

Wine Lovers Go West

Minnesota winemakers are carving out their own pieces of paradise in Napa Valley | BY DAVID MAHONEY

By almost anyone's standards, Duane and Susan Hoff were living the good life in Minnesota. They had both risen to high-level executive positions at Best Buy during the electronics company's explosive growth, and were duly rewarded. (Susan being the daughter of Best Buy founder Dick Shulze probably didn't hurt.) But at some point, they realized that they had become tag-team parents. One week Susan would jet off to Manhattan for work, leaving Duane to take their two young children to dance class and football practice. The next week Duane would fly to Silicon Valley while Susan held down the home front.

"We were spending half our time apart," Duane recalls. "Eventually we said, this isn't how we want to finish raising our kids and this isn't how we want to have our marriage constructed. What we really wanted was something that we could do together, and ideally something that we could do as a family."

Wine had always played a special role in their all-too-rare moments together. "Once we put the kids down to bed, we'd pull the cork out of a bottle of wine," says Duane. "We could put the sippy cups and the Barney tapes away and actually talk over a glass of wine like adults." They had visited Napa Valley, California's most celebrated wine region, and like many Minnesotans before them, thought it might hold the missing piece to their life puzzle.

Duane had grown up in Crookston, in northwest Minnesota, where both of his uncles had farms. "The idea of everyone pitching in to help with the family farm was something

appealing to me, and I love that about Napa," he says. "You strip away all the romance from the wine business, and at its core it's farming. It's waiting on Mother Nature, it's paying attention to the vines. And that really appealed to me."

They hired an experienced local consultant who helped them come up with a business plan and to find a place that fit their needs. In 2004, they bought a property in the Spring Mountain District, uphill from the impossibly quaint town of St. Helena, fully equipped with a vineyard, a winery, and a beautiful Mediterranean home, complete with a pool and extensive gardens. On top of that, the sellers included an inventory of wine in barrels, giving the Hoff's a leg up on their business plan as well as insight into the property's potential to produce great wine.

"The goal is to make world-class wine—wine that is in the absolute top echelon—and to have fun while we're doing it," Duane says of their ambitions for Fantasca. (The winery's name was taken from a commedia dell'arte character described by one source as "sexy, smart, and unpretentious"—which, according to Duane, sums up their aspirations for their wine.)

While the Hoff's are certainly having fun—their quote-bearing corks, or "fortune corkies," are evidence of that—they signaled the seriousness of their intent last year when they hired acclaimed freelance winemaker Heidi Barrett to help them fashion their estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Russian River Valley Chardonnay. Judging by what Barrett has done for previous clients such as Screaming Eagle and Dalla Valle, Fantasca may be poised to become the next Napa cult wine.

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FANTESCA ESTATE & WINERY

mountain grown Fantasca's Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the Spring Mountain District bask in sunlight NEED NEW PHOTO CAPTION FOR IMAGES





With its nurturing climate, stellar restaurants, and a worldwide reputation for producing extraordinary wines, Napa Valley has lured people from all over the world. A number of prosperous Minnesotans have headed west to join the ranks of the more than 500 winery owners who now call the valley home.

A decade or so before the Hoffes heeded Napa's siren call, Angus and Margaret Wurtele started looking around the valley for a spot where they could spend time after Angus's imminent retirement from his long career at the helm of Valspar, the Minneapolis-based paint and coatings manufacturer. Angus had grown fond of the area during weekend trips he made to the wine country while working on his M.B.A. at Stanford. "When we came up here in those days there were only four or five wineries," he says.

After seeing several places, the Wurteles came across a vineyard-covered hill just above what is now Fantesca on Spring Mountain Road. "We said, well, this is the moment of truth," remembers Angus. "We've never found a piece of property

we've really liked—this is it. We're either going to do it or not."

They did it: The Wurteles bought the property in 1995, and hired renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta to

"This is a garden of eden here. It is a fabulous place to live." BETTY O'SHAUGHNESSY



design a home for them. When they went down to Mexico to see what Legorreta had come up with, he unveiled a model of a

house tinted deep red. "He said, 'Earth and blood,'" Angus recalls. "We said, that's not earth and blood, Ricardo—that's Cabernet." Thus the Wurteles' strikingly sculptural house that now nestles among the trees above the vineyards acquired its name: Casa Cabernet.

A few years later, a property higher on the mountain came on the market. The recently deceased (and somewhat eccentric and reclusive) previous owner had ripped out his vines several years earlier, but left behind the monastery-like winery that he had outfitted with stained glass windows, arched doors, and a crenellated tower. The Wurteles had a vineyard but no winery; here was a winery with no vineyard. The match was too good to pass up, so they purchased it in 1999, naming it Terra Valentine in honor of Angus's father (who was himself named in honor of St. Valentine, having been born a surprise twin on February 14). The restored winery now makes Cabernet Sauvignon from the Wurteles' original vineyard as well as from vines they planted near the winery.

Asked how he likes being in the wine business, Angus modestly replies: "I don't know all that much about it.

But I like hiring young people and giving them responsibility." A good example is Sam Baxter, now 33, who took over the winemaking reins at Terra Valentine from his father at the age of 26—just a year younger than Angus when he became president of his family's paint company.

Pat and Anne Stotesbery's Napa journey has traced a route similar to the Wurteles'. Pat, too, went to Stanford, and met Anne while she was attending the University of San Francisco. "We drank a lot of California wines," Pat fondly remembers. They got a toehold in Napa with the purchase of a vineyard on Mt. Veeder, on the west side of the valley, in 1996. "Like everyone else, we were just going to dip our toe into the romance of Napa—be growers, sell our fruit, and have a connection," says Pat, who worked in banking and self-storage back in his native Minnesota as well as in cattle ranching with Anne in Montana (her home state).

It didn't quite turn out that way. The next year they bought a much bigger vineyard nearby, and started to make a little wine from their grapes at a local custom crush facility. But they soon decided they needed their own winery if they wanted to (as Pat puts it) "control

our own destiny and our own chemistry."

Before long, they had sold their Montana ranch to finance the acquisition of a historic winery across the valley on Howell Mountain. Built in 1886 as the Nouvea Medoc Winery by French winemakers, it was most recently owned by Chardonnay specialists (also French). Believing that Howell Mountain was best suited for producing red wine, the Stotesberys tore out the existing vines and replanted the vineyards mostly with Cabernet Sauvignon. At the same time, they embarked on a painstaking renovation of the stone winery—renamed Ladera, the Spanish word for "hillside"—which included re-milling the original floor planks to make all of the winery's doors and window frames and restoring the original gravity-flow design.

"We really got in a little deeper than we originally planned on," Pat admits. "We bit off a lot. Suddenly we were up to our eyeballs in the wine business." Though they have a consulting winemaker, Karen Culler, Pat is intimately involved in all phases of the operation, and personally controls all the pressing of his wines. Three of their four children have also worked for Ladera at various times.

"There's no denying that this is a romantic business and everybody would like to be in

minnesota connection Napa Valley winery owners with Minnesota roots include (from left to right) Duane and Susan Hoff of Fantesca Estate & Winery. Fantesca's Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the Spring Mountain District. Anne and Pat Stotesbery of Ladera Vineyards; Betty O'Shaughnessy of O'Shaughnessy Estate Winery.

vine views LEFT TO RIGHT Grapes growing on the hills of Howell Mountain at the O'Shaughnessy Estate and Winery. Margaret and Angus Wurtele of Terra Valentine; Terra Valentine's fieldstone winery features massive handmade doors and a castle-like tower.

it," Pat says. "They think we're living a dream. But they're not here six days a week, 12 or 14 hours a day that we're here making this happen, to see the hard side of this business." Still, Pat admits, "there's a certain rock star component to being in this business that draws people into it."

When the Stotesberys sold their original Mt. Veeder vineyard in 2000, the buyer was Betty O'Shaughnessy, now the eponymous proprietor of O'Shaughnessy Estate Winery, just a few miles from Ladera. Ten years earlier, Betty and her ex-husband, who ran a glass manufacturing company in Eden Prairie, had bought a vineyard on the valley floor in Oakville, where they later built a second home. "We really wanted mountainside property, but I absolutely hate snakes, and there are a lot of them up on the mountains here," Betty confesses.

That didn't stop them, though, from looking for vineyard land up in the hills that had the potential for making a great Cabernet Sauvignon. And in 1996, they found it, high on Howell Mountain. The only problem was that it was covered in forest, and new environmental regulations made developing mountain land difficult. But by 2002, the O'Shaughnessys had managed to obtain all the necessary permits, and they began planting 36 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon vines and other Bordeaux varieties. (In the meantime, they had acquired the Mt. Veeder property, which added to their mountain holdings.)

Betty's sophisticated taste is reflected not only in her polished wines (crafted since the inaugural vintage by winemaker Sean Capiiaux) but in the winery itself. The elegantly understated Mexican stone building was designed by San Francisco architect Michael Guthrie. Credit for the stunning interior, though, goes to Minneapolis designer Tom Gunkelman, who Betty also hired to shape her Oakville home. A glass-walled, two-story wine library is surrounded by exquisite custom furniture, including a table made of red cedar salvaged from the bottom of Lake Superior. The imprint of Betty's style sense can even be seen in the spacious wine cave, with its infinity-suggesting curve and glassed-in entertainment portal.

Five years ago, Betty sold her Minnesota home and moved permanently to Napa Valley. While she admits to missing the friends she made over the 40 years she spent in the Twin Cities, she has found the valley to be a welcoming environment. "I think the people here are as great as the climate and the vegetation," she says. "There are so many people who have been successful in some other career and had a passion for wine who came to Napa Valley in the last 25 years and settled and started over."

"Earlier in my life when I was raising children and my husband and I had a business, you hardly had time to meet new people and make new friends," she continues. "But because so many of us have relocated here, we've been really friendly and reached out to one another. I've had people help me in this business enormously. You're just open to new relationships and new ways of doing things. I think change can be invigorating."

Betty sums it all up: "This is a garden of eden here. It's a fabulous place to live." **AL**



More Minnesotans in Napa

Here are four more Minnesota transplants who are now making wine in the Napa Valley.

Thomas Kenefick grew up in St. Paul, earned an M.D. from the University of Minnesota, and did his neurosurgery residency at the Mayo Clinic before moving to San Francisco and investing in Napa vineyards as a tax shelter. Since retiring from his medical practice in 2000, he's lived on his vineyard property near Calistoga and made wine from estate-grown grapes under the Kenefick Ranch label, while selling grapes to more than a dozen wineries.

Peter Kitchak built a successful commercial real estate career in the Twin Cities and won car racing trophies at Daytona and other tracks before venturing into the Napa wine business. He makes Kitchak Cellars wine at a custom crush facility in San Francisco, mostly from grapes growing around his new home at the south end of the valley. His top-of-the-line wine, called Concerto, is a Cabernet Sauvignon made from grapes sourced from the legendary To Kalon vineyard in Oakville.

Emily Miner spent her formative years living on Lake Minnetonka and Hazeltine National Golf Course before going off to college in northern California. After graduating, she sold wine for a Minnesota distributor, but was lured back to California by a college roommate who was working at a Napa winery. Emily landed a job at the Oakville Ranch winery, and ended up marrying the boss, Dave Miner, in 1999. The same year, Emily and Dave launched Miner Family Vineyards, which now produces almost 30,000 cases of wine a year.

John Skupny, who spent his teenage years in Golden Valley, worked his way up through the wine industry, holding key management jobs at Caymus, Clos du Val, and Niebaum-Coppola (now Rubicon), and serving as president of the Napa Valley Vintners Association. While he still does consulting work for other wineries, his own Lang & Reed label specializes in Cabernet Franc, a grape typically used in Napa as a minor component of Cabernet Sauvignon-based blends.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: 2005 Fantesca Spring Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005 Terra Valentine Spring Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon, 2006 Miner Family Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005 Kitchak Cellars Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005 Kenefick Ranch Napa Valley Cabernet Franc, 2006 O'Shaughnessy Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005 Ladera Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon, 2007 Lang & Reed North Coast Cabernet Franc

Wine List

Fantesca Estate & Winery makes a Cabernet Sauvignon from its Spring Mountain vineyard, and a Chardonnay made with grapes sourced from the Russian River Valley.

Terra Valentine makes a Cabernet Sauvignon from each of its two Spring Mountain vineyards as well a blend from both properties. It has also just released an estate Riesling. Other wines include Russian River Valley-sourced Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, and Viognier.

Miner Family Vineyards makes a wide variety of wines from grapes grown throughout California, including Bordeaux varietals from Stagecoach Vineyard in Napa Valley, Pinot Noir from Garys' and Rosella's vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands, and Viognier from Simpson Vineyard in Madera.

Kitchak Cellars makes a Bordeaux-style blend and a Cabernet-based rosé with grapes from its Silverado Bench estate vineyard. It also makes a Cabernet Sauvignon with grapes from

Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard and a white Rhone-style blend sourced from the Russian River Valley.

Kenefick Ranch makes Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc, all from estate-grown grapes.

O'Shaughnessy Estate Winery makes Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon and Mount Veeder Cabernet Sauvignon from its estate vineyards, as well as a Howell Mountain Merlot.

Ladera Vineyards makes a Cabernet Sauvignon from its Howell Mountain estate vineyard, another from its Lone Canyon Vineyard on Mount Veeder, and a blend from both vineyards. It also makes Merlot, Syrah, Malbec, and Sauvignon Blanc from the Two Mountain vineyards.

Lang & Reed specializes in Cabernet Franc, making a Napa Valley and a North Coast version, as well as a Cabernet Franc-heavy Bordeaux-style blend from Napa Valley grapes.

Where to Buy

If you haven't booked your flight to Napa yet, enjoy these wines right here in Minnesota:

Crave

3520 GALLERIA
EDINA

Terra Valentine
Ladera

Kowalski's

MULTIPLE TWIN CITIES
LOCATIONS

Terra Valentine
Ladera

Ruth's Chris

920 2ND AVENUE S
MINNEAPOLIS

Miner Family

Lakeside Wine

580 WILLOW DR.
LONG LAKE, MN 55356

Fantesca

Terra Valentine

Miner Family

Kenefick Ranch

O'Shaughnessy

La Belle Vie

510 GROVELAND AVE
MINNEAPOLIS

Terra Valentine

O'Shaughnessy

Kitchak Cellars

Lang & Reed

Ladera

Fantesca

Miner Family

Kenefick Ranch

Spasso

17523 MINNETONKA BLVD
MINNETONKA

Ladera

Terra Valentine

O'Shaughnessy

Surdyk's

303 E HENNEPIN AVE
MINNEAPOLIS

Ladera

O'Shaughnessy

Terra Valentine



MAP COURTESY OF CONN CREEK

Visiting the Wineries

Take a tour, taste the wine at its source, or even help with the harvest.

1. Terra Valentine: Tours and tastings (\$30 tasting fee per person) available by appointment; call 707-967-8340 or e-mail info@terravalentine.com.

2. Fantesca Estate & Winery: Not normally open to the public, Fantesca opens its doors to a select group for its all-day Hands on Harvest program (\$175 per person) on October 10; for reservations, call 707-968-0890 or e-mail info@fantesca.com.

3. Ladera Vineyards: Tours and tastings (\$25 per person) available by appointment; sign up online at www.LaderaVineyards.com

4. O'Shaughnessy Estate Winery: Open by appointment; call 707-965-2898.

5. Miner Family Vineyards: Tasting room open daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. (\$15 tasting fee per person); MinerWines.com/locate.html.

David Mahoney writes about travel, wine, and the environment for a variety of national and regional magazines. A former senior editor at *Sunset* and the editor of *Minnesota Monthly*, he was also the founding editor of *Drinks* and *Real Food* magazines.



sample this!

"The Sample Room has the mellow air of those long, lovely weekend nights, but instead of Doritos and Bud, it serves exquisite food and flights of fine wine."
— *Twin Cities Taste, Minnesota Monthly Magazine*

"Bringing great food to Mpls."
— Anthony Bourdain, Travel Channel's *No Reservations* host, chef & best-selling author

"Service is crisp, drinks are strong, the crowd is chic."
— Andrew Zimmern, *Mpls.St.Paul Magazine*

"Tapas, Minnesota-style."
— Robert J. Hughes, *The Wall Street Journal*

"It's comfort food done elegantly and in good-sized portions."
— *The Rake*

"As a neighborhood joint it's just about perfect."
— Dara Moskowitz, *City Pages*

"Did I mention that I love the concept?"
— Carla Waldemar, *Lavender Magazine*

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