

V.2

LOAM Baby

A Wine
Culture
Journal

THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS ISSUE



HATERS

LOAM

Baby

A Wine
Culture
Journal

THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS ISSUE

Opening Letter

My Dear Reader,

Understanding the wines of the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation takes patience and a certain appreciation for...well...mountain fruit. For it is that word...Mountains...that is the most important word in the name of this appellation.

Fruit grown at high altitudes – above the fog line and in poor soils – seems to give us wines of structure, tension and energy. If these sound like ephemeral descriptors, it's because they are. I couldn't walk you over to a squashed grape under a microscope and say, "See? Right there. There's structure, there's tension, and there's energy!" Have a glass of zinfandel or cabernet from Ridge, a pinot noir from Rhys, Mount Eden, Alfaro...and what you'll experience is structure, tension and energy. You'll experience other things as well, to be certain. If this holy trinity of enological virtues appeals to you, then the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation awaits you. If you have never had a wine from this appellation, then I envy you the epiphany you'll experience upon enjoying that first glass.

It cannot be coincidental that two of our nation's greatest living vignerons live and work in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Paul Draper and Jeffrey Patterson (both featured in this issue) are arguably two of the most focused, consistent, truly site-driven winemakers alive today. Both men live and work at their estate vineyards, and both are widely believed to be gifted beyond measure.

It begs the question then: If such great wines...historic wines, even...(Ridge's 1971 Monte Bello Cabernet Sauvignon placed 5th in the 1976 Judgment of Paris Tasting...) come from this extensive, diverse and complex appellation, then why are these wines not more coveted than they are? Save for a few producers, most wines from the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation receive very little attention from the trade or media. Why is that, you may well ask?

I can only assume it is because this appellation is especially de-centralized. It unfolds over three different and large counties in California and highlights a number of varieties, not just one or two as is the case with Napa, which is readily identified for its excellence in cabernet sauvignon.

In the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation, it is not unusual to experience profoundly good pinot noir, chardonnay, syrah, grenache, cabernet sauvignon and zinfandel. If that reads like a hodge-podge to you, think again. Each one of these varieties has demonstrated singularity and excellence in the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation.

So, let's get started. Let's explore the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation together. In "Things We Love About the Santa Cruz Mountains" I will detail the various picturesque towns that comprise this appellation. A better understanding of these various townships will help you to build your fantasy trip around this very, very special American appellation.

On a personal note, I attended the University of California at Santa Cruz and remain a banana slug for life.

Let the trip begin...
R.H. Drexel



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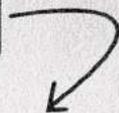
" TODAY YOU ARE YOU
THAT IS TRUER
THAN TRUE
THERE IS NO ONE ALIVE
WHO IS YOUER
THAN YOU "

- DR. SEUSS





YOUR BRAND HERE



100 PTS

This wine truly expresses its site. It is refreshing, possesses great structure and has an undeniably wonderful texture. Balanced and energetic, this wine compels the imbiber to revisit the glass, time and again, for new revelations. Relatively affordable and not precious, this wine merits some cellaring. Buy a case and pace yourself. Open a bottle every few years for further discoveries.



CUT HERE

PUBLICATION:

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The Presence of Bob Varner



When I ask Bob Varner if having been born in the Midwest informs his approach to winegrowing, winemaking and the business of selling wine, he says flatly, "Um. No. I don't think so." It's a perfectly Midwestern answer - plainspoken and achingly uncomplicated. Still, his honest, straightforward manner belies a man of ambitious, sweeping enological dreams. Over the years, Varner has become obsessed with pursuing as pure an interpretation of Santa Cruz Mountain pinot noir and chardonnay as is humanly possible. Under his Varner and Neely labels he does just that while maintaining a successful broad market brand, Foxglove, which is available nationwide and in a few foreign countries.

Bob Varner is the sole worker inside of his small, meticulously clean winery, tucked away in a lush, wooded estate within Portola Valley. Content to be able to access each one of his 100 wine barrels frequently - all of them full with pinot noir or chardonnay - Varner views his winegrower/winemaker job as a ruminative one, and finds harmony and ease dividing each day between the winery and the vineyard.

Bob Varner: In my mind, there is no difference between the vineyard and the cellar. I'm simply just going from the outdoors to the indoors. They are both here, on this one piece of land. I walk from the vineyard, into the cellar, and in my mind, they share the same space. It's like in France, where you have these small producers who live the same way. It's wintertime. I'm going to go out and prune, then, I'll come in the cellar and I'll think about wine... There's that same continuity of creativity there. It follows you around. It's beautiful.

And I think it's the most direct way to express site. You're not translating your fruit through a grower or a winemaker other than yourself. My goal is to express site, so this is the most direct, uncomplicated way I know how to do this.

[As Bob's white rescue Shepherd makes itself comfortable at Bob's feet, we settle into an easy conversation. Despite its being warm and nearly balmy in nearby Santa Cruz proper, it's cold and foreboding today at Varner's vineyard and winery site, located in the heavily wooded and fragrant Portola Valley suburb of Silicon Valley.]

RH Drexel: *But, making wine where you're also growing it – that's a luxury these days, isn't it? How many young winemakers can actually afford vineyard land and their own production facility?*

BV: Oh, it is a luxury. It's very rewarding for the winemaker to work this way, but, yes, you're right. It's a total luxury.

RH: *Can the consumer tell the difference if a wine is made the way we've just described – the way you make your wine – from estate-grown fruit at your home estate vineyard site or in a custom crush facility?*

BV: Well, that's just the thing. I don't know that they would be able to. I mean, there are these young guys out there, buying fruit where they can and custom-crushing at some facility. And they're making beautiful wines. They might not all be beautiful [laughs], but some of them really are.



RH: *Still, I think for someone who loves nature and who wants to produce truly site-driven wines...*

BV: For site-driven wines, I think this really is at least the most rewarding approach.

RH: *So, let's talk about this site. I was pretty blown away by your Upper Picnic Pinot Noir. What can you tell me about that block and about the greater estate site?*

BV: There's a presence at that site [Upper Picnic]. There's a presence at this entire site. A presence, and I would say energy. And also, a certain tension. So, everything I try and do, it's all to enhance that tension...enhance that energy. These qualities are apparent even right after pressing the fruit. You know how pressed wines are kind of raw and strange; I'll still be able to sense that presence in the just-pressed juice. And it will persist throughout production. I think of ways to enhance or maintain these qualities, and avoid doing anything that might dissipate that presence. I don't have a heavy hand with oak. I don't do acid additions, etc.

With my pinot noir, for example, I don't put it in barrels right away. I let it stay in tanks to try and really have a version of a wine that is very much about that tension and that energy. I like a lot of expressive fruit in my wines. And Upper Picnic – and our other sites here – they have very expressive fruit.

RH: *I was going to comment on how I, too, really love the fresh fruit on your pinot noir, but then I thought to myself, 'Will this be perceived as my suggesting that these wines are in any way flabby or showing too much fruit sweetness?...because they're not that way!'*

BV: That's just the thing. This site is so cool that it keeps these wines just naturally balanced. This site gives me all of the acid and structure I need, so I get the best of both; I get expressive, fresh fruit, and I get the structure I need. We're at about 700 feet elevation at this site. We have bay and ocean influences here, which keep this site very cool. Still, we have a lot of sunshine because we're above the fog line. It's that wonderful interplay between cool air and sunshine that's perfect here.

RH: *Tell me about your approach to winemaking.*

BV: I'm trying to think of how to say this...Okay, you can choose to try and make your wine from the outside looking in. You can try and think of all kinds of manipulations to do in the cellar. Or, you can start from the inside, and try and understand what's there. That's as true for me in the vineyard as it is in the cellar. The longer I'm at this vineyard, the more I'm comfortable just letting the vines do their thing. I just go back to the basics. Always back to the basics. If the farming is good, if the fundamentals are in check – pHs, etc. – and if you have natural balance in the vineyard and cleanliness in the cellar, then you're not going to screw up. You just have to have the basics covered.

RH: *I like your practical, non-dramatic way of looking at things.*

BV: Well, that's just from having been through lots of adventures. You know...good vintages, bad vintages, whatever challenges you can imagine at harvest. Sometimes, as a winemaker, you wonder how you're going to get through the next 24 hours. So, you just start working, and somehow you get through it.

RH: *What's the best thing about being a winegrower and a winemaker?*

BV: Probably the opportunity to get into the cycle of the seasons by just being with the vines and the wine. They flow along with the seasons...the change of seasons. I think that's a pretty nice thing. If you can hooked into that, boy, it's fun! When spring is ending, you'll have this great, cool morning. You'll notice this spring-like cloud pattern, but the scenery will draw in more sunlight. And, you'll know: okay, we're experiencing a transition here. You'll see it in the vines. They'll start to change. The same is true in December. The wine will have been in the barrel, developing over the course of a year, let's say. And you'll taste it at year's end, and you'll see that it's not as primary as it once was.

RH: *What's the worst thing about it?*

[Here, Bob stops to think for what feels like an awful long time, so I try and help him along.]

RH: *When I ask winemakers this question, most of them say: 'Compliance or sales calls.'*

BV: Oh, I love sales calls!

RH: *Okay. That's a first. I don't think I've ever had anyone give me that answer.*

BV: I really do. You get to interact with people, and you get honest feedback. I just did a sales call at K & L the other day. They were really professional and they provided honest feedback. And, you know, working with distributors and brokers...I don't mind



that, either. There's a place for everyone in the wine business. There's a place for distributors, to be sure. Listen, sure, you lose money on the margins, but if you don't have them, you have to travel more, rent cars, pay for hotels, worry about collections on accounts... I like distributors because if they represent our brands, I can spend more time at the vineyard and at the winery. That's how I like it to be. The more time I can spend connected to this place – to the vines, to the wines – the better.

RH: *Your brother is also your business partner – Jim Varner.*

BV: Yes, Jim really manages the business side of the winery. And it works out pretty nicely. I very much respect his opinion on the winemaking side of things. I may not always listen [laughs heartily] but I respect his opinion. We realized early on that it would be smart to have someone in charge of the vineyard/winery, and

someone in charge of the business end of things. What's important is that each one of us has a say in the other's area. Beyond that, it works pretty well.

RH: *Tell me about Foxglove.*

BV: We make chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon and zinfandel. They are all un-oaked.

RH: *Is that to save money, as they're, what...about \$15 a bottle?*

BV: It helps to save money, but it was really more of a creative choice. I guess the savings cost would be more in the labor involved in having barrels, the topping off, etc. But I think I would have gone with un-oaked on these wines, anyway. I wanted to preserve the freshness of the berry-like nuances in the zinfandel. Also, with the cabernet, I just wanted to maintain that liveliness, that freshness. I felt the oak would just mute that fresh fruit. And we get our chardonnay from fairly down south. It's a warmer spot for chardonnay, so I don't want to weigh it down further with oak. I like to preserve the white flower component we get with our chardonnay fruit.

RH: *So, back to the other half of my original question. What's the worst thing about being a winemaker?*

BV: Every job has its tedious aspects, but I really can't think of anything.

I was already quite taken with Bob's wines before I ever met him. There are those who say a wine just tastes better when it's consumed on site where it was made. I don't know that I agree with that summation. Bob's wines were as good the day I had them for the first time, in a private home, as they were when I tried them later at his winery.

His answer to my final question to him, however, is what sealed the fate of my fandom for all wines Varner.

The People's Republic of Alfaro

Richard Alfaro is the rebel's winemaker. His first few years in the wine business were spent trying to look like the cookie cutter version of the contemporary winemaker: He worked closely with distributors to get his wines into the wholesale market; he submitted his wines for scores and to competitions, for reviews or medals. He attended expensive consumer tastings, and networked with a host of sommeliers, retailers and writers. He felt he was ticking off every box that he should, yet he found himself struggling with the business model.



Now, years later, he is at peace with himself, and with his successful brand, Alfaro Family Vineyards, yet his business model is anything but typical. He has devised for himself and his family a successful livelihood doing what he loves, but on his own terms.

R.H. Drexel: *How long has your brand been around? It feels like such a 'Santa Cruz Mountains' brand, if you will. That is to say, it's been quietly churning out amazing wines for years now, but hasn't garnered that much press. So, when did you get started?*

Richard Alfaro: We've been around for 14 years now. It started out as more of a hobby for me. I had a bakery business that I sold to Sara Lee. It sold for quite a bit of money, and I was wealthy there for a while...but now I own a winery. [Alfaro chuckles heartily]

Let me just say that I didn't get into this business for the money or anything like that. We are making money now, but it's been 14 long years since starting. But the most important part of all of this has been discovering what is important to me...to us. I feel good about what I'm doing and who I'm working with. I feel really good about the product I make. Otherwise I wouldn't do it. And I like the people in this business. There are wonderful people in the wine business. I have a motto: I won't work with assholes.

RH: *I have the same philosophy! I try not to work with assholes, either, though it's not always that easy to control. Generally speaking, though, I find that you're right; there are so many great people in the wine business.*

RA: You know, they work hard, they play hard. They care about what they're doing. My son sees how hard I work, and how much I love it. He's in the process of trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. I wouldn't be surprised if he came to work with me in the near future.

RH: *Do you hope he does?*

RA: Oh, absolutely. Of course, I don't tell him that. It's the same thing with my daughter. I'd love them to both come work with me, but, you know...they're 18 and 19 and they need to find their own way. When I was 18 and 19, I didn't know what I'd want to do ten years later...not even five years later. Luckily, I've always been in the food business, and the wine business is kind of an off-shoot that. I'm also kind of weird because,



in high school, when all the other kids were doing keggers, I'd show up with a bottle of Blue Nun, or Lancers, or Mateus.

RH: *So even back then, you were already drifting towards an interest in wine.*

RA: You know, my family always had wine on the table. Usually, there'd be a jug of Gallo, and they let me taste some. I thought it was cool.

But what really turned me onto this idea of making wine was a bottle of pinot I had. I call it my 2.5 million dollar of wine. I was up in Lake Tahoe, skiing with a good friend. This was years ago. We went to dinner at the PlumpJack Hotel and we didn't know what wine to order. So, this waiter goes, 'Hey, this 1994 Rex Hill Reserve is really good stuff' So we ordered a bottle and it was like, 'Oh my freaking God!' It was like so epic. You know, '94 in Oregon was great. Some of the best wines I've ever had were 1994 pinots from Oregon. We were freaked out and so we go back the next night and ordered the wine again, and it was just as good that second night. After that second bottle of wine I said, 'I'm going to plant some pinot noir.' That's why I call it the 2.5 million dollar bottle of wine.

RH: *Let's talk about the wine business and cash flow. Really, the wine business barely makes any kind of sense as a business model. It is so capital-intensive and it takes years upon years to see any kind of ROI.*

RA: You know, four years ago my wife looks at me and goes, 'Richard, make money or get rid of this damn thing.' So I sat down and figured out how to make money. I started by looking at the package. Do I really need this big, thick bottle? That's costing me 4 bucks. Do I need that? No, I don't. Boom! I got a little, thin bottle.

Do I need this big, thick, super-long capsule? Do I need a 3-inch long cork? Do I need these things? So, Boom! Boom! I made some packaging changes. That's 40 thousand bucks to the bottom line for one year.

Do I need to travel all over the state? Am I doing it for my business? Am I doing it for my ego? 'Cause it's fun, I can do an event, here I go. I'm a winemaker. Do I need that? No, I don't need that. Boom! 35 thousand more to the bottom line. And I don't do big events anymore. Used to love World of Pinot Noir. I loved that thing. I had so much fun. I'd go there and I'd party. I'd stay up late. I'd see buddies. I'd spend 4,000 bucks easily. You know, I'd pay for an expensive hotel room for about 3 nights, I'd go out to dinner, I'd take staff down there to pour. Do I need to do this? No.

Also, attending all of these events just made me lose focus. So I stopped doing all those things. I was worried that it would hurt business. It didn't hurt business. We're still growing.

I used to think that I need to get acceptance from everybody, everywhere. I wanted to be noticed, but all of that's changed.





Now, I want our tasting room to be noticed. I want people to come see my house here. I get so much enjoyment out of it. We have these wine club pick-up parties and I'll bake 90 pizzas in the pizza oven. We'll have about 400 people. We sell tons of wines, and it's so much more rewarding this way. It's very important to me that folks walk into my tasting room and feel like they're on the set of Cheers. I've had folks say that before. Visiting Alfaro is like being on *Cheers*...where everybody knows your name... that kind of thing. We're only open one day a week – Saturday. So, everyone knows we're open on Saturdays and they come hang out, they buy wine, they visit, they bring their friends.

RH: *Do scores matter to you?*

RA: We got a 90 from Robert Parker once. I didn't even send in my wine; a grower did it for me. I was jumping up and down. So happy. But did it change anything? Not really. Same goes for medals. Do I really need to send in six bottles of my wine and pay 75 bucks or some high entry fee just to win a medal? I don't need that. None of that. Those competitions make big bucks!

RH: *How about the whole sommelier thing? Do you try and target them at all? I know a lot of winemakers these days do.*

RA: I did that early on. I remember this one time, showing my wine to a sommelier in San Francisco. I was so excited about the meeting. Really looking forward to it. Then, when he finally tasted my wine, he didn't like it. He was pretty rude about it. I was gutted. Years later, he tasted my wines again and liked them very much, but by then I'd moved on to this current model.

RH: *So, would you consider yourself a broad-market brand or a local brand?*

RA: Oh, we're mostly local. We sell about 67% of our wine direct-to-consumer. Our wines range in price from 15 bucks to 42 bucks a bottle, so it helps that we are able to have these great margins. I know that 42 bucks is expensive; I'm not saying that. But, we're small, so we need those good margins in order to make it. We have a broker in California, as well. The rest of what we sell is around here, either direct-to-consumer or wholesale.

We are in about five Safeway stores locally. People ask me why I still sell to grocery stores when there's such a demand for our wines in our tasting room, and the margins are better. But, I like to support people who supported me early on. They were buying my wine before I ever made a name for myself, so I won't stop selling to them.

[Richard and I have been touring his vineyard and estate property in his truck. We come upon a small, manicured block of young looking vines.]

RH: *And what is this here?*

RA: This is a little experiment of mine. This is Grüner Veltliner. Last year I got two carboys off this block. It turned out good. Hopefully, next year I'll get a couple of barrels' worth.

RH: *Why Grüner?*

RA: Actually, it's all because of this place called Soif Wine Bar in Santa Cruz. They have a great wine list there. They do great things with wine. Anyway, this one time, I was feeling a little under the weather from having tied one on the night before, so I went to Soif, to have a healthy dinner. I ordered some Brussels sprouts, a side of asparagus and a salad. So, what was I going to drink? The server there puts a bottle of the Nikolaihof Grüner Vertliner on the table. I drank the whole bottle by myself and called to order the grape vines that night...drunk...cause I liked it so much.

So, I planted just over an acre of Grüner. That was three years ago. I've probably put 25 grand into bringing this little Grüner block together, so that bottle I had that night at Soif, that's turned out to be one of the most expensive bottles of wine I've ever had. That, and the 1994 Rex Hill.

RH: *What variety do you most enjoy working with?*

RA: Pinot is my life. I love pinot. I drank pinot last night, but I like these little tiny, weird varietals, too. I like it and my customers like it 'cause I have seven pinots...you know...I've got a lot of pinot-only wine club members, but a lot of them like the weird, little things. I love the crush and I love the intensity of doing twenty different wines every year.

RH: *Do you follow the high-alcohol versus low-alcohol debate?*

RA: It's hard not to, but I don't get caught up in it. I try and like wines for what they are. I like a balanced wine. I had this Sine Qua Non wine. It was 15 % alcohol or higher. It had

the most amazing texture. It was so silky. Such a compelling wine. Those are big wines, but they're balanced.

And, whenever I go to Passion Fish Restaurant in Pacific Grove, I order a diatom chardonnay. He [Greg Brewer, owner/winemaker for diatom] puts out some chardonnays that are like 16% alcohol, and they're some of the most delicious, balanced chardonnays I've ever had.

You know, my thought with the alcohol thing is this:

I would like to see a little more tolerance. Just like anything in life, everyone's different. It's a person's right to be different. Just because they're different doesn't make them wrong and me right. I don't like that hardcore stance that says, 'This is the way you have to do it.' Folks that are hard core like that about alcohol remind me of Republicans and Democrats and how divisive they've become. I'm more of a guy in the middle. I think there can be good in everything. You've just got to find it.



THE HOROSCOPE eLevage

Dedicated to Rob Brezney

By Madame Insomnia



Nebbiolo (March 21 - April 19) Your sometimes brash and bristly ways alienate many, especially those who lack patience. You will do well to align yourself with those who understand that your gifts are not immediately recognizable, but instead exercise a certain bold nature and a willingness to stare into your capriciously dark heart. When you finally shine, your underlying elegance and sophistication will surprise and delight your true friends.



Cabernet Sauvignon (April 20 - May 20) Your early successes have caused you to adopt hubristic tendencies and an intermittently smug complacency. The next two years of your life should be spent turning inward. You must ask yourself: What is my true nature? Who are my real friends? Why is it that I am liked, and Do I like those things about myself, too? If you answer truthfully, you will return to your noble heritage.



Syrah (May 21 - June 20) You have a bipolar love and understanding of yourself. On some days you reach the stars with your brilliance...your iodine beauty. On other days you feel widely misunderstood, used and manipulated. What you lack is your own voice. Until you find it, you will continue to feel lost. Your gifts are many, specific and heart-stoppingly gorgeous. Believe in your truest self, which you seldom have the strength to show. 2013 is about Courage for you.



Pinot Grigio (June 21 - July 22) Your days of being the underdog are over. Like Olympian, the Bladerunner, you just needed a moment to prove that you can share the world stage with others who pursue excellence. Your character can appear reticent and retiring, but your core emits an undeniable presence. Quiet confidence. That is your motto for 2013. This is your moment; seize it.

THE HOROSCOPE eLeVage



Sauvignon Blanc (July 23 - August 22) You spend too much of your time worrying about what others think of you. This has caused you to be perceived as wishy-washy, flim-flammy, and lacking a true identity. The next 3 to 5 years will be your “make-it-or-break-it” years. You fear the very sharpness that causes you to stand out in a crowd. Find your inner-strength. Embrace your true nature.



Riesling (August 23 - September 22) “Slow and steady wins the race” ought to be your motto. Success has arrived, unbidden, at your doorstep while you were toiling quietly. You have remained fantastically focused on your artistic endeavors. You were gorgeous in your youth, and remain so in your older years; like Helen Mirren, you are somehow getting sexier and more interesting as the years unfold. My only advice is that you remain true to yourself, for it has served you well.



Chardonnay (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22) You are a lightning rod for debate among those who surround you. While some close to you feel that you do well when you are most ostentatious and generous, others grow concerned that this side of you leaves you vulnerable to criticism. Many believe that your more private, measured and naked self is your truest self, while I, personally, feel a marriage of both is where you will find true peace and understanding. This is your journey, not mine, but the stars, too, seem to be calling for you to find balance in your life.



Pinot Noir (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21) Like many other great martyrs, poets and artists among us, you are often held to impossibly high standards. Because of your profound intellect, your rare beauty and your unique transparency and humility, you are often the target of deep jealousies, corruptive motives and profound misunderstandings. Gladly, you remain elegant in your articulations of the life you take in around you. You are the ultimate translator, yet others find themselves speechless before your most indescribably beautiful eminence.

THE HOROSCOPE eLevage



Cabernet Franc (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21) Thank goodness for entities such as yourself; game, always up for the challenge, affable not fussy. No matter what. You could very well be the star of most any gathering, but your genial, unassuming demeanor causes you to take a back seat – often, and by choice. This may have caused you to lack the celebrity of some of your associates, but those close to you trust your upright character, your friendship and your pervasively bright nature.



Merlot (Dec. - Jan. 19) For too long, you have allowed others to define who you are. You have lacked the backbone to stand up for your beliefs. When you were told you were too thin, you gorged yourself until you became nearly unrecognizable. Now, as you become healthier, the stars caution you to not go so far in the other direction that you become a shadow of your real self. You have a lot of life in you. Others would be lucky to experience it. My little wintry bird, why not sing proudly?



Grenache (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18) The stars have aligned: This is the era for you. What others have been secretly sensing – that yours is a rare, profound and staggering beauty – is finally finding its voice among the masses. Gradually, over time, your life will become positively historic. It will be unstoppable in its profundity. There are few in the world that can match your graces, which only become more pronounced with age.



Chenin Blanc (Feb 19 - March 20) Ah, my fresh-faced beauty. You who rarely read horoscopes because you are too busy playing in the garden, frolicking among the white flowers and the hummingbirds. This is the year for you. Everyone wants a little piece of your energy. But I doubt very much that you are reading this, for you are busy living your splendid, balletic life, out there among the salinity of the ocean winds and the buzz of the honey bees.



What We Love About the Santa Cruz Mountains Appellation

The Santa Cruz Mountains appellation spans three counties within California: Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and San Mateo. That covers an area of around 320,000 acres, yet only about 1,500 are planted to vineyards. That's an astoundingly small number when you compare it to, say, Napa Valley's 43,000 or so acres planted to vineyards, within a much smaller area. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why Santa Cruz Mountains wines are not better known. There aren't a lot of them out there, and many never end up on the broad market, so perhaps consumers just haven't heard of the appellation yet. At least that is my hope, because there are so many true enological wonders awaiting the ardent wine lover hidden within this mountain appellation, and great rewards favor the patient seeker.

Elevations in this appellation range typically from 400 ft. on the Monterey Bay side to 800 ft. on the San Francisco Bay side. The highest peaks within the appellation come in at 3,000 ft. Generally speaking, the appellation runs from around Watsonville/Gilroy, all the way to Woodside and Portola Valley.



When I visit, I like to begin at the southern end of the appellation in the town of Corralitos. Although there are wineries in Gilroy and Watsonville as well, I find Corralitos a more picturesque place to kick off my visit. I like the **Corralitos Market and Sausage Company** for their amazing hand-made sausages and tri-tip. There are a handful of great wineries to visit, two of which are my favorite in the appellation: **Alfaro Family Vineyards** and **Windy Oaks Estate Vineyards and Winery**. Most of the accommodations within Corralitos tend to be a little too "Victorian B&B" for my taste. Instead, I enjoy staying in nearby **Aptos** or **Capitola Village**, where one can find good ethnic food – especially sushi and Thai food – and rooms aplenty with ocean views.

After a day or so in Corralitos, I head off to the town of **Santa Cruz** proper. I have a long, somewhat complicated love affair with the town of Santa Cruz. It was my home during my college years, and I came to love it for the diversity of people, the freedom of thought, the expansive community of artists, writers and musicians, and the natural beauty that envelopes the entire town – from the ocean vistas to the majestic redwoods that dot the University of California at Santa Cruz campus. I came to hate it at times, as well, perhaps through no fault of its own, for its associations in my mind to a less than stellar academic career at UCSC and the attendant

anxieties of coming-of-age somewhat later than most. I was a late-bloomer, and had it not been for amazingly brilliant professors like Loisa Nygaard and Susan Gillman, I might have been greatly disillusioned by the college experience.

Happily, when I return now, those collegiate anxieties are far behind me and I can enjoy the true bohemian spirit of the place. The downtown area offers great shopping, ethnic food and a unique cultural experience. Like its Bay Area-based



cousin, Berkeley, this hippie town is reluctant to commodify itself. Despite a few big box stores, it remains mostly alternative, organic and peace-loving. The addition of a surfer culture to the hippie mentality lends this charming place a truly singular vibe. There are few places around like it, and the smell of Patchouli-wafting from artist studios and the salinity of the nearby Pacific really can't be found anywhere else.

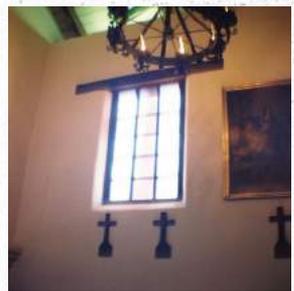
The **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** has an old-timey aura, with its cheap, hot funnel cakes and wooden roller coaster. I enjoy staying at the **Dream Hotel**, just off the **Santa Cruz Wharf**, which has modern, clean rooms, despite being in a high-volume, family-oriented tourist area. There is a great walking path that leads along the waterfront and provides plenty of people- and surfer-watching.

I am absolutely enamored with **Surf City Vintners**. You mustn't leave Santa Cruz without stopping here. The iconic **Bonny Doon Vineyard** has a tasting room and restaurant here, but that's not all. **Sones Cellars**, **Rexford Winery**, **Trout Gulch Vineyards** and a number of other great tasting rooms can be found here, not to mention **Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing**, the popular **Kelly's French Bakery** and



– one of my favorites – **El Salchichero Charcuterie**, an honest to goodness community butcher whose smoked bacon is...well...euphoria-inducing.

Just outside of the town of Santa Cruz is **Highway 9**, which offers not only breathtakingly majestic views and the fragrance of ancient redwoods, it also provides great entry into small mountain towns like **Felton**, **Ben Lomond** and **Boulder Creek**. While these towns do not provide luxurious, wine country accommodations, they offer ample campgrounds, old-timey roadside motels, and



a refreshing take on wine country destinations. If you're a bit tired of some of the over-the-top contrivances other winegrowing regions use to promote their lifestyle to tourists, the Highway 9 corridor offers a much more natural, down-to-earth wine country experience. Eventually, I like heading over to **Big Basin**, where **Big Basin Vineyards** is located. Though it requires an appointment – that often needs to be made far in advance – winegrower and winemaker Bradley Brown offers game-changing, cool-climate syrahs and pinot noirs and warm, gracious hospitality.

Highway 9 will drop you into **Saratoga**, **Cupertino** and **Los Gatos**, where the appellation continues to unfold, but now in an environment that speaks more to Silicon Valley than Sixties Idealism. Still, there you will find true purists like **Mount Eden** and **Ridge Vineyards**. Los Gatos is my preferred destination town in this neck of the appellation. It is heavily wooded, offers great dining and has several very well-appointed hotels in a vibrant downtown area. You will want to stay at least two days in this area, as the wineries are somewhat spread apart, but so worth the effort.

From Los Gatos, I continue on to **Portola Valley** and **Woodside** – both exceedingly pleasant, albeit upscale tech communities. **Varner** and **Thomas Fogarty Winery** – two fine and representative wineries within the greater appellation – can both be found here. Because there are so few wineries to visit in this region, I typically head north following a day there, and end my trip to the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation with a night or two in **San Francisco**, which is relatively close by at only about a 30 mile drive.



For more information and a quite usable map, please visit:

The Santa Cruz Mountain Winegrower's Association:
www.scmwa.com/

Surf City Vintners:
HYPERLINK "<http://www.surfcityvintners.com/>"



Inside Eden:

A Visit with Jeffrey Patterson

It takes a steely nature, and a pretty good four-wheel-drive, to make it up to the top of Mount Eden. The two-mile, dirt road is pock-marked, winding and in poor, poor condition. In places, it feels dangerously close to the precipice. If you are a pinot noir lover and you make this trek as I did, you arrive at the Mount Eden estate as if you've culminated a spiritual journey. The challenging symbolic journey will be rewarded with transcendent, alchemical Pinot Noir, and with a lesson from the master.

Enter Jeffrey Patterson.

Since 1981, Jeffrey Patterson has been making some of the most elegant, layered and sophisticated pinot noirs in the United States. He does so somewhat quietly. You don't see him at a lot of wine events, or out in the market place much. You don't see him rubbing elbows with celebrity sommeliers or at consumer events. His wines are reviewed often and very favorably, but he doesn't often grant interviews.

This could very well be because Jeffrey Patterson is actually busy making wine. Many winemakers who have been making wine for as long as Jeffrey, have long since graduated to a different lifestyle. They've hired an entire winemaking crew so that they can go out and travel a lot, presumably enjoying the fruits of their labor - and also trying to sell the case amounts that have increased over time - so as to sustain this type of lifestyle. I'm always shocked when I see winemakers traveling or working the market in, say...Manhattan...or Chicago...during harvest.

One of the reasons that Jeffrey Patterson's wines have consistently proven to be among the best in the nation is that he refuses to compromise the health of his estate or cellar for an overly ostentatious, hectic lifestyle. He's a farmer, first and foremost, and it shows.

RH Drexel: *What makes this appellation special?*

Jeffrey Patterson: This appellation was not based on watershed, political boundaries, cities, etc. No, it was based on this particular mountain range above the fog line. No other appellation in the United States has that kind of distinction. When I'm traveling, people will ask me, 'Well, where is Mt. Eden?' And, I'll say the, 'The Santa Cruz Mountains' and they'll get this nostalgic look and say, 'Ah! Santa Cruz. I was there once! I had such and such an experience there once.' You know, Santa Cruz is one of those towns - like Berkeley, like New Orleans... There's just no other place like it; it's signature. So, I tell them, 'No, the Santa Cruz Mountains,' because, it's vast. It crosses over three counties. San Mateo, Santa Clara - where we are - and Santa Cruz. When folks say they're from Knights Valley, people kind of know where that is. Or they say - I'm in Calistoga. People know where that is. When you say, 'Santa Cruz Mountains,' people immediately get confused.

RH: *What's the identifying feature of Santa Cruz Mountains fruit?*

JP: The unifying concept is mountain vineyards. You have to be in the mountains to have a vineyard in this appellation. Mountain vineyards, just by their typography, are not alluvials or valleys. They're mountain tops, so gravity is always working against

you. The soils and the weather here are equally important, in my view.

The soils here are primary, fundamental. They are not fertile. The vine has to do a lot of work. There's precious little water, if any. That's probably the big limiting factor in why there are not more vineyards planted here. There's precious little water.

Then, there's the sunlight. During the summer, when the valley has maritime fog every morning, you're above the fog line, so you get that sunlight.

And you don't see huge expanses of vineyards everywhere. This is a relatively small appellation, when you talk about what's actually planted. So the winemakers are better able to focus on the signature of their site. That's a huge factor here. What is planted is small enough so that everyone can really focus.

Small vineyards – you look at true map of Burgundy, in a grower's cellar – they've just compartmentalized these sites; an 1/8 of an hectare, and they give that site a name! A name! So, that site becomes something special. So, it helps to have a small plot of land.

We're close the ocean. Most of us are in the inland side of the ocean, though there are some nearer the ocean.

So, all of these things kind of dovetail: infertile, well-drained soils, above the fog line, small vineyards, cool coastal environment, very little water.

RH: *And what about the human element here? Does this appellation attract winemakers who want to plant small vineyards?*

JP: Our founder, Martin Ray, he was a local guy who got into the business by buying Paul Masson. Paul came here in the 1880's and married into the family that owned Alamaden. He gained instant entry into the wine business because of who he married. He bought the land right next door to us. So, Paul kind of started the whole thing going, because without Paul, Martin Ray might not have gotten into the wine business, and we wouldn't be here. It was Paul who planted the seed with Martin Ray to start this vineyard.

So, the type of person who is drawn here has a small budget, typically. There isn't a big splash, with lots of financing, large production facilities, etc. You don't really see that here. The most high-profile opening here has been Rhys, but even they are somewhat under the radar.

By and large, most wine brands here are pretty homespun. Small mom and dad operations; you know, 2000 cases or so, often with purchased fruit because vineyards and fruit are hard to come by here. It's more of a pioneer kind of guy that ends up here.

Another thing that distinguishes Santa Cruz Mountains is that we're very far apart from one another here. We're spread throughout this vast mountain range. We're miles and miles and miles away from everyone else. In Corralitos, you may have seen more of a concentrated community of wineries. But, in this mid-section of the





appellation, where we are right now, we're very far apart from one another.

RH: *I don't see any of you marketing your community as a 'wine country destination'. Every other region seems to be doing that, or wants to badly.*

JP: Paso Robles, for example, is set up for visitors, for people. There is a critical mass of wineries there. You can hop in your car; if you're in West LA, you can get there in a couple of hours. You can spend the night and have this wine weekend. Just drive from one winery to another.

At Mount Eden, for example, we don't have a tasting room. I don't want to be snobby, but we're kind of beyond that. If you go to a great estate in Burgundy or Bordeaux, they don't have a 'tasting room'. They welcome you, they are great to you, but they don't have 'tasting rooms'. We will always make our wines available to purchase to anyone in the world, but we won't do it through a tasting room. It's just not us. It's not Mount Eden. Mount Eden is a traditional California winery; it's commercial but not... grasping for attention.



ability to communicate place.

JP: It is good, isn't it? I like it for the same reasons you like it. It has delicacy. It has longevity. It has flavors that I enjoy. There's a transparency there that communicates the land. It's a traditional variety and people understand it. It's not esoteric. It's relatively small-yielding. The clusters are small. Light in weight. We have this lineage with chardonnay going back to the '40s here because of Martin Ray's chardonnay, so that makes it very special here.

It's also relatively easy to make. White wines, because you don't ferment on the skins, is all about growing the grapes. You're not finessing the fermentations like you do in red wines. Chardonnay, like riesling – the other noble white grape – has an ability to

RH: *Describe your ideal customer to me?*

JP: Our ideal customer is a collector-type who enjoys more of a classic style of California wine. He or she has a wine cellar and is willing to buy a case and track it – drink a bottle every year, or every two years. The wines we make here are made to ideally improve with age, so my ideal customer would follow that case over the course of 10 to 20 years. Even the chardonnay.

RH: *I think I'm your ideal customer!*

JP: Those people exist. Not in huge numbers, but they exist.

RH: *Okay, let's talk romance.*

JP: Romance?

RH: *Well, yes – as it relates to varieties. For example, I love chardonnay. I am taken by it – by its transparency and its*

translate where it came from. Which I guess is true of everything, but chardonnay is very ubiquitous, so you can better see how it translates all of these different sites. In the North Coast, chardonnay conveys more of an orchard-type flavor profile. In the Central Coast, which is not here – it's actually Monterey to Santa Barbara – there is more of a tropical flavor spectrum. Santa Cruz Mountains chardonnay is neither one of those. It's more soil-based.

RH: *Well, I agree with you there. There's this acid and salinity you get from Santa Cruz Mountain chardonnay that is not as common in other regions.*

JP: I tell people, 'If you're looking for a fruity chardonnay, then that's not the Mount Eden style.' It never is. Not in the barrel, not in the bottle, not when it's aged.

RH: *I love the texture of your chardonnays. It's funny; as soon as I turned 40, I all of a sudden discovered texture in wine. And weight. And finish.*

JP: I think a good finish is generally an indication of quality. If you're really good, your wine has to have a long finish. If the finish is sudden, it doesn't matter what the price tag is or what the label says. It's not complete. There has to be a long finish.

RH: *So, how would you describe the flavors of your chardonnay? I mean, I don't want to dial down and get too geeky, but I'm just wondering, I guess, how you would apply language – descriptors – to this lovely chardonnay we're having right now?*

JP: It's a little citrusy, but not in that fruity way. Just a little citrus. A little bit of a nuttiness. Some herbs. An earthiness. Good acidity. Lightness on the palate. A freshness. It's hard to describe, but those words work.

RH: *Can we talk about how you make wine?*

JP: There is a book out now about corporate wine – about how corporate wine is ruining artisan wine. I haven't read it yet, but apparently it's about how many people don't draw a distinction between the two.

RH: *It's hard for me to imagine that, I guess, because I love it so much. But, sure, you're right: There are people out there who just think, well, 'wine is wine.'*

JP: Most people think that! Wine is wine. I look at it very differently. Corporate wines and small, hand-crafted wines are night and day. So, one of the reasons why we like our approach here is that we do everything on a very personal level. We offer a very personal experience with our wines, and with visitors who come here.

RH: *I guess the analogy I would draw is that, I myself eat only locally grown fruits and vegetables at home. I mean, at a restaurant that might be different. But what we eat at home is locally grown because, well, there's so much of a difference between vine-ripened locally grown tomatos that I buy fresh at our farmer's market versus something I buy at a chain grocery store. I mean, they're not even in the same wheelhouse.*

JP: So that means you eat tomatoes from August/September to November or December, and that's it. Right?

RH: *Yes, you're right. I pay attention to seasonality.*

So, that makes me sad that consumers, or end-users, or whatever other marketing phrase you want to use, but really I mean "people." It makes me sad to think that there are





people out there who won't experience a vine-ripened tomato. Or maybe don't care to. Or, by the same token, people who will never have or appreciate a true, artisan wine. I don't mean to sound elitist. I understand very much that some people just don't have that opportunity, and I'm fully aware that these are first-world problems I'm describing. But, I guess, from someone who is as intrigued by nature and its flavors as I, it's just a bummer to think of folks who don't really care about that stuff. It's all the same to them: Food is food. Wine is wine. Corporate or not.

Anyway, I went off on a tangent, which I tend to do about this topic. Tell me, Jeffrey, do you enjoy what you do?

JP: Yes! I can't imagine doing anything else. I've been doing this since '81 and I'm still very surprised. I don't know if surprised is the right word, but I keep saying to myself that I'm very lucky to be doing this kind of work. Most people I know that do what they do for 31 years cannot say that.

RH: *I feel lucky because I, too, can say, 'I love what I do.' But, it's got to be great for you because you not only love what you do, but it's widely considered as fact that you do it very, very well. I mean, that's got to feel great. All the accolades – how important is that to you – the accolades?*

JP: Nowadays, there are so many people that are writing about wine, and it's so easy to have a Google search. Anybody that mentions you in blogs, print, whatever, it pops up. So, it seems like in the last 5 years, we've gotten a lot of good press. I'm not sure why, or why now? Why more now? Maybe it's because we have Google Search! [Laughs.] Our wines are being reviewed and talked about much more than they used to be, and I just don't know why. I'm befuddled.

RH: *Well, that's good to be befuddled, because it will keep you humble and focused. My own theory on why your wines have been garnering more and more press – and I've noticed that, too – is because I think the American palate is becoming much more attuned to balance, restraint, elegance. At least the folks who are seeking out fine wines seem to be talking more about these virtues, and so the press has discovered that, and is writing about wines that they think will appeal more and more to their readership. I mean, you've been doing elegant wines for so long, and this new generation of somms and consumers – they're discovering you, or re-discovering you, because your style is in-line with what they're seeking out.*

JP: Well, maybe that's the case. The style that we've always made may be coming back into vogue.

RH: *Let's talk philosophy. Do you have one in the cellar?*

JP: My take on wine – when I'm making it – is pretty simple: I don't use yeast. I don't use water. I don't use tartaric acid. I don't use enzymes. I don't use anything. I do buy some barrels. I make sure my old barrels are really clean. I don't want any Brett problems. I like some Brett if it's controlled, but it's so hard to control that I don't even go down that road. So I like things very clean. I make the same wines every year, from the same vineyard sources, so I kind of know what to expect in any given year. I'm not experimenting with other sources all the time. I don't change much. I may tweak things a little, but nothing really changes except the vintages.

RH: *So you don't inoculate. You use natural yeast. There is so much life in a vineyard – so much life in yeast. Do you think yeast helps to translate or transmit terroir?*

JP: The thing about not adding yeast is that the fermentation starts off much slower. In the early stages, it's a very heterogeneous ferment. After a few degrees of alcohol, the *saccharomyces* dominates. So you have a more heterogeneous beginning. Things are not so fast or frenetic, and so a more gentle fermentation happens. So that, paired with the fact that we don't use any fertilizers in the vineyard – I mean, 90% of a good wine happens in the vineyard. So, I think we're communicating place here with these wines.

RH: *Are you still learning?*

JP: Well, winemaking is a very simple process. Mankind's been doing it for a real long time. But you learn from the challenges. The vintages. You learn from tasting. You can't not do those things. If you want to be good, you have to keep tasting... learning. Why would you want to make wine if you don't constantly want to get better at it?

I do some work on the side for a client. I buy bulk wines for this client. So here I am, going all around California, buying these bulk wines for this client, and winemaking seems so perfunctory with some of these folks. They might as well be pumping gas. I'm getting used to it, but it still puzzles me how there are so many places where there's just no passion.

Do you find that?

RH: *Oh, absolutely. I actually see that a lot. Lots of lip service is paid to making wines of place, but then you visit those wineries that are talking about this kind of stuff in their marketing materials, and you go there, and there's just no passion, no real deference to place. It's a business for them. Solely a business. They may like the lifestyle – the travel, the fancy dinners, etc. – but they aren't farmers by any degree. They're not winegrowers, necessarily, either. They're just churning stuff out. Yes, I do find that and if I can be emotional for a moment, I find it kind of heartbreaking that something that came from nature is relegated to this business model that cares mostly about the bottom line.*

Switching gears now, can we talk about pinot noir.

JP: Do you like pinot noir?

RH: *I do. I love pinot noir.*

JP: Is that your favorite?

RH: *I would say it's tied with grenache. I find that these varieties, depending upon their birthplace, challenge me the most. They're cerebral and very mysterious.*

JP: When I first got into wine in 1976, pinot was what I loved the most. And, I still do. In those days, I didn't have much experience with California wines. In '76,



Chalone was good.

Sanford & Benedict had just gotten started and they were making some interesting pinot noir. Joseph Swan was and is still making great pinot noir. There were a lot of great choices in Burgundy. Over all, it wasn't a great decade for Burgundy, but in '78, there were some great ones. I was living in Berkeley at that time, and I would shop a lot at Kermit Lynch, and he had great burgundies at that time.

So, if I was given just one case for the rest of my life, I would choose Burgundy or pinot noir. I must say, since the '70's, the progress of California pinot noir has been immense. Especially here and in the Lompoc area.

I've been experimenting with more and more whole cluster. When we first started, we had this very antiquated crusher that had a de-stemmer and rollers. Everything was static and it just tore up the fruit. We used to put the grapes through the rollers and they were crushed with the stems. Every vintage was stemmy back then. I didn't like the flavor at all. I started to hate the flavor of stems.

But, in 1985 – which is still, I think, is the best vintage of pinot noir I've ever made – we put the grapes in a tank. 100% stem inclusion, but we stepped on them with our feet – *pigeage*. It turned out great. So, I like stems now.

The main thing I've been doing recently with pinot noir is actually fooling around with how much whole cluster to include. And by that I mean no crushing – just either foot stomping or just letting the uncrushed fruit mingle with the crushed fruit, and create a mixture of the two. I think it's a year-by-year call. Most Burgundians I've talked to don't have a 100% attitude about stems. They make that call based upon vintage, which I'm playing with now.

The thing about whole cluster: it does give a wine an herbaceous, stemmy flavor when it's young. Over time, that flavor morphs into this beautiful rose petal, violet, camembert cheese and earth spectrum that is magical when that wine is 20 years old. You have to sell the wine when it's 3 or 4 years old, though. So, you have to balance the stem inclusion – because I want it to be magical at 20 years old, and not still stemmy in 20 years – so I've been coming back to this whole cluster idea. I'm walking this tightrope of how much whole cluster is good versus how much just shuts it down. I think 30% is my normal approach. It's there, but it does not dominate at that level, but I'm still always thinking about it.

It's the one thing about pinot noir that is an issue. If you make cabernet, I mean, who ever talks about stems?

So, back to pinot noir. I like the delicacy. I like that it ages. I like the history of pinot noir. I like the fact that it's very compatible with food. It tends to go with everything I like to eat. I can drink it young. I can drink it old. It's got a lot of things going for it. I guess the only thing that's hard about it is the yields. With chardonnay and cabernet, for example, the crop can be big, but it will probably still be a pretty good wine. It might be light, but it'll be good. But, for pinot, if you come in at, say, over 3 tons an acre, the quality just drops off pretty severely. You must really pay attention to yield. In a big year, you've got to drop lots of fruit.

RH: *Do you try and stay within a certain alcohol level?*

JP: I want to stay under 14%. You know, anywhere in the 13's is fine with me. About 13.5 for everything I make right now. I don't pick over-ripe because I don't want to have to add water or acid.

RH: *Can you have a perception of balance at over 14% alcohol?*

JP: Yes. Absolutely. I do like to make wines under 14% because I don't want to pay more taxes [laughs] and I personally don't want that or need that. My whole shtick is promoting Mount Eden. This place. And its classicism in winemaking. So, higher alcohols with riper styles – that's not what I'm here to do, but let others do it. There's nothing wrong with that. The world can absorb everyone – every style.

RH: *Yes, it bugs me when somms and writers get totally caught up on a number.*

JP: Yes. I used to just put 'Table Wine' on all of my bottles. That just means its somewhere between 11 % and 14% alcohol. I wanted to keep them in the dark, in a way. Just have the wine speak for itself. People would ask me, 'What's table wine?' And, I'd say, 'Well, it's wine for your table.' [Laughs.] But then my wife told me we should stop doing that because too many people were assuming that Table Wine meant it was inferior somehow – just cheap stuff – so now we put the alcohol on the label.

RH: *Okay, so, let's talk about consumer appreciation. Let's say you're a fly on the wall at one of your favorite restaurants. And there's a couple at a table, having a bottle of one of your wines. What do you hope to hear them say?*

JP: Well, the usual suspects: 'This is really good! I had no idea this would be so good! Where is this from? I want to get some more! Where is Mount Eden?'

RH: *Are you in a position where you still have to go into restaurants and sell your wine?*

JP: No.

RH: *Oh, thank God. Because account visits can be so brutal. At least I find that they can be. That to me can be the most inhumane part of the wine business. One works so hard to farm something well and then make something that captures a place and vintage. And, then you present it to some snot-nosed kid who barely has time to make eye contact with you. I mean, not every buyer is this way, but there are so many of them out there.*

JP: I used to call on accounts, but I just don't want to do that anymore. And, my talent is really better spent working in the vineyard. And in the winery. I'm also not very good at it. I'm a little snobbish. I have a lot of pride. If they don't dig what I'm doing, it's like... 'See you later!'

RH: *Do you worry about staying successful? Staying on top? What do you do when those thoughts creep in? When you wonder to yourself, Does my work still matter?*

JP: Yes, I think about those things. And, when I do, I just I get up and I go to work. The thing about me and my situation is that...it's not really about me. I've done a lot here at Mount Eden. Built cellars. Planted. But, you know, it's more about *here*. I like to think of all of this as a wine estate. The people who run it will come and go. Who runs it is important, but no one lives forever, but the wine estate will continue.

So, for me, I guess, it's important that I'm successful. I'm not going to deny that. But, I'm not that guy who buys grapes and makes them in a rented cellar. I am a winemaker who makes wine at a fine wine estate. You know what I'm saying? This place will outlive me.

RH: *Is it hard to be a serious winemaker in the United States?*

JP: I think most winemakers in America are serious, at least at my level, at the small estate level. Especially when you're also an owner. Especially when you have to keep up with expectations. Winemaking in Europe is so common. When you're in a winegrowing area in Europe, half the village makes wine in this way. In the Santa Cruz Mountains, most people don't have an idea of what I do.

I realize that I'm very privileged. Most guys who do what I do don't have their own wine estates. I'm lucky. Very lucky to have a place like this to work in. I realize it's not common. Gratitude and joy are the true nature of our souls. These are soulful qualities that make us human. I try to remember these, while still trying to extract some money from the whole process. [Laughs.]



Just Breathe:

An Interview with Bradley Brown

If Pinot Noir and Syrah made wild, unfettered, crazy love to each other they would probably give birth to something closely approximating grenache. Grenache, with its stately structure, still pirouettes in the glass, with often startling aromatics of dried citrus peel, frankincense, and rose petals just on the verge of decay; fully effulgent and just hanging on to the ephemerality of life.

I love grenache. It's probably my favorite variety in the world. Of course, when speaking of the best grenaches in the world, we don't speak of grenache, do we? No. We speak of place. To speak of Grenache in France, instead of say, Rayas, is to destroy the very dignity that this variety has found in the soils of the Rhone, principally in the Southern Rhone. For it is a great interpreter of its 'climat,' and is known more for its various ideally placed homes than for its individual identity as a grape variety.

I've come to visit Bradley Brown, then, because I have been told by colleagues that he makes one of the best grenaches in the United States, and I want to taste it.

When I pull up, there's a modest winery sign, right next to a sign for the Shakti Yoga Shala, a yoga studio that was established by Bradley's wife, Samantha Shakti, above the winery production facility.

It's the first thing I ask Bradley about when I step out of my car. I immediately like his demeanor -- unassuming, energetic yet grounded, and capable of smiling broadly and freely. He seems exceedingly well-adjusted. Fit, friendly and unfailingly polite.

R.H. Drexel: *Is there a yoga studio here?*

Bradley Brown: Yes, my wife has a studio right above my winery. We built it together. You know, I've been -- in conjunction with my wife, Samantha Shakti -- we have taught some wine appreciation and yoga workshops, which is kind of interesting. So we do yoga at the beginning, of course [laughs], and people get really tuned into their bodies. They become very aware and present. Then we go into wine tasting.

RH: *That makes a lot of sense, actually, because you're really watching your breathing in yoga, and the breath is crucial to wine appreciation. You just have to be present.*



BB: Yeah, being very present with it. And paying attention. I mean, it really is all about paying attention and focusing your awareness on different things. That was something that I tried to really illuminate for people – this sense of a texture, of a weight – that it's not just about the flavors. Pay attention to each different stage: smelling the wine, then the texture, and how the flavors evolve and change.

RH: *And, you're a Rhone guy, right? How did you get turned on to Rhones?*

BB: Yeah, I'm mostly a Rhone guy, but lately I'm really into pinot noir, too. But, yes, I think I'm considered a Rhone guy. My brother lived in Paris for 7 years. He spent a year in the Rhône Valley and came back with this love of Rhones, of Rhone varieties, and turned me on to them. So I feel like that's when I graduated from drinking zinfandels to syrah, you know? It was like I was this kind of younger, post-college kid. Zins were what he could afford if we wanted a wine that was exuberant and emphatic and there were all those old-vine zins out there. There were some really fantastic ones, but once I got turned on to syrah, I never really looked back a whole lot.

I remember Randall Graham believed real strongly that we could do really great Rhones in the Santa Cruz Mountains. At the old estate vineyard in Bonny Doon, he had planted syrah and some other things but, unfortunately, the vineyard succumbed to phylloxera. There's a little stream going through it where the sharpshooters would live and Randall just never got over it...he felt burned by it, I guess, and never wanted to plant there again. Probably for good reasons, but...anyway, I remember the 2004 Estate Syrah from that vineyard. I still have one bottle in my cellar and it's actually held up reasonably well. I was like, 'Okay, it definitely can be done. You can make amazing Rhones here.'

I started looking around. Well, let's just say I had fallen in love with Rhones, and I was sure I wanted to plant syrah here in the Santa Cruz Mountains. People were already doing cabernet here, especially on the east side. You had people doing pinots and chardonnays and other things too. I was like, 'Oh, I don't want to do what everybody else has done,' and I thought: there is this untapped potential here. You've got these steep mountain hillsides. You've got windy afternoons, ocean breezes blowing through consistently. Aren't there a lot of attributes here that are sort of similar to the Rhône Valley?

RH: *Did you have anyone kind of help you out at the beginning?*

BB: John Alban. I called him up. I visited him. Did barrel tasting with him. He wanted to show me the different selections of syrah he had and we hit it off. He got the sense that I was serious and that I wasn't just looking to build a trophy vineyard or something like that, that I really was passionately excited about doing this, and, of course, a bit naive. I asked him a lot of questions. I ended up crushing at John's place the first couple of years. I think it takes a little naïveté to put in a vineyard. [Laughs]

RH: *Yes, it does. I think if you pencil out everything in advance and take a cold, hard look at the business model, most people wouldn't do it – or even get into the wine business, for that matter. But I'm glad you took that leap of faith, because that's what it takes, really.*

BB: Right. It's not a three year start-up project like in Silicon Valley. This is a ten year start-up project. I'm still in start-up mode. [Laughs]

RH: *So, how many acres do you have planted to vineyard?*

BB: Ten. What I set out to do was restore it back to what it had been. I used to mountain bike along the top of the ridge up here and I had no idea that this part of the property

existed. I'd never been down this part, basically, where the vineyard and winery are now. Before I bought it, I started crawling around through these sort of Scotch Broom cavity brush hillsides, you know, and I started finding all these hand-split stakes in a grid pattern. I'm like, Hmmm... Certainly looks a lot like a vineyard. Sure enough, I found a couple vines growing up into the trees. There was almost nothing left. When I did some more research, I found out this property was once owned by some French farmers. This is pre-prohibition. Then, right after prohibition, another French guy named Justin Lacau bought the property and called it Frenchy's Ranch, which I find hysterical... a French guy calling his ranch Frenchy's Ranch, you know? He farmed it up into the '60's, and then the property was sold to another family that bought it for the timber. So it became, basically, the biggest party spot in Santa Cruz! You know, there were seven junk cars pulled off in the last timber harvest. There was a shooting range. There were beer bottles and beer cans everywhere. There were all kinds of plastic pots and chicken wire all over this hillside where they were growing pot. The original homestead house was built in the late 1800's, built right here in this spot. People stole the wrought iron gate, all the farm equipment was stolen... These people who bought it for the timber just didn't care about



the whole historical farming aspect. I've seen aerial photographs from the '60's, and you can see the grid pattern of the grapes and an apple orchard. There was an old hand-dug well, too. So after I saw the property, I ended up buying it, and that's when I set out... sort of crossed my fingers. I'm thinking this has got to be a good spot if there were grapes here before. You know, here in the Santa Cruz Mountains it's obviously frowned upon if you're going to go try to convert redwood forest into vineyard land. But restoring it to its previously existing agricultural use is considered acceptable. So that was a tall order. There were three different landslides I had to repair and it ended up being an extensive and expensive undertaking. I brought one of the top viticulturist in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Prudy Foxx, up here. She looked around and said, Yeah, I don't know. This isn't the kind of land that you plant if you want to grow grapes and make money. [laughs] That's what she said to me. I wasn't going to accept that answer [laughing] so I kept moving on. This was before I even met John Alban. When I brought him up here, he said, Okay, have the backhoe ready to go, we'll take soil samples, we'll take a look at it. He was pretty encouraging.

RH: *And the winery...*

BB: We built the winery and studio from redwood that we harvested sustainably from our property.

RH: *So, let's get back to Big Basin Vineyards. Is it important to you that your brand be identified as a Rhone brand?*

BB: That's a tough one, 'cause it's like Rhones were my first love and pinots are definitely a new love, but a very passionate love.

RH: *Well, there's plenty of that kind of love to go around.*

BB: Plenty of love to go around, yes. [laughs]. I certainly am a real strong believer in Rhone varieties in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I consider it a long term project of mine to have people out there 'get it' about Rhones in this area. I believe truly remarkable Rhone-style wines can be made here. There are just so few people doing it.

I think some varieties like grenache are so transparent. I've completely fallen in love with grenache. I mean, if there's a grape that I really am in love with right now, it's grenache. It's amazing what it does in different regions...for me one of the quintessential grenaches was the 1990 Rayas I got to try at a friend's house. And it just completely blew me away as to what was achievable with 100% grenache and how well it aged.

[Bradley typically blends his grenache with syrah, in a bottling he calls "Grizzly", a tremendously elegant Rhone blend, but he tastes me on stand alone lots of 100% estate grenache. Suffice it to say, I'm blown away.]

RH: *The texture of this this grenache is amazing. I mean, the weight of it on the palate, and then the texture of these very fine-grained, chalky tannins. It's just very, very elegant.*

BB: That's kinda something I'm really seeking in wine – that combination, trying to find



that balance – between texture and mouth feel and complexity and intensity. You know, a lot of the vineyards we source from...they produce intense fruit so I like to see intensity... what I call 'verve' in a wine. I don't want to make a wine that becomes ponderous. It has to have energy. I don't want to get into the realm of syrupy or overdone. So we're looking to find our balance; and our program has been a continual evolution, and every year we look at what we've done and make our little tweaks and say, 'What could be done differently?' The barrel program has probably been the biggest evolving part. We seek to use barrels that offer the greatest transparency in the vineyard. I put this grenache in neutral barrels. It has next to no wood influence.

RH: *How much did John Alban actually influence the way you make wines?*

BB: John taught me a lot of little things. He was a really great teacher...and he didn't try to over-explain it or say why I should do anything and there were a lot of blanks I had to fill in over the years. But one thing he mentioned was the punch downs: Be gentle. I never forgot that. He said, You're just trying to fold the cap, that's all you're trying to do. I was like, 'How many should we do? Two, three?' And he was like, 'Play around, let's see. Different grapes might need different things. There's no recipe for 'winemaking'. That's what he told me. 'There's no formula.' So, one year, I actually did this experiment where we punched down harder and we smashed the berries down to the bottom and did a little bit more where we sheared the skins and things like that. You know, you hear about people having crews doing punch downs all night long. Anyway, I learned that when you do that, you just get more grip and you get more tannin if you beat up the wine a lot more. If you de-stem and crush, you're shearing the skins a lot. You'll get more grip if you do your punch downs real hard, but you lose some of this finer textural elements that I like so much – this body, this mouth-feel, this more sensual aspect of the tannin being softer. So that's just what I found over the years – just to be really gentle with it and let what the grapes have to offer really emerge, and if you want a little more tannin you can throw some more stem in there, if the stems look ripe.

RH: *Where do you come in on that whole discussion of balance, which seems to lead to discussions about alcohol levels?*

BB: Well, all these people are like, 'Oh...don't make high alcohol wines!' You know, taking very religious stances on it like, 'I don't want any wine above a certain alcohol level, or whatever.' So I've had to do some soul searching on it because we've had some pretty ripe vintages, you know, some stuff that's come out pushing 16%, 15.7%, 15.8 %. I don't like to manipulate a wine – add a whole bunch of water and water it back to a lower alcohol. I'd rather just get it dry...even if it's at 15.8. If I can do that, I'm going to go for it. Why should I dilute it? And I've found that when people try our wines they often use the "b" word! They'll describe them as balanced. They'll say, 'There's no heat on this. This seems really balanced.' Look, I'm not just pushing the ripeness to push the ripeness. It's just that, in some vintages, that's when the grapes were ripe...at those higher alcohols. That's what the vintage gave me! I'm not going to pick them a lot earlier to get the alcohol lower. If you do that, you can also swing all the way in the opposite direction. Really low alcohol wines can be just as monolithic as over-ripe wines. Now, I would never push a pinot noir to those levels. I like pinot noirs under 14%, but the Rhones can handle alcohol and still be balanced. Basically, I'm not going to try to force my wines into some numbers, high or low, just to make a point. I want to work with what each vintage and each vineyard gives me.

When I leave Big Basin Vineyards, I can hardly believe I've spent the better part of a day with Bradley. As is often the case when one meets a kindred spirit, the time tends to go by much too quickly. I believe very firmly that Bradley is on the cusp of greatness with his Rhone wines, and, more recently, his elegant, restrained and nervy pinot noirs. Should you find yourself in the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation, which I hope is the case, dear Reader, do

make an appointment to visit with Bradley. If you are close to giving up on Cali syrahs, his fine efforts in the vineyard and cellar may very well change your mind.



The Man on the Hill:

A Visit with Paul Draper

Deadlines are tough for a writer. Most writers I know don't procrastinate out of laziness. They procrastinate out of fear. The longer you put off writing that story you've been meaning to write, the further you remain from the possibility of failure - of failing your reader - or failing your subject.

After having spent the day with Paul Draper up at the Ridge Monte Bello Estate - his iconic piece of land that quite possibly comes nearest in the United States to producing site-driven cabernet sauvignon - I drove back home fearing that I might somehow let him down. For if you love cabernet sauvignon as much as I do - like those elegant, multi-dimensional wines made by André Tchelistcheff in days of old - then getting to spend a day with Paul Draper - quite possibly the finest interpreter of this noble red our nation's seen to date - is, well... a dream realized. Scratch that one off the bucket list.



So I knew that writing about Paul was going to be daunting, to say the least. What calmed me down over time was hearing his avuncular voice in my head. The day I spent with him was peppered with gentlemanly, courteous turns-of-phrase. On several occasions he showed concern for my well-being. Was I too cold in the cellar? Was I hungry? He opened doors. He pulled out chairs. By remembering these small kindnesses, I was able to relax a little about this entire process, long enough to articulate what I most admire about Paul.

The highest praise I can give to Paul Draper and his wines is this: Long before my cabernet sauvignon-loving friends and I ever heard of Paul Draper, we were already coveting the wines of the Ridge Monte Bello Estate. And we would search out the Ridge zinfandels from York Creek and Lytton Springs for their sheer beauty and restraint. These zinfandels were like none we'd ever tasted, and our respect and fondness for this variety reached new heights when we discovered these wines for ourselves.

It strikes me now as curious and endlessly refreshing that for years, because of the way Ridge was and is marketed, I first grew to appreciate these sites, not even paying attention to the fact that there was someone shepherding these wines towards greatness. I still find myself referring to Ridge wines by their place of origin: Monte Bello, Pagani, Jimsomare, Buchignani, Carmichael, Mazzoni, and so forth.

It's quite common, nowadays, for some wines, especially coveted ones, to be associated with a person, or winery building, rather than a particular climat. You hear folks talk about Jayson Woodbridge's wine, or Phillipe Melka's wine. Whether it is their intention or not, these rather out-sized personalities often eclipse what's happening in the soils they work with. It isn't unusual to read more

about a spectacular building than it is a specific wine grown next to, and made inside, that self-same building. The cult of personality, wherein it's increasingly acceptable to view fame as the endgame (even if Mother Nature, for example, is doing most of the work), virtually guarantees that many of today's coveted wines are more about the people who make them and their lifestyle than the wines themselves.

Paul Draper, by contrast, can be viewed as a modern folk hero to those of us who love wines that lead with site, varietal character and typicity. His path has always been one of purity: Translate the site as well as is humanly possible, and then get out of the way.

I will let Paul take it from here:

On the Ridge Monte Bello Estate:

We're at 2,700 feet elevation here. This ridge was formed something like 67 million years ago when a major die-off of little sea life created limestone and it formed along the ocean floor. It was mountainous on the floor of the ocean and as the little sea life dropped, if they went a certain distance and found the bottom, as they did here, they formed limestone. If they fell further than that, they disintegrated and nothing was formed. What we love about that is that geologists tell us this ridge is what is called 'an exotic terrain' – that there is no other land like it around here, so we feel very lucky. And my French friends love it. They say, 'Ah, the limestone...that's what makes it what it is.' And I smile and say, 'Yes.' But on a 24-hour basis during a growing season, it's as cool as Bordeaux, but it's colder at night and warmer during the day and so we have firmer acids. So we think that great fruit... that firm acid and the local climate up here has probably more to do with the character of the wine than the minerality from limestone. The minerality is part of it, but it's not the determining factor.



On Learning How to Make Wine:

I was so lucky. In my thirties, I had the opportunity to start making wine, which I had always wanted to do but I thought you needed a degree in enology to do it. Then I discovered that in Europe, at all these great chateaux, most of the *maitre de chai* had never even been to high school. And here they were, making these great vintages in Bordeaux, so I realized, finally, that I really didn't need a degree...so I arrogantly moved forward. Well, what I had to do was really turn back to the practical books of traditional winemaking, and I used a book that was published here in California in 1883 by another man here in the Santa Cruz Mountains – Emmett Rixford – who planted La Cuesta Vineyard that same year. Rixford wrote a book about the best methods being used in California and in Bordeaux in the 1880's. His La Cuesta Vineyard Cabernets were – now this is pre-prohibition, of course – probably the single most expensive cabernets made in California, and considered, obviously, some of the finest. He was very dedicated, very traditional. The way he laid out day by day winemaking – what you did in the vineyard and then afterwards in the winery each day 1, 2, 3, 4 – is exactly what I needed 'cause I had no training. I mean, I had been tasting, drinking, loving wine as part of every day life at least from the time I was in high school. That love was reinforced when I worked in Italy, and later when I lived in France for 3 years. So I was very intrigued by how wine was just a part of every day life in Europe. I was very intrigued by that whole idea. I grew up on a farm, and so that idea of something coming from the soil that then transforms itself into something as complex, mind-altering and amazing as wine was, of course, amazing itself. It's why wine became a part of the Christian ritual, I think – that transformation that occurs.

On the Term "Winemaker":

Whoever invented this term 'winemaker'? So often we get caught up on this title: Winemaker. We're supposed to 'make' the wine, and so what do we want to make? What is our favorite style? What is the consensus in our region? And when we taste with our fellow winemakers, what do we all feel is the best? And so now let's all make that!



And there's nothing wrong with that. It's just that...I think it's much more interesting if you've got very fine grapes, a very good vineyard, moderate yields...so that you can actually see what's there. In that way, instead of a 'winemaker' you take on the role of parent or guide or teacher, keeping the child on the straight and narrow, off drugs, through college or whatever, sufficiently to get them launched into adulthood without too many detours.

Your job, then, is to really watch over this and, ideally, to intervene as little as possible. Now to do that, you've got to have grapes that really are of high quality and – the most interesting thing for me is that piece of ground – an ideal site. I dislike the word 'terroir' but we don't really have another word that includes everything that terroir does. I wish we did. I call it site. I call it a piece of ground, but it's, as you know, much more than that. It's the drainage. It's the way the cool air or the warm air can come across that vineyard through a cut in the hills. It's everything that affects that piece of ground, not just the soil and the micro-climate and so on. So it's hard not to use that clichéd word, but if you've got a piece of ground that in any but a disastrous year provides this level of high quality and distinctive character and does so consistently, then you want to guide it with absolutely minimal intervention. If you've got that, you've moved into a category which I guess I prefer to call fine wine. It's wine that is true to its place because it happens to be a place capable of expressing its character and a quality that is really a fine quality – a distinctive quality.



At the same time, you need to be careful about how you talk about fine wine. Or, for example, natural wine. So, does that mean that if it's not a natural wine, it's unnatural? It's junk? That can be very divisive. I mean, I'm very lucky to work with this piece of ground. And in Europe they are also fortunate. They've had hundreds of years of exploring expression in these very special sites. You know, only about 10% of wine in this country is

artisanal. The other 90% are industrial wines. And there's nothing wrong with that. Those wines still give people pleasure. I prefer to explore site, but I understand that some people make wines in an industrial way, and use the skills in their tool box to make wines of pleasure with the grapes and land they've been given to work with.

I mean, there was this interview on City Arts & Lectures, moderated by Karen MacNeil, between two high profile wine industry personalities – both people I like and admire, but I don't need to name them here. Anyway, they were pretty down on California wines, suggesting they're mostly industrial. I thought to myself, Come on, be a little more encouraging to the younger generation. Don't tell them there are no non-industrial wines being made in California. That's simply not fair...or true. Look at Kevin Harvey at Rhys. Look at Jeffrey Patterson at Mount Eden. Look at Cathy Corison at Corison. You've got to encourage people who are trying to make wines of place, not discourage them with generalizations.

I have some friends in the Napa Valley, for example, that have these great vineyards, but they make these unbalanced wines. So I continually try to talk to them and say, 'Hey guys, you realize what a piece of ground you've got?' But I do so gently. I try and encourage them to pay more attention to their site, rather than just criticize their efforts.



Look at Bordeaux in '09 and '10 – especially '09 – because the climate was warm. Many there are choosing to make this international style of higher-alcohol wines. I mean, they've got something unique there, and to give that up chasing the international style just because some critics praise that override style...? I guess I don't understand that part. You know, Bordeaux has this gift, for God's sake. Don't lose it.

On Hiring People to Work at Ridge:

In interviewing people that we want to have join us, I look for the passion. Is that passion really there? And if it, they don't have to have the degree. I want them to have a little experience, but if it's clear to me that fine wine is very important to them, then that's all I really need to know. The average employee seniority around here is about 23 years. In the vineyard, it's 19 years, or so. This team is just phenomenal.

On Chardonnay:

We've all seen so many chardonnays that are too heavy, lack freshness, too oaky, too ripe, whatever. I think, because I am more of a red wine drinker, I consider chardonnay to be the closest white wine ever gets to red. I've had beautiful rieslings, sauvignon blancs, other really wonderful white wines. But, if a chardonnay has acidity, if it expresses a place, if it is a full-bodied wine, then it has great, great appeal to me.

On "What Is the Duty of Wine":

First, I would say, that the duty of wine is to give pleasure. And, if you have average-quality or less-than-average-quality grapes that require some manipulation in order for



them to provide pleasure, then so be it. I'd rather see that happen than see a winemaker refuse to make adjustments to poor quality juice, just for the sake of not making adjustments. Having said that, this kind of wine should be reasonably priced, not \$300 a bottle and manipulated to death. No, this kind of wine ought to be reasonably priced. The second duty is for a wine to be true to a piece of ground. It's difficult not to sound elitist saying that as not everybody has that luxury, but yes, I have to say the first duty is pleasure, the second duty – especially for a fine wine – is to be true to place.

On the Enjoyment of Wine:

I think winemakers who allow for vintage differences can bring a lot of enjoyment to the wine drinker. In making Scotch whiskey, the ideal is that you blend to make this consistent product, year in and year out. A lot of people are making wine that way, unfortunately, and I think just noticing vintage differences can make it so exciting for the winemaker and the wine drinker. What did this year produce? Not 'what did the winemaking team succeed in blending up that makes this wine taste like all the other years?'

- The connection with the seasons, with the soil, with life, is at the heart of the enjoyment of wine. •



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THANKS

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO ROBERT M. PARKER JR.
2013 Inductee, The Vintners Hall of Fame

Adrienne Cecile Rich



Adrienne Cecile Rich: Circa 1951 (May 16, 1929 – March 27, 2012)

American Poet, Essayist, Feminist, Santa Cruz Resident.

Photo courtesy of Radcliffe Archives

