

RAVENS



WOOD

Vineyard Designate Vines

Through the years, Ravenswood has had the good fortune of working with amazing vineyards. But among the many are a few that stand high above the rest for the one-of-a-kind character they display. They're so special, you wouldn't dare blend them. And just like the people that own and farm them, they have their own distinct personalities, moods and auras.

What does it take to become a Ravenswood Vineyard Designate? First, the vineyard must be in a precise location that makes it ideally suited to the varietal planted there. Second, it must have its own specific flavor characteristics and profile, which make it special. Third, the vines must be older and very low yielding. Last and perhaps most important, the vineyard must be farmed by meticulous and experienced growers.

RAVENS



WOOD



PATRICIA HERRON

*Patricia*  
"You know what, Dad? When I grow up, I want to be a farmer."

Patricia Herron and her father had just passed a nice old farmhouse in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. Patty was a restless ten-year-old who, despite a roaming mind, got straight As in school. Her father was a hardware man who knew a bit about nuts and bolts. He also knew his daughter.

"Patty," he said from behind the wheel, "I think your idea of farming mainly involves a porch and a rocking chair."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Well," he said, "do you like cows?"

"They're morons," answered Pat.

"Chickens?"

"Total idiots."

"What about wheat fields?"

"Yawn."

"Don't you think that might be a problem if you were a farmer?"

Patty just looked out the window, thinking the question over. She wasn't much given to arguing, as even at the age of ten she already had an amazing ability to understand all sides of an issue and choose the most logical course of action.

This was undoubtedly why, after she'd later spent time in a convent, served as dean of several colleges, gone to law school, managed a California firm, and developed a specialty representing divorced men who sought custody of their children, Governor Jerry Brown appointed her a judge. It also probably had something to do with the fact that, only a year and a half later, her male peers elected her presiding judge of the Seventh Circuit Court.

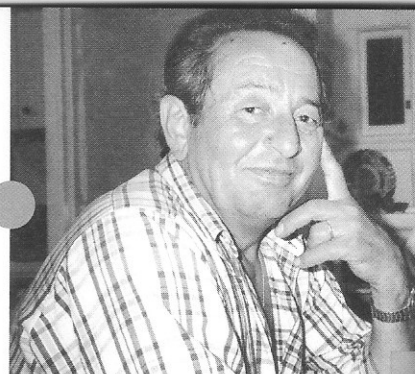
When Pat and partner Barbara bought land near Sonoma, they christened the place with a combination of their own names. Only later did they learn that "barrica" is Spanish for wine barrel. This seemed somewhat appropriate, though, seeing as how the property contained 36 acres of old grapevines. A mixture of rich alluvial deposits and volcanic soil from the surrounding mountains, it was now in pretty bad shape, but Pat learned to drive a tractor, prune the plants, and check them for curling leaves and bugs. In only a year they turned the place around.

Sometime after that, Pat and Barbara gazed out at the vineyard from the shade of their Sonoma Valley porch. "You know what?" Pat said, sipping the beautiful, blackberry-and-pepper-spiced Zinfandel that Ravenswood now made from the 100-year-old vines, "I like being a farmer."





## THE UNLIKELY ARISTOCRAT



RICARDO BELLONI

*Belloni*  
Ricardo Belloni loved people. In fact, he loved life. He loved to garden; he loved big family dinners with homemade wine; he loved the vineyard that he made the wine from. Actually, Ricardo's vineyard was like a member of his family.

Ricardo grew up near the village of Varsi in Emilia Romagna, not far from Parma. His wife Natalia came from the other side of a nearby mountain. To make a long story short, the two of them ended up in California, where Ricardo started a cabinet shop. But because he'd grown up on a farm, he also wanted a vineyard.

He found one for sale in 1971 along Wood Road on the outskirts of Santa Rosa, where it had been planted near the turn of the twentieth century. On the northern horizon you could see Mount St. Helena, which reminded Ricardo and Natalia of the mountain that separated them when they were young. Now they worked side by side every weekend—hoeing weeds, trimming suckers, tying up vines.

Sometimes, in the beginning, Ricardo couldn't find buyers for his fruit. His wasn't the kind of spot that necessarily seemed great for grapes; it was flat and sandy and flooded almost every winter, but Ricardo made wine from it every autumn and he thought it was good.

Sometime around 1991, Ricardo called a winemaker who'd become known for old-vine Zinfandel. Joel Peterson drove up from Sonoma and, somewhat to his surprise, liked what he saw. Belloni's vineyard wasn't on a "well-drained hillside," but the Russian River climate was temperate and the vines were 90 years old. Zinfandel was the primary player, but there was a classic array of accompanists—Carignane, Petite Sirah and Alicante Bouschet—that Joel had learned to love.

Because of its cool location, Ricardo's was the last Zin vineyard that Ravenswood harvested that year. Thanks to the lengthy hang time, its berrylike fruit flavors were fully developed; the riper varieties seemed to reach a plateau where they waited for others to catch up. The grapes were all picked on the same day and fermented together, resulting in a gloriously balanced, integrated wine with concentration and finesse—as soulful and aristocratic as any Zin Ravenswood had ever made.

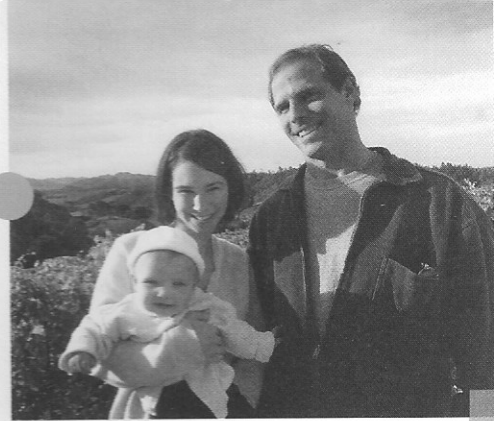
Ricardo passed away in 1997. By then the vineyard had the respect it deserved, and the Bellonis received several offers. But they decided to keep it. Natalia continues to cut the grass, while her son Danny runs the wood shop and her daughter Milena's husband Will looks after the grapes. It's still a family affair, which is how Ricardo would have wanted it.







## RIVER OF RINGS



LYNN & SCOTT ADAMS

*Big River*  
California's Russian River means different things to different people. For the original natives, it was a life-giving cornucopia of fish, game, fruits and berries. For Russian trappers, it was a vast bank of sea-otter pelts. For the Americans who came later, it was a place of enormous redwoods, a prime spot for growing apples, finally a source of summertime inner-tube inspiration.

For wine buffs, it usually means cool-climate grapes like Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. But away from the coast, the Russian River has a different character. From its source in the Mendocino County highlands, its whitewater tumbles down past Cloverdale into the Alexander Valley, then winds through the hills behind Healdsburg before passing north of Santa Rosa to assume its familiar, civilized role.

It's in the unpeopled sector of central Sonoma County that Ravenswood's Big River Zinfandel is grown. Despite the notoriety that surrounds it to the north, south, east and west, this spot remains a world of its own—a still, silent, secret realm that almost seems like something from Tolkien, existing outside time.

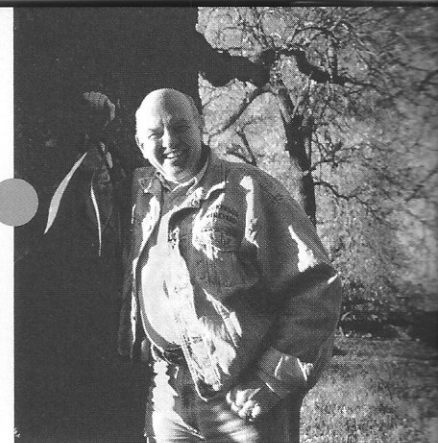
More than a hundred years ago, some enterprising and investigative Italians noticed a similarity between this place and the winegrowing regions from which they'd immigrated. They knew that hillsides had good drainage and they appreciated deep red soil, so they planted vines on the slopes above a big bend in the river—then watched them flourish. Straddling the modern-day border between the Russian River and Alexander Valley grapegrowing appellations, this unique area enjoys the benefits of both—the moderating riparian influence tempers the fog-free warmth, which is shielded from westerly winds by the looming mass of Fitch Mountain. Average daily temperatures here are five degrees cooler than those to the north and east, but five degrees warmer than those to the south and west.

Under the stewardship of Scott and Lynn Adams, Big River is the most meticulously farmed vineyard that Ravenswood has the privilege of using. It's not an exaggeration to say that it's coddled by two mothers: Nature and Nurture. Its grapes respond with healthy, exuberant flavors that, if anything, tip toward the inland direction of Alexander Valley: rich, ripe, soft, round, plush, plummy and spicy. It's an amalgam of attributes that gives new meaning to the term Russian River.





## THE RIGHT STUFF



BILL DICKERSON

Dickerson

Just before a football game at Shawnee High School, Bill Dickerson searched out his teammate Gordon Cooper in the locker room.

"Hey Gordo," Bill said. "Do you mind if I borrow your car? I left my thigh pads at home."

"No problem," Cooper said, reaching into his locker and handing Dickerson the keys.

Bill went outside, started the engine, and pulled out of the parking lot. When he came to the stop sign at the school entrance, the brake pedal went straight to the floor and the car careened out into Friday cross traffic, other vehicles swerving around him and blasting their horns.

"Why didn't you tell me it had no brakes?"

Dickerson growled as he and Cooper ran onto the playing field. Bill had gone all the way home and back using only the emergency brake.

"Oh, sorry," Cooper grinned. "That's how I drive it."

This may or not have had anything to do with the fact that Bill was later accepted to Annapolis while Gordo wasn't. But Dickerson secretly admired his friend's daredevil nature, so he wasn't especially surprised when Cooper was chosen as one of the first Apollo astronauts.

By that time, Dickerson was a Marin County psychiatrist and a serious wine buff. When he was launching his practice and Cooper was orbiting Earth, you could count good Napa Valley wineries on one hand. One of them, Dickerson noticed, had a particularly talented young assistant, so Bill bankrolled him to start his own operation. Joe Heitz proceeded to help revolutionize California wine, largely on the strength of a eucalyptus-tinged Cabernet Sauvignon grown in Martha's Vineyard (named for its owner's wife) on the west side of Napa Valley.

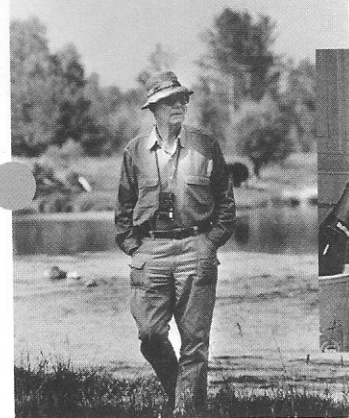
Inspired by that example, Bill bought another eucalyptus-lined vineyard close by. The old, dry-farmed, head-pruned vines were Zinfandel, not Cabernet, but that fit right into the plans of another promising young vintner of Dickerson's acquaintance. The wine that Joel Peterson produced from Bill's grapes was immediately recognized as extraordinary: bright, elegant, sumptuous and aromatic, redolent of raspberry, cedar, mint and (yes) eucalyptus.

*The Wine Advocate's* Robert M. Parker, Jr. would go on to call Ravenswood Dickerson "the Heitz Martha's Vineyard of Zinfandels." Bill, however, can't help but think of it as the Gordon Cooper of wines.





## THE ORNERY OLIGARCH OF SONOMA VALLEY



OTTO TELLER

Even to his close acquaintances, Otto Teller was larger than life—an irascible and exasperating figure who was generous to a fault, prodigious in his creative energy and unswerving in his devotion to the quality of life. “Mose,” as Otto was known to his friends, was an environmentalist and organic farmer decades before those pursuits were considered politically correct—which was fitting, since he made a kind of career out of being impolitic. Independently and unapologetically wealthy, he was a self-proclaimed “country slicker” who wore ascots to dinner and made weekly drives in his Jaguar from Sonoma to San Francisco for “luncheon.” He also donated money to the homeless, founded the Sonoma Land Trust and established a 1,300-acre wildlife refuge in western Montana. That says nothing of Otto’s personal benevolence, which was frequently accompanied by verbal barbs about the recipient’s imperfections. In short, Teller was a confounding and commanding character in the grand old style of eccentric American outdoorsmen whose like has now largely passed from the earth.

Otto’s pride and joy was Oak Hill Farm in Sonoma Valley, where he raised flowers, produce and decorative shrubs. In 1981 he expanded his domain to include Old Hill Ranch, an abandoned vineyard across Highway 12, where century-old Zinfandel vines were covered by blackberries

and poison oak and discarded bathroom fixtures. Consultants advised Otto to fumigate the property with methyl bromide and replant the vineyard, but instead he cleared the brush with a dragline, left a natural cover of grass and stimulated vine growth with foliar kelp, relying on ladybugs and praying mantises to control pests. Far ahead of his time, Teller rejected the use of chemical herbicides and fertilizers; since quality was his top priority, he saw no need to “improve” a vineyard that produced a ton of unsullied and unbelievably intense fruit per acre.

“Mose was a very unconventional man,” Otto’s widow Anne would later say. “He couldn’t stand excesses or decorations or the distractions of modern life. He knew what was good, elegant and classic and he eschewed anything that didn’t meet his standards. He wouldn’t tolerate mediocrity, and he didn’t waste his own time. He worked out a special recipe for life and he stuck to it.”

When Teller died in 1998 at the age of 90, his wizened grapevines were already older than he was. As they live on, so does Otto’s legacy. An acknowledged benchmark in California wine, Ravenswood Old Hill Zinfandel is nothing less than an ongoing incarnation of Otto: big, rich, deep, generous, complex, uncompromising, apparently immortal and inarguably inimitable.









JOHN & CATERINA TELDESCHI

Teldeschi

When World War I ended, fireworks lit up the sky over Casabiasciana. But underneath, the tiny Tuscan village was far from overjoyed. Some of its native sons were still missing in action, and although the townspeople continued to wait and hope, they gradually grew resigned to the inevitable.

Finally they staged a memorial service for Lorenzo Teldeschi, a young man who had come back from America to procure a wife from his family's village, only to enlist in the Italian army when the war broke out. It was terrible to see his young widow Eugenia holding their baby son Michele, all dressed in black.

Italians aren't especially noted for emotional reserve, so imagine the scene in Casabiasciana when, a few days after his "funeral," Lorenzo Teldeschi came walking into town. And how everyone felt a year later, when he and Eugenia had their second son, Franco.

The family eventually returned to California, where Lorenzo's father had settled in the Alexander Valley. Franco (who, upon coming to America, began calling himself Frank) planted his own vineyard and sold grapes to Italian home

winemakers in San Francisco. Sometime later, during the 1970s, a young winemaker came to their house in Dry Creek Valley and asked if he could buy some grapes for his new winery, Ravenswood. He and Frank sat down under a tree and Frank opened a bottle of his homemade wine; four hours later Joel Peterson could hardly walk, but he had a deal for a few tons of Zinfandel—a grape that, if God could grow it in only one place, He would grow it in Dry Creek Valley.

Today Frank's son John is also a grapegrower, and the Teldeschis still sell fruit to home winemakers. But a few years ago their truck blew up near the Golden Gate Bridge, so John doesn't deliver grapes to San Francisco any more. This turned out to be another break for Joel, who swears that he didn't do anything to the truck but does now produce a wine made exclusively from Teldeschi grapes. Some of the vines are 90 years old, and the grapes are the classic Italian-Californian field blend: Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Carignane.

But Zinfandel was Lorenzo's favorite, so it's mostly Zinfandel.







ANGELO & MIKE SANGIACOMO

In 1982, while driving a load of just-picked fruit to Sonoma, Joel Peterson hit a pothole while turning from Adobe Road onto Stage Gulch Road. His truck turned over in the middle of the intersection, spilling four tons of grapes onto the road.

Joel didn't panic. He just dusted himself off, called Angelo Sangiacomo and pretty soon a crew was there to pick up the grapes.

Though Sangiacomo is one of Sonoma's best-known vineyardists, he hadn't grown the grapes that ended up on the pavement. But that didn't matter to Angelo. As Ravenswood's landlord in the 1980s, he served as the winery's private emergency service.

For example, when Joel first moved into Sangiacomo's warehouse in the Carneros district (behind a woodworking shop that had once made toilet seats), he needed heavy equipment to move his fermenters and French-oak barrels. Since Joel couldn't afford a forklift, he borrowed one from Angelo—and would go on borrowing it for the next decade.

Joel was intrigued when Sangiacomo budded 20 acres of Riesling vines over to Merlot, so he bought half of the first crop in 1989. Surprise! It rained

seven times during that harvest, one of the most difficult in California history. But because of who grew it and where it came from, the '89 Sangiacomo Merlot is still drinking well today.

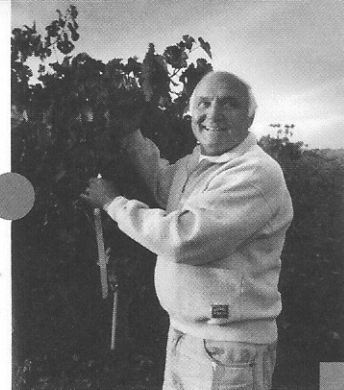
Carneros has a marginal climate for Merlot, which needs a lot of hang-time for full flavor development. But that isn't dissimilar to conditions in Bordeaux, where Merlot achieves its highest expression. Raised with care by Angelo and hand-crafted with Old World techniques by Joel, the Ravenswood Sangiacomo isn't unlike a powerful wine from Pomerol: forceful, spicy and complex, with a firm backbone behind its smoky herbs and cherries. Drinking the garden variety of Merlot that later came in with the California craze, you'd never guess that the grape has so much natural integrity.

Angelo must have concluded that his Merlot experiment was a success: today he farms 150 acres of the varietal, with much of it still going to Ravenswood. The picked grapes now have to be trucked about five miles to the winery, but the drivers have instructions to avoid the intersection of Stage Gulch and Adobe Road. Angelo isn't Joel's landlord any more—and besides, the Sangiacomos have other things to do with their time.





## FROM SOLDIER FIELD TO SONOMA VALLEY



DICK GREGORY

*Gregory*  
When Dick Gregory was a \$5,000-a-year rookie running back for the Chicago Bears, he and his teammates staged a three-day strike against the team's owner, George Halas. Their labor demands were:

"1. Pay for our laundry. 2. Buy us game shoes. 3. If you cut us, buy us a bus ticket home."

Halas's answers: "1: No. 2: No. 3: We'll pay your way home, but not on the bus. The Burlington Railroad is cheaper."

Gregory played in the NFL before football helmets had facemasks. Players stayed in on both offense and defense, and still had to have a second job during the offseason.

All of which was fine with Dick Gregory, who was just happy to be there. Growing up in Montana, Gregory had to be tough; before he was even eleven, his father, brother and aunt died in drowning accidents—and Dick had responded by going to work as a lifeguard. Years later, when doctors removed one of his kidneys, Gregory told them to make the incision through his abdomen because vineyard work put a strain on his back.

Grapegrowing was supposed to be Dick's "retirement." When he quit working in the Seventies, he'd bought ten acres southeast of Sonoma that had been planted in 1945 with Cabernet Sauvignon. The weeds were higher than the vines, so Dick and his family coaxed the bushes upward, installed drip irrigation and changed from cane to cordon training. In 1983 they planted five acres of Merlot and in 1987 Ravenswood started buying the grapes.

From them comes a New World version of an Old World-style wine. In warm years the cedar-tinged Cabernet comes forward, and in cool ones the Merlot adds softness to the center. It's all made distinctive by a dollop of mint, wafted in by cool Carneros breezes from a eucalyptus grove next door. As a whole, the package is unique—bright, lean and complex, but also friendly, flavorful and approachable.

If it sounds like the guy who grows it, maybe that's not a coincidence.







# PRINCE LA LA AND THE PICKBERRY PLACE

## A BEAUTIFUL MARRIAGE



LORNA & CRIS STROTZ

*Pickberry*  
In college Lorna went out with a lamé-wearing singer who called himself Prince La La. Eventually he dropped out of school to perform with the Sex Change Band, leaving Lorna in some confusion. Luckily, La La's roommate Cris was a talented therapist. Not long after he and Lorna graduated, they got married, moved to San Francisco and had a couple of kids.

In the Haight-Ashbury, where they first lived, it was the Summer of Love. But all Cris and Lorna knew was that they hated the fog that blew in from the Pacific Ocean every day. Exploring north of the Golden Gate for a sunnier spot, they found a place on the north side of Sonoma Mountain and began spending weekends there in a trailer, building a cabin and collecting blackberries. Before long, their two toddlers started calling it "the pick berry place."

Since Cris was a home winemaker, pretty soon they started thinking about planting grapes. People suggested French Colombard or Sauvignon Blanc for high yields, but Cris and Lorna suspected that, on a north-facing mountainside, high yields were as likely as a longterm relationship with a

lamé-wearing singer named La La. Instead they planted Chardonnay and, because Cris had a weakness for Bordeaux, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. When the vines started producing, Cris and Lorna called a local vintner who wanted to make a "Meritage" wine from a single vineyard of Bordeaux-style grapes.

Joel Peterson already knew that good Cabernet came from the north side of Sonoma Mountain, and he saw that Cris had a trellising system that spread out the crop and kept clusters small. The grapes, grown in shallow rugged soil, had enormous intensity, complexity and concentration.

Ravenswood's first "Pickberry" wine was called "one of the most important wines of the vintage" by Wilfred Wong and received a 90+ rating from Robert M. Parker, Jr. From the first, it has been Ravenswood's most prestigious bottling, which is saying something.

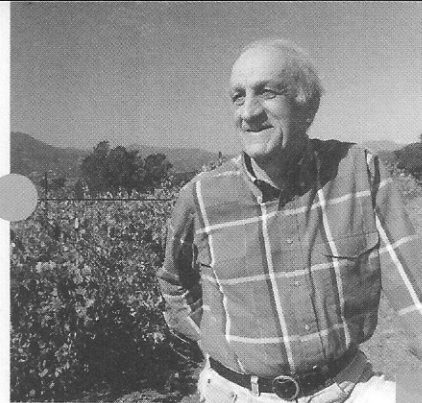
You could also say that we owe its existence to a sex change, but that might be counterproductive.





# THE TRANSFORMATION OF DOMINIC PAINO

(OR: DON'T CALL IT SALINAS)



DOM PAINO

Rancho Salina

In the beginning, Dom Paino didn't know anything about growing grapes. His parents had come to America from an island north of Sicily, and after they settled in Boston, his father managed a supermarket while his mother worked in a shoe factory. When Dom graduated from Harvard business school, it was the ultimate fulfillment of an immigrant family's dream.

Dom went into real estate development, helping create the Embarcadero Center in San Francisco. Some of his Harvard classmates also worked in California, and one of them wanted to start a winery specializing in Bordeaux-style grapes. Dom may have been ignorant about viticulture, but he did know a lot about real estate, and from the first moment he visited the site—Moon Mountain above Sonoma Valley—he was bullish about the idea. When he was invited to become a partner, he said yes.

Dom's group founded Carmenet Vineyards, a first-class operation that helped pioneer the "Meritage" style of California wine. Ultimately, the company went public and the partners decided to liquidate their holdings; by that time, though, guess who found himself reluctant to leave.

Turned out Dom had fallen in love with vines. He now knew how to farm on hillsides, and he knew that Moon Mountain—a thousand feet above

sea level, but right in the path of San Pablo Bay breezes—was a great place for Bordeaux-type grapes. He started searching the vicinity for a similar piece of property, finding an utterly spectacular one on an adjacent ridge with a bird's-eye view of Sonoma. A former quarry for cobblestones, it was empty of water, electricity, or roads, but since Dom was a developer, that didn't faze him at all.

Today Dom farms forty acres of meticulously maintained Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. To make wine from it, Ravenswood harvests and ferments each varietal separately, combining them only later and barreling the blend for two years. As rich in texture as in flavor, the bottled wine is full of dark fruit, herbs, smoke, tar and spice. Structured like a classic Margaux, it's built for the long haul (ten years or more of aging) but is lively and luscious when young.

Through all the decades and developments, Dom didn't forget that his fortunes changed when his parents immigrated before he was born. But neither did he dishonor the importance of his family's roots. When he obtained his own piece of earth, he called it Salina—the island that his parents came from, whose name also echoes early California. A bridge between the Old and New Worlds, it's a perfect reflection of the wine it produces.



