiram Walker.

FB: Here's an item from April 6, 1986. Relates to Hiram Walker interest.

I recall Carl Djerassi saying that there were several American companies that were interested. I remember hearing that they proposed building two wineries down in the valley and Paul was supposed to go around to them and be head winemaker. That didn't fly at all.

CS: What is the ownership structure at the end?

CR: At the end there were the original three- Cranes, Bennions and Rosens- and Carl Djerassi, Alex Zaffaroni, Dick Foster, and Paul Draper, and Stevenson's investment group. And Rosencranz as well. That group of interests owned well over 50%.

CS: I count nine names there.

HC: That's more like 80%.

EB: Here's a huge list of stockholders as of 1986, including all the partners' kids.

CR: It was pretty widely held for a family operation.

CS: How exactly did the transition take place?

HC: It happened on December 30.

²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5/10/1988.

³⁰ *Wine Spectator*, 9/1/1984.

³¹ Nestlé-Beringer bought Chateau Souverain in 1986. *Wines & Vines* (May 1986): 18.

³² Bought Jekel Winery in 1992, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1/12/1992; and Fetzer Vineyards the same year, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10/19/1992.

³³ Bought an interest in Napa's Sequoia Grove Vineyards in 1985, *Wine Spectator*, 12/16/1985.

³⁴ Before Robert Mondavi determined to go public in 1993, there were persistent rumors that Moët would buy that winery. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9/23/1992.

³⁵ Bought Winery Lake Vineyard in the Cameros for its Sterling operation in 1986. *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/5/1986.

CR: They wrote us a check for part of the money, and part they kept back until they had ascertained that the inventories that we had claimed in wine were correct. It was a very large inventory-- several hundred thousand gallons. Then they paid it all off later.

HC: They were very happy with what they found.

CS: Now, Paul is going to continue on.

CR: He made a separate deal with them. But he sold out completely. Neither he nor any of the rest of the staff was permitted to retain any stock ownership. Naturally, he stayed on as head of winemaking.

FB: I remember that it was December 31, New Year's Eve. It was my job to go up and collect the checks. It was when everyone was shredding paper and throwing it out the windows in San Francisco. And they kept me waiting there for an hour and a half for those checks.

CR: And we had to deposit it before the New Year for tax purposes.

CS: Nahhh! You thought, but it's the date on the instrument.

And now at that point you are just civilians, right?

CR: Absolutely.

FB: We each got five years of buying wine at half price. That's just about up.

CR: Some of us kept our ATP and CP going. Some didn't.

CS: I quit three years ago. But I am going to buy the 1992 Monte Bello Cabernet. Absolutely a great wine. And I haven't bought one since 1980.

CR: One thing to keep in mind about the sale. Otsuka did buy fifty acres on top of a mountain looking down on Silicon Valley. And he did buy a huge inventory of excellent wine. If he didn't do anything with the winery it wouldn't have been a bad deal. There were 200,000 to 300,000 gallons in the deal. And it was on the books at cost, not at market value. He knew about our reputation, and that was a good part of what he thought he was buying. He was looking ahead to the year 2,000.

CS: How old a man is Otsuka?

CR: He's in his fifties.

CS: What are you people doing now.

HC: I still work at SRI.

CS: Charlie is retired and Fran plays the cello.

FB: I have a real job.

CR: I do a little consulting from time to time.

FB: Charlie is a guru for people starting robotic companies.

CS: And Sue swims.

HC: She's in politics.

SC: I'm on the Portola Valley Town Council.

CR: She was the mayor for a while.

CS: Well, if you all don't ever do anything else, you started Ridge Vineyards. Now I have to talk to Paul Draper and a few others.

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