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V. SATTUI



V. Sattui Winery

The family dream comes true

CHRISTOPHER SAWYER is tasting coordinator for WINE X magazine, as well as a sommelier and wine consultant. He lives in Sonoma County. He may be contacted at feedback@vwm-online.com.

In the bustling California wine industry, visionaries can be seen on a daily basis. Some are entrepreneurs that take big risks to help start wineries with great potential. Others are maverick winemakers who create delicious trends that consumers will follow for decades. And, we can't forget the great innovators that develop new equipment and techniques to help grow premium grapes and craft world-class wines. Point is:

the common thread that links all these unique individuals together is a shared passion for wine and an unquantifiable sense of bold determination that drives each of them to make their dreams become reality.

In Napa Valley, one of these courageous characters is Daryl Sattui, an enterprising entrepreneur who set out to fulfill a dream of rekindling a family tradition started by his great-grandfather Vittorio, an Italian immigrant, who started making wine in San Francisco in the 1880s.

As a child, Sattui saw his great-grandfather on numerous occasions and fondly remembered the sights and smells of his family members sipping red wine in the old musty cellar and telling stories of the glory days before V.

Building a Golden Empire!

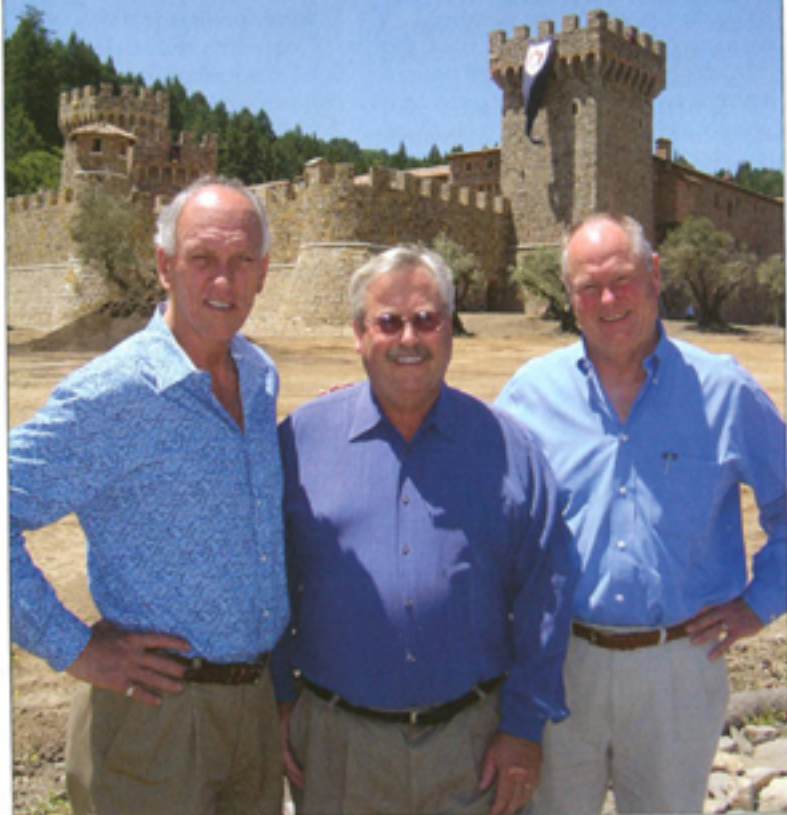
Sattui Wine Company was shut down by Prohibition.

While growing up in Marin County, these vibrant images stuck in Sattui's mind and eventually he made a promise to himself to start the next chapter of the family's rich history at any cost.

To prepare for this epic journey, Sattui spent two years traveling in Europe after college and eventually began working as an apprentice at a variety of different wineries after moving to Napa Valley in 1972. During this exciting and very informative period of his young life, Sattui kept his eyes open for a plot of land to call his own.

In 1975, he found a charming piece of property featuring a walnut orchard and a small house located off Highway 29, 1 1/2 miles south of the quiet town of St. Helena. And despite having barely enough capital to make it through the first year, he purchased the property and immediately began preparing to make the first wines bearing the classic V. Sattui label since 1921.

Key players at V. Sattui Winery, from left: Daryl Sattui, owner and founder; Brook Painter, director of winemaking; and Tom Davies, president. In background, Sattui's newest project, Castello di Amorosa, a medieval-style castle and winery near Calistoga.



As expected, the first year was not easy. Tight on funds, he enlisted the help of investors with construction

skill to help him complete the original winery by early 1976. And as harvest approached, he scrapped together enough money to buy 45 barrels, a small general purpose pump and 100 feet of hose; while the crusher-stemmer, wood basket press and the rest of the equipment he needed were rented to cut down on expenses.

When the tumultuous first harvest was finished, many of the wines were stored inside the small house



At Castello di Amorosa, the beautiful frescoes on the walls of the Grand Hall were painted over a two-year period by two artistic brothers from Italy.



The barrel room at Castello di Amorosa.

on the property. As a result, Sattui spent many nights sleeping on the floor of the winery. And despite working 12-hour shifts seven days a week, he often laid awake thinking about the future and concocting ingenious plans to get the wines into the hands of consumers. It was during this critical period that the classic V. Sattui *modus operandi* was fine tuned and made ready for action.

The first part of this master plan was a commitment to put high-quality wine in every bottle the winery produced, regardless of the vintage, variety, or the price point. While this idea was safe and practical, the second part of the equation was much more risky. It was based on selling wines directly to consumers and eliminating the need to use distributors or brokers.

By cutting out the middle man, Sattui believed the better price margins would save the necessary funds needed to expanding the winery and, hopefully, over time create an intrigu-

V. Sattui Winery, Information with an Italian Twist

Owner: Daryl Sattui

Date Founded: 1975

Case Production: 40,000 cases, all sold direct to consumers.

Key Players: Daryl Sattui, founder and owner; Tom Davies, president; Robert O'Malley, vice president, Brook Painter, director of winemaking; Larry Bradley, vineyard consultant, David Béjar, vineyard manager, Lori George, tasting room manager.

Vineyards: 300 acres and long-term vineyard contracts with farmers in specialized wine growing regions in Northern California.

Wines produced: Whites: chardonnays, sauvignon blanc, sémillon, riesling, gewürztraminer, muscat, Marsangier (a Rhone-style wine made with marsanne and viognier), and sparkling wines made *methode champenoise*. Pinks: white zinfandel, dry rosato, and a very popular rosé made with Napa Gamay. Reds: cabernet sauvignon, merlot, zinfandel, sangiovese, and pinot noir. Dessert wines: include a sweet muscat, a limited-bottled Angelica, a brandy fortified Madeira, and a vintage port.

Brands: V. Sattui, Estate and Vineyard Designates, Castello di Amorosa, and Monastero di Coriano (import).

Visitor Center: V. Sattui Winery is located on a 38-acre parcel in the center of Napa Valley along Highway 29 at White Lane, about 1 1/2 miles south of St. Helena, California. Visitor Center hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily (until 5 p.m. November-February). Special tastings and tours are available by appointment. Website: www.vsattui.com

Notable associations: Napa Valley Vintners & Growers, Family Winemakers, ZAP, and the Fish Friendly Farming Association.

For more information about the castle and winery, visit www.castellodiamorosa.com.

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see listing on page 121



Peering through the vineyards at Castello di Amorosa, a magnificent medieval-style castle and winery developed by Daryl Sattui near Calistoga.

ing niche for the brand. Of course, that was just theory.

In an exclusive interview with *Vineyard & Winery Management*, Sattui told me that most of his friends thought he was crazy. "I remember the doubters saying that the winery would never survive if the wines were not available in restaurants and retail shops. I like to think that they obvious

didn't know enough about my deep Italian roots!"

Despite all this criticism, the winery sold 1,800 cases from the debut vintage and actually made a small profit. Besides making the wine, Sattui's other duties included doing the bookkeeping and tax returns, hiring new employees, buying new retail products, and keeping the grounds around the winery clean and tidy. "The first year, the \$2,640.00 we made in profit was by far the hardest money I ever worked for in my life!" said Sattui, 65, with a smile.

As the cash flow continued to increase over the following decade, the showmanship of Sattui's master plan began to emerge. To generate extra revenue, he sold specialty cheeses, meats, salads and other food items at the gourmet delicatessen that was built next to the tasting room. To attract passing motorists, he purchased picnic tables from Sears for \$94 apiece and placed them on the expansive lawn shaded by walnut and



Photographed on location at the Grigich Hills Estate, Bathurst, California.

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—Mike Grigich and Violet Grigich, Grigich Hills Estate

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oak trees. And to maximize revenue in the off-season; he kept the doors to the winery open on Thanksgiving and New Year's.

More importantly, Sattui also taught his staff to smile and treat all visitors with respect. "Loyal customers are priceless assets," he said. "It's not us and they, but all of us together." Needless to say, these fresh ideas

eventually led to financial success and brand loyalty from consumers across the country.

As the popularity of V. Sattui wines began to rise, much of the revenue was used to construct the stone winery completed in 1985. Modeled after 19th century wineries in Europe, the building features a majestic stone tower, a state-of-the-art winemaking facility,

an underground aging cellar, and an expansive tasting room, cheese shop/deli and a boutique gift shop.

Today, this glorious structure and all the contents within its walls are visited by over 400,000 consumers each year. And despite being one of the most popular Napa Valley destinations, it still has a cult status because it has held true to the code of ethics that selling directly to consumers can work. In short, it's the true Italian heritage in action!

BUILDING A GOLDEN EMPIRE

Over the past two decades, Sattui has continued to build his family-owned empire. In Italy, he purchased Monastero di Coriano, a thousand-year-old Tuscan monastery in the famed Chianti district near Siena, where he began making wines and olive oil that he now exclusively sells at V. Sattui Winery.

Around the same time, he also purchased a prime piece of real estate in Napa Valley near Calistoga. Today, this beautiful property is home to Castello di Amorosa, an epic, medieval-style castle and winemaking facility that took 14 years to design and build.

But despite these newer projects, Sattui has not lost his focus on making the best wine possible at V. Sattui. To ensure this competitive edge, he steadily began purchasing new vineyards in premium growing areas; updated the winemaking equipment on a regular basis; and assembled a solid staff that believes in the vision he started in 1975.

"We want everyone to share the benefits of success, whether it is the workers that help make the wines, the ones that sell them or ultimately each consumer that falls in love with what's inside the bottle," said Sattui.

Over the past five years, these new vineyard resources and updated improvement in the cellar have helped the winery earn hundreds of gold medals at the top wine competitions in the United States. For example, the winery won nearly 80 gold medals in 2006, including five double golds and the prestigious "Winery of the Year" award at the California State Fair.

The winning streak has not stopped this year either. The latest example was seen first-hand at the West Coast Wine Competition, where the wines won 8 golds and the vaulted Sweepstakes

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Award for Best White Wine for its incredibly complex V. Sattui 2006 Off-Dry Johannisberg Riesling (\$18.25). V. Sattui President Tom Davies says the winery uses this feedback from these important competitions as an important parameter for what they are doing right and what needs to be improved.

"Our goal is to showcase the fact that we make great wines on a con-

sistent basis, regardless if the wine is being sipped by a guest visiting our tasting room or by a professional wine judge that is itching to find out whose bottle they are tasting blind," said Davies, a loyal employee at the winery since 1985.

VINEYARD DEVELOPMENT

Interestingly, over the first decade the



majority of V. Sattui wines were made with sourced fruit. But in 1985, the focus changed for good when the winery purchased a 34-acre vineyard adjacent to the property and renamed it Suzanne's Vineyard, after Daryl's wife.

In the meantime, the winery's viticulture portfolio continued to expand with new purchases of the Carsi Vineyard in Yountville, the Henry Road Ranch in Carneros, and two unnamed sites in Mendocino's Anderson Valley and Solano County. Today, the 300-plus acres of estate vineyards account for nearly 85 percent of the grapes the winery uses.

In addition to having more grape varieties to work with, the winery has developed a new vineyard management program that mixes sustainable, organic and green farming practices. The end result is higher quality grapes that possess more intensive flavors and better varietal characteristics than those grown in more conventionally farmed vineyards that favor the use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers.

These new applications include: planting cover crops of legumes, oats and clover between the rows to attracting beneficial insects in winter; working with Brassica, a blend of mustard and cabbage, to detour nematodes and other soil borne pathogens from the roots of the vines; spading instead of disking between the vines to maintain the health of the soil; and using soil sensors and pressure bombs to monitor the conditions affecting individual blocks leading up to harvest.

In addition to implementing a large-scale water conservation regime, the winery is also a proud member of

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Many of these eco-friendly applications were put into play by vineyard consultant Larry Bradley, who oversees the development, planting and maintenance of these vineyards. After graduating from UC Davis with degrees in Reusable Natural Resource Science and Viticulture, Bradley quickly emerged on the scene as vineyard manager at Flowers Winery and Camp Meeting Ridge Vineyards on the Sonoma Coast from 1992 to 1997. He has also gone on to consult for many other wineries, including Clos du Val, Cain, Elyse, Falcor, Spencer Roloson and Naggiar Vineyards, as well as fine producers in France, Australia and Tasmania.

Another key player is David Béjar, the on-site vineyard manager. In addition to keeping a close watch on each vineyard throughout the year, Béjar

dedicates a large amount of time to teaching the winery's year-round staff new techniques to use in the vineyards. This includes the introduction of new ways to monitor the growth of the vines, efficient methods of pruning, helpful tips on making critical picking decision, and mastering the techniques of using the ½ ton picking bins—a more recent addition to the winery's harvest repertoire.

The end result has been increased grape quality with higher yields; in some cases 3 tons instead of 1 ½ tons. This extra amount of juice has also allowed the winery to hold back from releasing wines until they are ready. In short, it's a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Besides working with



At Castello di Amorosa, one of the new Sirio Aliberti open-top fermenters equipped with a TC-1 Tanknet Controller designed by Sonoma County-based Acrolon Technologies.

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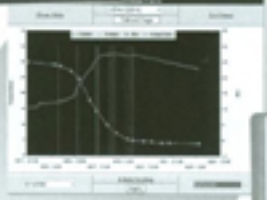
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estate fruit, the winery has also established long-term relationships with farmers in Napa Valley and other special wine growing regions. As a result, many of the unique flavor profiles from these sites have become part of the winery's popular vineyard designate program.

The latest releases include: cabernet sauvignons from the Morisoli and Preston vineyards in Napa Valley; zinfandels from Pilgrim Vineyard in Lodi, Duarte Vineyard in Contra Costa County, Black Sears Vineyard in Howell Mountain, Ramazatti Vineyard in Dry Creek, Crow Ridge in Russian River Valley; and cool-climate selections of merlot and pinot noir from the Henry Ranch in Carneros.

NEW WINEMAKING APPROACH

As the new vineyards came on-line, the winery began looking for another accomplished leader with an exceptional palate and blending skills to accompany veteran winemaker Rick Rosenbrand, who joined the company

in 1984. In April 2005, this long search ended when they hired Brooks Painter as the new Director of Winemaking.

With an impressive résumé that includes stints at Robert Mondavi Oakville and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in Napa Valley, Leeward Winery in Texas, and Felton Empire Winery (now Hallcrest) in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Painter says his style is focused on capturing the "sweet spots" that express the best characteristics of grapes grown at each site.

In general, he prefers to handle all grapes as gently as possible. With reds, this often involves whole-cluster pressing, cold settling, using well-paced punch-downs that allow for gentle extraction, and paying close attention to balancing the solids.

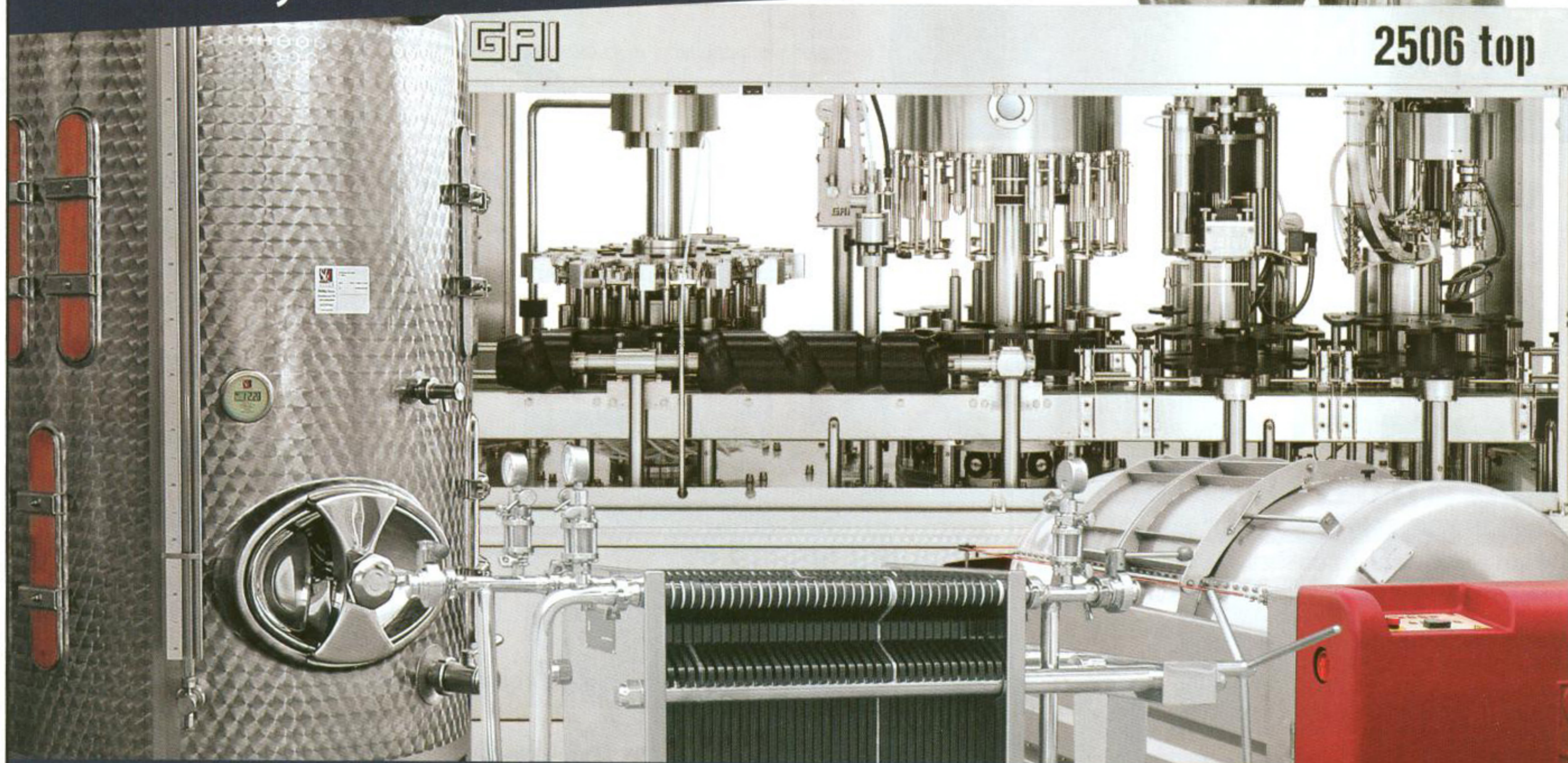
"To make great wines, some lots require more detail and creative approaches. Others are just










Example of a TC-1 Tanknet Controller designed by Sonoma County-based Acrolon Technologies, attached to the new open-top fermenters used at V. Sattui and Castello di Amorosa wineries.

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fun right out of the gate," says Painter. "In each case, my focus is to create flavorful wines that make people say 'I just finished a glass of V. Sattui, now give me another!'"

To allow the winemaking team to showcase the generosity of fruit flavors, an arsenal of new open-top fermenters with electronically-controlled punch-down devices and long, shiny upright-standing stainless steel fermentation tanks have been added at the V. Sattui and Castello di Amorsosa facilities. While he admits that the wide variety of shapes and sizes of these tanks was not cheap, Painter considers each one of them a "mandatory luxury" at harvest.

"Should Mother Nature decide to throw heat spikes, rain, or other forms of climatic chaos in our direction, having extra tanks at our disposal is an important benefit that you can't put a price tag on!"

In addition to being jacketed and temperature controlled, many of these new tanks are also equipped with

computerized Tanknet Controllers. Designed by Sonoma County-based Acrolon Technologies, these hip high-tech devices allow the winemaking team to monitor and control the fermentation status of each batch either in the cellar or from off-site locations via the internet.

As an additional bonus, the records from each controller can be saved to chart the fermentation patterns of each batch, how new yeast strains worked, reduction rates of brix levels, and much more.

Other updated improvements include: more laboratory trials used to test pH, alcohol, and potential bacteria levels in isolated batches; experimenting with new yeasts to preserve delicate aromas in the whites and dense fruit notes in the reds; working with micro-oxygenation units to balance or soften tannins; and using tightly sealed TranStore containers to limit potential oxidation problems when transporting wines from the winery to the castle.

AGING REDS AND WHITES

Once fermentation is complete, Painter pairs each lot with the appropriate style of integrating oak designed to add extra layers of complexity to the wine without masking the fruit. With reds, for example, he uses a mixture of expressive French and American barrels from Demptos, Adalie, Francois Freres, World Coopers and other specialty producers.

More recently he has also started using Grande Reserve barrels from Tonnellerie Boutes de France, a Bordeaux-based cooperage, with the cabernet sauvignon program. These limited production barrels are slowly toasted over low-fire, which Painter feels helps showcase the purity of the fruit and adds more structure to the finished product.

"Personally, I'm much more into promoting the expressive flavors of the fruit, rather than hiding it behind a big hit of smoke or chocolate," says Painter, who ages nearly 1,600 barrels in the 800 linear feet of naturally humid caves below the castle.

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New Allier and Vosges oak barrel from Demptos with medium toast. V. Sattui uses this for the new pinot noir program with fruit from the Henry Road Ranch in Carneros.

With whites, the winery typically uses 40% to 50% new oak with full or partial malolactic fermentation for the four separate chardonnays it produces. They also make two distinct styles of sauvignon blanc. The first is the Vittorio's Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, which spends a small amount of time in neutral oak to add notes of creaminess, texture and complexity. The second is the bright and sassy Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc, which is blended with a small amount of *sémillon* and aged in stainless steel to preserve the freshness and crisp acidity.

V. Sattui is also one of the top California producers of Riesling and has worked with the noble grape variety since 1977. Today, the majority of the fruit they use is grown in the cooler sections of the Henry Ranch, Carsi, and the newer vineyard in Anderson Valley.

When asked how he made the award-winning 2006 Off-Dry Johannisberg Riesling, Painter said the trick was to spotlight the juicy flavors from start to finish. To do this, he used

yeast strains that were tolerant of cold temperatures between 48 to 52 degrees in order to retaining the lovely exotic flavors and a wonderful level of balanced acidity.

"In terms of continuity, the aromatic notes that you get in the nose must somehow continue all the way to the palate. If done right, chances are you'll end up with a bright, fruit-driven wine that is seductive, exciting, and able to dazzle the senses throughout the entire mouth!" said Brook, who also makes a drier styles of riesling, gewürztraminer, *sémillon*, and a newer Rhone-style blend of marsanne and viognier called Marsangnier.

On the sweeter side, the winery has also established a solid cult following for its tasty dessert wines that include: an expressive blend of fresh muscat juice and alembic brandy

called Angelica, a late harvest muscat; an Old World-style port aged for 24 months in cask; and solera-style madeira aged for ten years in Rieger barriques.

FOCUS ON CUSTOMER OUTREACH

Today, the 40,000 cases of wines made at V. Sattui are sold to a diverse cross-section of consumers with many different palates. For that reason, the winery has developed an interactive program designed to make sure novices, connoisseurs, expert wine drinkers, and everyone in between all feel welcome.

At the Tasting Room, for instance, guests can sample a wide assortment of new releases free of charge. In the Reserve Room, located in the cellar below the winery, they can taste higher-end wines for a nominal fee. And for the big-time wine fans looking for more adventure, members of the exclusive Cellar Club can taste older vintage wines, ultra-premium releases, and newly made wines straight from the barrel.

V. Sattui was also the first winery in Napa Valley to sell futures. Today, this exciting program is responsible for 8% of the red wines they sell. "The demand is so high, that if we kept the futures program open we'd essentially



Row of stainless steel barrels used for aging white wines and blending at V. Sattui Winery near St. Helena, Napa Valley.

Castello di Amorosa: The Newest Hot Spot in Napa Valley

Okay, here's the situation. It's the early 1990s and you're an ambitious Italian-bred entrepreneur living in Napa Valley. You own a successful winery with thousands of devoted fans and you just purchased a 175-acre parcel of prime real estate in the hills near Calistoga with a vintage three-story house, a lake, ancient redwoods, and other natural amenities. So what's your next move?

To many, it would be time to settle down, possibly sell off the winery, or simply retire. But Daryl Sattui isn't a typical guy. Instead, he took the alternative route and spent the next 14 years designing and building himself a castle.

Modeled after a 14th century castle in Tuscany, Castello di Amorosa is now a reality.

Opened to the public this past April, the magnificent stone structure and operational winery is a true architectural feat that took an estimated \$30 million to complete.

During my recent visit to Napa Valley, I stopped by to see this bold undertaking firsthand. And to be honest, it didn't take long before I was completely in awe of the magnitude of the castle and the brilliant attention to detail that is spread through the 121,000-square feet of space that includes seven floors, 107 rooms, and a seemingly endless labyrinth of passageways.

For starters, the outside of the massive stone fortress is highlighted by medieval-style accoutrements, including five towers with battlements, a dry moat, a drawbridge with heavy chains forged by hand, gargoyles and wrought-iron sconces, 100-year-old olive trees and vineyards flowing over the rolling hillside.

Once inside, the hour-long tour starts at the monastic-style tasting room and covers more than a mile through the castle. On the upper levels, you can see the Great Hall, which features a 22-foot vaulted ceiling and colorful frescos painted on the walls; a monastic-style chapel; charming outdoor patios; and a professional kitchen big

enough to make a feast for the masses.

Then it's down to the underground levels, where the guests weave through an underground maze of cellars that can hold up to 4,500 barrels. After passing by the dark and musty rooms vaulted with thick iron doors used for storing library wines, another main attraction is the torture chamber fully equipped with an antique iron maiden and other ghoulish devices used in the Middle Ages. In short, not a penny was spared to make the castle truly authentic!

To separate Castello di Amorosa from V. Sattui winery seven miles away, the wine program is centered on Italian-style wines. Tasty examples include: Pinot Bianco, a bright, crisp and expressive wine made with

95% pinot bianco and 5% pinot grigio grapes grown in cool region of Carneros; La Castellana, a full-bodied yet rather elegant Super-Tuscan style blend made with cabernet sauvignon, merlot and sangiovese; Il Baroni, a bold and powerful reserve-style cabernet sauvignon; and Fantasia, an intriguing and rather seductive red sparkling wine modeled after the classic style of Brachetto d'Acqui made in the Piedmont region in Italy.

In addition to other current releases of pinot grigio, chardonnay, moscato and gewürztraminer; there are also plans in the works to plant new vines at the base of the castle to make an estate version of primitivo—the Italian cousin of zinfandel.

Aside from becoming the hottest new tourist attraction in Napa Valley this summer, the castle is also used for private parties, weddings, and a number of important community fundraisers.

When asked about this enormous project, Sattui said his ultimate goal is to give each visitor an experience they will not forget. "Every time I walk through the hallways of the castle to get to my office, I know I made the right decision to go for it no matter how much it cost!"



The main entrance Castello di Amorosa, the hottest destination in Napa Valley, includes a drawbridge and a dry moat.



The active monastic-style tasting room at Castello di Amorosa, near the Diamond Mountain district in Napa Valley.

become a non-profit winery!" joked Sattui.

In addition to purchasing wines at the tasting room and over the internet, a large percentage of the new releases are sold through the popular Monthly Wine Club program that features many options to choose from: wines and rosés, dry whites and reds, all reds, and the more expensive Premiere Club, which focuses on limited releases and vineyard designate wines.

When shipped, each selection is accompanied by an informative sheet that explains the viticultural and enological aspects of the wine, with special recipes and food pairing suggestions.

According to Davies, it is not uncommon for a husband and wife to belong to separate clubs. "It's our policy to encourage all of our customers to buy a selection of different wines," he said. "Life's just kind of boring when you drink the same wine all the time!"

To generate additional revenue, the winery has also established a solid reputation for being a gracious host to private parties, weddings, corporate meetings, and a pleasurable series of annual events geared towards further educating consumers about the beauties of wine and food. Examples include: the relaxed and casual Festa Italiana party in July and the more formal Harvest Ball in September, which features guest chefs from around the world pairing fine cuisine with specialty wines, including large-format bottles.

Since the winery sells direct, they do not need to advertise in magazines or other publications. Instead, they send out a glossy quarterly newsletter to alert wine club members and the thousands of other consumers they have in their database about new releases, current winery gossip, the staff's favorite picks, and information about all upcoming events.

"Our goal is to make people feel comfortable with their surroundings when they visit the winery and have them leave here already thinking about the next time they can return," said Davies. "We like to think this as a wonderful opportunity for all of us and the brand to mature together."

ESTABLISHING WORKER LOYALTY

In conclusion, as much as he'd like to take credit for the accomplishments at the winery, Sattui is humble enough to say that the company would not be where it is today without the help of a loyal staff. Consequently, when hiring new employees, Davies, Vice President Robert O'Malley and he all look for traits that make each potential staff member special and enthusiastic about being part of the team.

"If you are an average worker, then you won't last very long here at this winery," says Sattui. "You can't train for character, either it's there or it's not!"

Once hired, the winery helps build and nurture a familial relationship between employees in all departments by holding monthly meetings where they give out awards for achievements and brief everyone on new programs. To prove everyone is important, they pay bonuses to warehouse workers for not making shipping mistakes and

to vineyard workers for their unsung contributions to winning gold medals. In addition to the eco-friendly focus on recycling bottles, plastic goods, paper and cardboard, they also pay employees \$1 per day to ride their bike to work, \$4 per day for carpooling, and offer extra cash incentives to encourage workers to lose weight and quit smoking.

As a result, more than half of all the employees have been with the company more than five years, many longer. "If the company does well, the people do well," said Sattui. "This concept is what drives everyone to ask themselves how they can do better and make it happen!"

Questions or Comments?

Please send your replies to feedback@vwm-online.com.



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