

# SHOWCASE

ANTELOPE VALLEY PRESS, May 12, 1989

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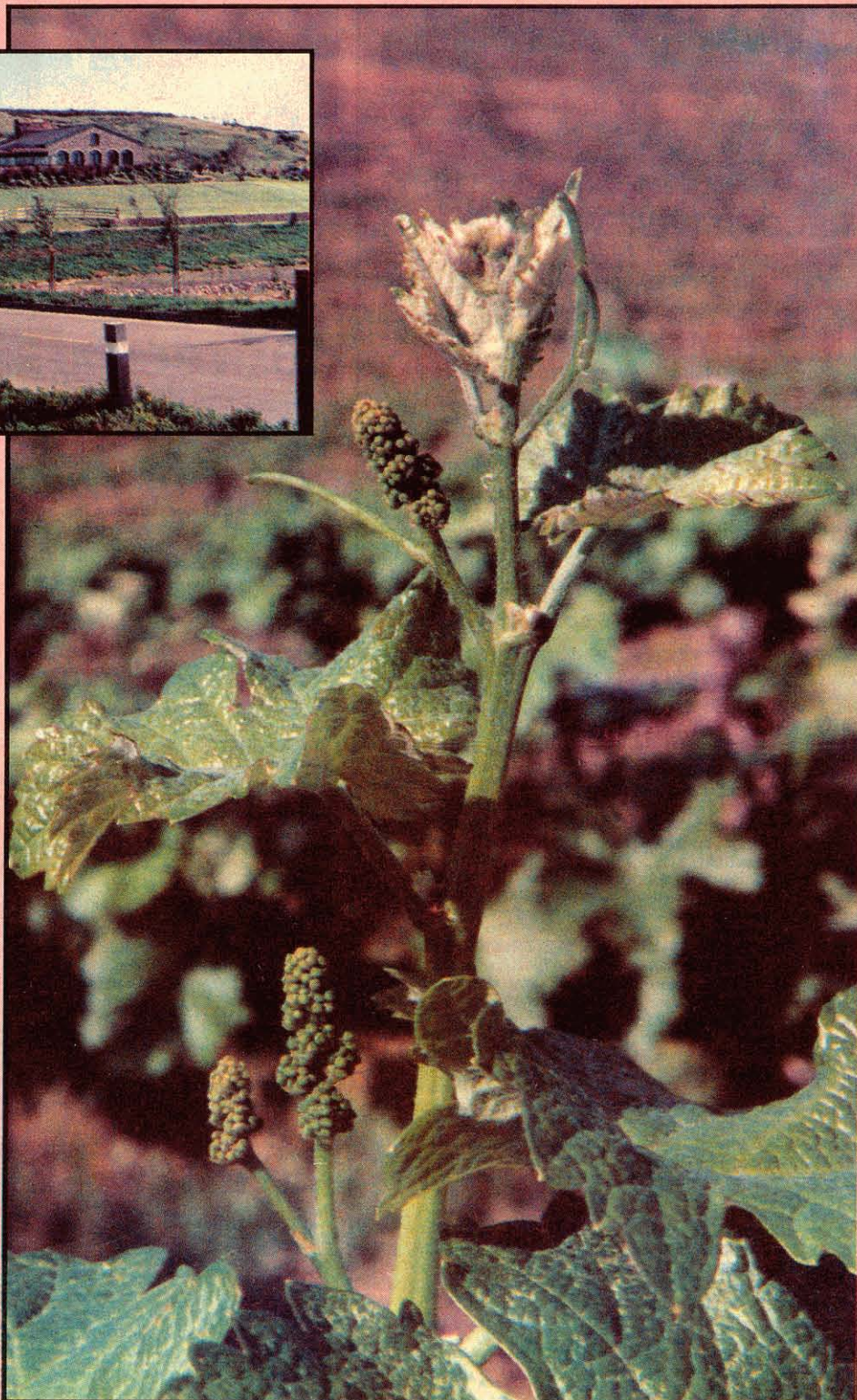
Arts•Entertainment•Travel•Dining



## Not Napa

Only 2½ hours from the Antelope Valley is a thriving wine region in the Temecula Valley; among the wineries here are Culbertson, top, and Callaway, below. Wine making is nothing new to Southern California; one winery was producing as early as 1831 in Los Angeles. Karla Tipton reports on the growing Riverside County wine country, as well as the shrinking Los Angeles vineyards, on Page H3.

— Photos by Rick Perrine





# Southland wineries blossom in Temecula Valley

By KARLA TIPTON  
Assistant Showcase Editor

In the old tradition, many of the wineries in the Temecula Valley grow roses alongside their grape vines.

"Legend has it that in the old days, roses were an indicator in the vineyards as to the quality of that year's grapes," said Rici Peterson, tour guide for Calloway Winery, as she stood beside one of the bright rose gardens near the 20-year-old vineyard. "Roses are so sensitive it was a way to keep ahead in the wine trade."

The allusion is particularly appropriate when considering that the nearly dozen wineries in the Temecula Valley of Riverside County are harvesting strategies to gain headway in California's wine industry. The fruit of their labors will be evident at the 1989 Balloon & Wine Festival, scheduled for the weekend of May 20-21 at Lake Skinner. Events include champagne hot-air balloon flights at dawn, a country fair, arts and crafts booths, an antique and classic car show — and, of course, wine tasting.

While similar festivals in the Napa or Sonoma valleys draw a few thousand people, the attendance at this wine festival could number as high as 50,000.

That's what makes Temecula's wine country unique among the other wine-producing regions of the state.

"The largest potential wine

population in the world is in the L.A. basin, Orange County and San Diego County. We're an hour, an hour-and-a-half drive from all those people," said Audrey Cilurzo, who owns and operates the Cilurzo Winery with her husband Vincenzo Cilurzo. "Our biggest job is to let everybody know that there is a place called Temecula. Then we will be able to sell almost all the wine we make right out of our wineries," she said.

In 1968, the Cilurzos became the first family to plant a vineyard in Temecula. In the next few years, Calloway and Mount Palomar wineries planted, with Filsinger and Hart wineries coming next, and French Valley, Piconi, Britton Cellars, Maurice Carrie, Bailly and Culbertson following later.

Unlike the road to Napa Valley, there's no need to worry about driving along a narrow, winding route to get to this wine

country. It's located just off Interstate 15 in southwestern Riverside County — about a 2½-hour drive from the Antelope Valley (via Highway 138).

"If we could get 1 percent of Southern California coming out here, we wouldn't know what to do with all the people," said Peter Poole, a spokesman for the Temecula Valley wine country who works at the Mount Palomar Winery with his father — the winery's founder — John Poole.

"We'd be nuts not to promote having people come and visit us," he said.

As for the quality of the wines, "It's right up there with the top wine-producing regions. That's evidenced by the awards," he said. "Based on quality, the Temecula wineries do very well in the competitions."

Any inferiority complex the wineries might have suffered at their onset have been offset by recent successes, said Poole. "It's pretty hard to feel negative when you see evidence every day of acceptance among the broader people. They are coming out here because they like us and they like the wines and the whole experience."

"We're not as famous as Napa Valley. But 15 years ago Napa Valley wasn't as famous as Napa Valley."

And while the term "wine country" recently has become a sobriquet reserved for Napa Val-

ley, it was Southern California that was the first region in the state to begin cultivating grapes for the purpose of making wine back in the 18th century.

Father Junipero Serra planted the first vines at the mission in San Diego in 1769. Although there are still a handful of wineries in San Diego County, the oldest wine-producing region has been swept away by urbanization.

Ironically, it was urbanization which revitalized wine-making in Southern California, centering in the Temecula Valley.

In 1967, when 87,500 acres in the valley that had previously been under one ownership began to be developed by the Rancho California Development, the Cilurzos became one of the first families to purchase land in the area.

"We fell in love with the whole area and bought 100 acres," said Audrey Cilurzo. "We wanted to plant something, but we weren't quite sure what. We decided the best we could do was do a weather study and just find out what crops would grow in the valley."

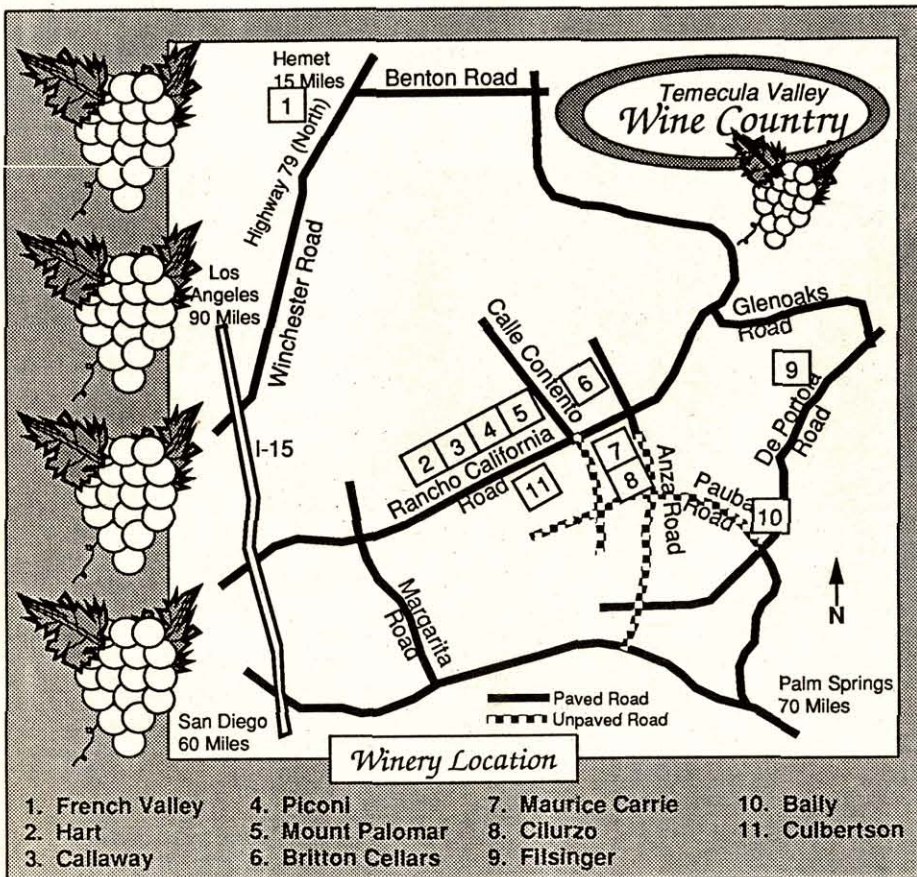
What they discovered was that the Temecula Valley had a "micro climate" that keeps temperatures there 8 degrees to 10 degrees cooler than elsewhere in the area. This condition is brought about by the cool ocean breezes that flow through the

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rick perrine photo

**MAURICE CARRIE WINERY**, owned by Budd and Maurice Carrie Van Raekel, was named after the female half of the team because "Buddie's Bubbles" wouldn't look dignified enough on a label, said Maurice.



Liz Moore / valley press

## Zoning crushes wine district in Los Angeles

By KARLA TIPTON  
Assistant Showcase Editor

Winemaking came to Los Angeles decades before "wine country" became synonymous with Napa Valley. It was in 1831 that Jean Louis Vignes planted the first commercial vineyard in what is now downtown L.A. By 1851, there were more than 100 vineyards growing grapes in the county, with its wines prized for their quality.

Now there are just a handful of vintners.

Yet the four L.A.-area wineries — oppressed by the city's strict zoning that forces them into heavy industrial areas, and overshadowed by the rest of California's wine industry — regularly produce award-winning vintages. Still, they go unnoticed by many who live here.

In contrast to Napa's narrow Route 128, which leads past the "winery row" towns of Rutherford, St. Helena and Calistoga, four-lane freeways lead to L.A.'s wineries, McLester, Palo Verdes, Donatoni and San Antonio. With the exception of the latter, all the greater Los Angeles area wineries huddle together in an unincorporated island in Inglewood, untouched by the city's zoning restrictions.

While Los Angeles makes its

reputation as an international city, it has never been particularly known for either its fine wines or its hospitality. Yet its wineries offer up both — in most cases by the vintners' own hands.

The plucky vintners who started these "airport" wineries (so called because of their proximity to LAX) mostly garnered their knowledge through home wine-making kits rather than expensive schooling. They continue to succeed against the odds.

"If we were going to get depressed about being in Los Angeles instead of Napa, we would have given up a long time ago," said Cecil McLester, who with his wife Marcy, opened up McLester Winery in 1979 on La Cienega Boulevard in Inglewood, just south of Los Angeles International Airport.

McLester, like compatriots Herbert Harris of Palo Verdes Winery and Hank M. Donatoni of Donatoni Winery, operates his winemaking business in the midst of Inglewood's industrial warehouses and automobile fumes. He started out making wine with a home wine-making kit given to him as a gift.

Several awards later, McLester laughingly relates his narrow opinion of wine before

See ZONING on H18



# Wineries

## From H3

Rainbow Gap in the hills to the west.

"We realized that this is the same climate as Napa," said Cilurzo. "That's how we got started."

According to Peter Poole, whose father was another early landowner there, the regional plan had always specified that the core area adjacent to Interstate 15 would consist of residential, commercial and light industry while the outlying areas would maintain a more rural/agricultural character. "There is 6,000 acres that's designated as a vineyard rural area," he said.

"Calling it an agricultural slash-winery area is somewhat unique. If we were just out here and the only thing we were allowed to do is grow grapes or cit-

rus or nuts, then it wouldn't be as worthwhile monetarily. But when you've got a winery and you can put in a tasting room, it enhances the value of having agricultural land.

"We're really talking about raising the value of agriculture to a new level," he said. Poole provided an example: Across the road from Mount Palomar there will soon be built a 130-room hotel/resort with vineyards and a tasting room.

While the climate may be right and the business prospects promising, to some of the more critical members of the wine society, the vintages of the Temecula Valley haven't yet proven themselves over a long enough time, said Poole.

"In a way, we don't get the same kind of reception in some of the traditional channels - let's

say, what they think of you in the fine wine shops of La Jolla and Beverly Hills - but who cares?" he said.

It's been this ability to appeal to the average wine drinker that has brought success to the Maurice Carrie Winery, which released its first wines in 1987. Owned by Budd and Maurice Carrie Van Raekel, the winery caters to the popular taste.

"The wine is made strictly to our tastes. We're not wine connoisseurs," said Maurice Van Raekel, whose first and middle names grace the label because "Buddie's Bubbles" wasn't dignified enough.

"We don't care for any of the acidic taste. We want wine that the public will buy and something that's enjoyable to drink." Maurice Carrie's emphasis is on the sweeter blush and dessert

wines. This formula must work, because the winery garnered 14 medals the first year, 19 the second and 11 so far this year.

The awards tend to attract the attention of "the big guys," said Van Raekel, who added that there is talk that Napa's Meadowlark Winery is looking to start a Temecula-based vineyard as well.

"Some of the biggies want to expand to have a Southern winery, too," she said. "They really can't look down their noses at us anymore. There's no more snickers. The Japanese are trying to come here, too."

Although it is not for sale, the Maurice Carrie winery has had two requests from people interested in purchasing it, she said.

The couple has been so successful in their winemaking enterprise, they recently purchased

the Mesa Verde vineyard next door and are revitalizing it. Soon it will open its doors as the Van Raekel Winery which will offer "something a little bit different from Maurice Carrie."

## 1989 Balloon & Wine Festival

This annual festival offers a variety of activities including wine tasting from Temecula's wineries, jazz concerts, a country fair, balloon rides, arts and crafts booths and an antique and classic car show.

**WHERE:** Lake Skinner, Temecula Valley in southwestern Riverside County, off Interstate 15.

**WHEN:** 7 a.m.-8 p.m. May 20; 7 a.m.-6 p.m. May 21.

**ADMISSION:** \$3 per person includes parking, balloon ascension viewing, entertainment and country fair.

**WINE TASTING:** 11 a.m.-3 p.m. both days; \$6 includes six tastes and souvenir festival wine glass.

**INFORMATION:** (714) 676-4713 or (714) 676-5090.

## H18 Friday, May 12, 1989, Antelope Valley Press

# Zoning

## From H3

coming forth from a "foreign country" - Texas - into the land of the enlightened grape: California.

"The closest I got to drinking wine when I was living in Texas was mixing Gallo Rose half-and-half with strawberry Kool-aid," he said. "I remember many a night waking up and wondering where I was. You know how you do when you're in college."

It wasn't until moving to San Jose that McLester began educating himself about le vin. When it got to the point that he had 2,000 bottles of wine stored in his garage, "It was time to start selling it," he said.

The labels to two of McLester's popular table wines - Runway Red and Runway White - show a 747 landing on a runway amidst rows and rows of grape vines.

Of course, there are no vineyards in Inglewood. McLester, like the two other "Napa Valley South" wineries, buys grapes elsewhere - usually from the central coast districts of Paso Ro-

bles and San Luis Obispo.

All the grapes crushed at McLester last year came from Antelope Valley's Cameo Vineyards, owned by Westside farmer Steve Godde.

"Since these wines were so good, he's going to release them under a special label called Godde Estates," said McLester. "Godde Estates wines will be available at McLester Winery."

Among the varieties available under the McLester label are many premium reds - McLester's specialty - such as Merlot, Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon. Also offered are Blanc de Noir, Fume Blanc and Suite 13, a dessert wine made from muscat that is 13 percent alcohol and 13 percent sugar. The McLesters have a package of Suite 13 cooking recipes available for the asking and recommend the wine over the rocks or as an ice cream topping.

Providing a contrast to the airport wineries is the city of Los Angeles' last remaining winery, San Antonio.

Designated as a California

historical monument, this 72-year-old winery is owned by the Riboli family. It was founded by Santo Cambianica in 1917, when there were still 92 other wineries producing in the city of Los Angeles.

Prohibition jolted the region and most wineries closed. However, Cambianica was granted the privilege of making altar wine for the Catholic church. The winery still does a significant portion of its business in sacramental wine, producing 40,000 cases per year for the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches. During the '50s, when the Southern Pacific Railroad declared eminent domain in the area, the California Historical Society had the winery made a historical monument, thus saving it from the wrecking ball.

Steve Riboli Sr., Cambianica's nephew, joined the winery when Prohibition ended in 1934. He remains president and supervises the tasting room. His wife Maddalena and daughter Cathy Riboli Colombatti oversee the restaurant and gift shop. Sons Steve Jr. and Santo Riboli are vice presidents and take care of national and international sales and Santo's wife Joan works in the accounts department.

"The whole family is still involved," said yet another member of the family, Steve Jr.'s wife Susan Riboli, who handles public relations. "It's unusual to find large family-owned wineries that haven't sold out to large corporations or split up publicly. We all get along, which is also unusual."