

## PURSUING THEIR DREAMS

**The five vintners profiled below have diverse backgrounds and interests, but they share the goal of dreaming big. And their hard work is resulting in some of the best Cabernets in California today.**

**MaryAnn Worobiec**

**Issue: November 15, 2012**

### BEVAN CELLARS

Small-vineyard focus scores big

When Russell Bevan decided to move back to California and pursue a career in wine, he had never formally studied wine-making. But he knew what he liked to drink and used that as his guidepost. "I come at this with the palate of a consumer. I had a vision of the types of wines I wanted to make," says Bevan, 47. So far, his vision has resulted in six classic-rated wines (95 to 100 points on the Wine Spectator 100-point scale) in his first five vintages.

Bevan and his longtime companion Victoria De Crescenzo had lived in the Midwest, with careers in the dental field, before the return to California in 1999. Once back in the Golden State, the Santa Rosa native sought the advice of winemakers such as Greg La Follette and Philip Togni, whom he credits as mentors.

Since his first vintage, 2005, Bevan has focused on his vineyard sources—small vineyards in Napa and Sonoma, such as Showket, Sugarloaf and Kick Ranch. The couple owns a 2-acre vineyard in Bennett Valley that was originally planted to Syrah but now is being grafted to Cabernet Franc.

Bevan's winemaking approach centers on managing tannins, resulting in wines that are massive yet refined. To achieve this, he employs cold soaks and extended maceration. In addition to tending his own label, he consults for a handful of clients, including Wren Hop, Westerhold Family, Jemrose, Château Boswell and Harbison. "I have to think I have a shot at being one of the big boys on the block," says Bevan. It's a bold assertion, but shows the depth of his confidence, backed up by the quality of his wines.

Score: 96 Showket Vineyard The Curmudgeon Oakville 2009 \$150

Score: 95 Sugarloaf Mountain The Whitney Napa Valley 2009 \$150

Score: 93 Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Showket Vineyard Bab's Cuvée 2009 \$150

Score: 92 Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville Showket Vineyard Julie's Cuvée 2009 \$150

### KINSELLA

Single-minded pursuit of Dry Creek Cabernet

Before buying a vineyard and creating a wine in Sonoma's Dry

Creek Valley, Kevin Kinsella had established himself as a successful entrepreneur with diverse business interests. Kinsella is founder of the private venture capital fund Avalon Ventures. It was the first investor in the social gaming company Zynga, and Avalon developed more than 100 different companies. Kinsella is also the largest private investor in the Broadway hit *Jersey Boys*.

When Kinsella, 66, purchased a 12-acre vineyard in the foothills of the western edge of Dry Creek Valley, in 2007, his business instincts took over. "Part of the philosophy of venture capitalism is to go with the best people you can," explains Kinsella, who hired talented winemaker Thomas Brown. Kinsella quickly set his sights on making the best-tasting Cabernet from Dry Creek, an area better known for Zinfandel. And success has come swiftly—his very first vintage, the 2008, is the highest-scoring Dry Creek Cabernet to date.

Kinsella says the terroir of his hillside vineyard is key to quality, based partly on the good drainage patterns its soils provide, which helps avoid the green notes that grapes grown on the valley floor can show. There are no plans to branch out or grow beyond what the vineyard has to offer. "Buying grapes to supplement a label would be considered absurd in Burgundy or Bordeaux," he says. Instead, he wants the Kinsella story to be about a single vineyard. "I have no need for other varietals," Kinsella says. "No need to amp up production. I'd be very happy just to do this perfectly."

Score: 95 Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Creek Valley 2008 \$100

Score: 94 Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Creek Valley 2009 \$100  
KNIGHTS BRIDGE

Setting down roots in Knights Valley

Napa Valley native Tim Carl pursued many interests before fulfilling a long-term dream of making wine. Carl was first a drummer in a rock band, then a chef, navigator for a nuclear cruiser, a student of molecular genetics, and a Harvard postdoctoral fellow. Yet Carl knew he was destined to get into wine. "If you think about something for 20 years, apparently it will happen," he says.

Along the way, Carl, 47, started up wine and food groups and met people who shared his passions. In 2006, Carl and four friends decided to become business partners and start their own wine label. "[We'd] wanted to make compelling wines that tell a story of where they come from, for a long time," explains Carl. The group purchased 100 acres in Knights Valley, planting 50. Carl is managing partner, living on the property with his family. Jeff Ames is winemaker, known for his own label, Rudius, and his work for Tor. "[Ames] is someone who can express wine elegantly, the simple way," says Carl.

Most of the grapes come from acclaimed Napa vineyards, but a growing number come from the estate property in Knights Valley, just a few miles north of Napa. "It's such an amazing place," explains Carl. "It's a place where Sauvignon Blanc,

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Chardonnay and Cabernet can grow on the same parcel." They will continue to purchase fruit, while expanding their Knights Valley production.

Score: 93 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard 2009 \$135

Score: 93 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard 2009 \$135

Score: 90 Cabernet Sauvignon Knights Valley 2009 \$115  
MYRIAD CELLARS

A leap of faith pays off

In 2004, Mike and Leah Smith took a leap of faith, moving from Portland, Ore., to Napa so Mike could try his hand at winemaking. It's the sort of risk most wine lovers only dream of taking. "We are the type of people that try to seize every opportunity," explains Leah. "I never want to live life wondering woulda, coulda, shoulda."

Mike Smith learned wine quickly, and drew on the knowledge of winemaker Thomas Brown. The two met on a wine bulletin discussion board in the mid '90s, when Brown was winemaker at Turley and Smith was looking for Zinfandels from the label. Beginning in 2000, Smith started saving up vacation days so he that could go to Napa for three weeks at a time during harvest to work Brown, for free. In 2004, Smith sold his courier business and relocated to Napa, where Brown had offered him a harvest job paying \$12 an hour.

Smith ended up making wine alongside Brown for five years, assisting with clients like Schrader, Maybach and Outpost. In 2009, the Smiths struck out on their own, founding Myriad. They purchase grapes from different vineyards in Napa, including top Cabernet vineyard Beckstoffer Dr. Crane. Mike, 44, says his desire is to create big wines with finesse, using what he calls natural, "hands-off" winemaking. He also has clients such as Quivet and Carter that have excelled under his winemaking hand. It's clear the couple made the right decision. "I've never met anyone more meant to make wine than Mike," says Leah.

Score: 92 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard 2009 \$95

Score: 90 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Vineyard Georges

III 2009 \$75

Score: 89 Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District 2009 \$65

POTT WINE

A winemaking talent on a clear trajectory

The son of a Presbyterian minister, with a fondness for German Riesling, Aaron Pott knew early on he wanted to be a winemaker. He grew up in Eugene, Ore., but his father's vocation moved the family around. When Pott graduated from high school, his family was living in Davis, Calif., presenting him convenient opportunity to attend the University of California, Davis, to study enology. "I imagined winemaking was like being a mad scientist. I hadn't thought of the agricultural aspect, which of course now is the most important part," recalls Pott, 45.

After Davis, Pott's career took off. He began at Newton, in Napa, in 1990, under winemaker John Kongsgaard and consultant Michel Rolland. Rolland helped him find a job in Bordeaux. When Pott showed up for his first day at Château Troplong-Mondot, he found out he was the winemaker, not just a cellar hand. Next, he was winemaker and general manager of Château La Tour Figeac, and later earned a masters in viticulture from the University of Burgundy.

In 1998, he joined Beringer as winemaker for its international properties, in France, Italy and South America. In 2001 he returned to California as winemaker for St. Clement, adding a stint at Quintessa in 2004 before starting his own label and consulting business in 2007.

Pott wines are produced in part from his own 76-acre property on Mount Veeder in Napa Valley, as well as from purchased grapes. His list of clients is long, including Quixote, Blackbird, Seven Stones, Fisher and Bello. "I have four tenets that I abide by," explains Pott. "Work slowly, taste often, travel often, and keep it weird," he says, breaking into a grin.

Score: 93 Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford The Arsenal Greer Vineyard 2009 \$120

Score: 92 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Her Majesty's Secret Service Stagecoach Vineyard 2009 \$110

Score: 92 Cabernet Sauvignon Stags Leap District Actaeon Quixote Vineyard 2009 \$110