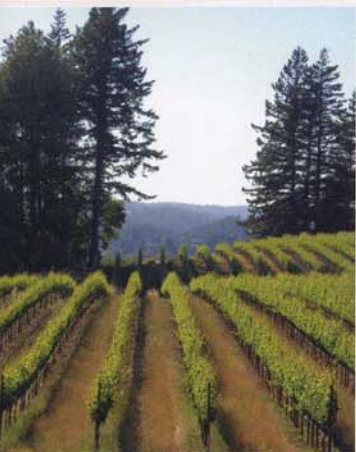


Wine & Spirits

SPECIAL ISSUE

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REBELS ROCK THE

BEST

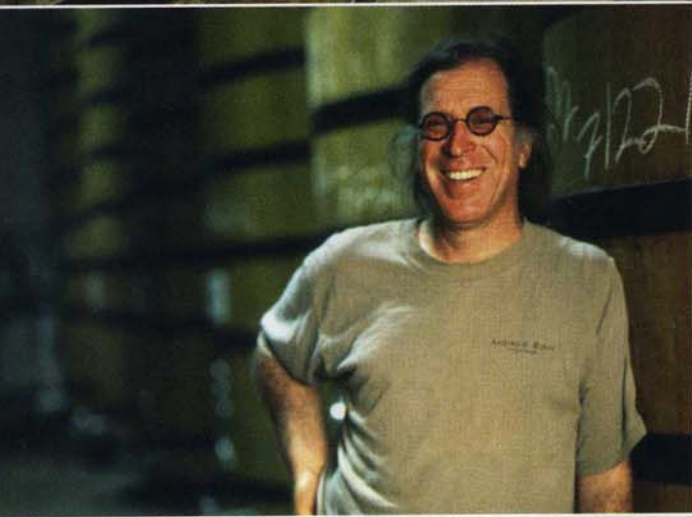
IN THE WORLD OF

WINE



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natural wine leaders

Many of the most vocal rebels in the wine world today are promoting their wines as “natural.” It’s a positive trend in the context of other issues of the moment—global warming, rising oil prices, falling water supplies, contaminated foodstuffs and pollution from chemical farming.

Most leaders in the natural wine movement can agree about what they are working against. But there is no universal definition of what they are working toward: What makes a wine natural?

The French invented bureaucracy, so it’s no surprise that *vin naturel* actually has a meaning in France. Alice Feiring profiles some of the leaders who agree with the meaning (non-sulfured wine) and others who move in their own natural directions.

In Italy, the movement has as much to do with ancient traditions, or prehistoric extrapolations. Some growers idealize a complete lack of intervention, as if to go back to the time when wine invented itself. Matthew MacCartney considers the range of producers from Friuli to Sicily who are reinventing wine in an “untouched” state.

In the New World, Max Allen just completed a book on the sometimes eccentric producers of natural wine of Australia; he profiles the leaders Down Under while *W&S* critic Patrick Comiskey, who has written extensively on sustainable, organic and biodynamic viticulture in the US, covers the leaders in California, Oregon and Washington.

And if you’re curious about how extensive this movement has become, we’ve produced a list of the top performing natural and biodynamic wines from our own tastings—a shopper’s guide to some of the best.



Benziger's biodynamic vineyards on Sonoma Mountain



Christophe Baron, Cayuse



Alan York



John Williams, Frog's Leap Winery



Randall Graham, Bonny Doon

And to three of the most important biodynamic growers in the valley: Bart and Daphne Araujo, whose farming restored the Eisele Vineyard to its former glory; Valeria and Agustin Huneeus, who developed and farm Quintessa as a biodynamic vineyard; and Ivo Jeramaz at Grgich Hills Cellar, who in 2007 certified 366 vineyard acres biodynamic, the largest such holding in Napa.

Mike Benziger

Since 1996, when he sought to reverse a decline in soil health at his family's Sonoma Mountain estate, Mike Benziger has aggressively pursued alternative growing practices to promote the health of his vineyards. On a visit to Nicolas Joly in Savennières, he was introduced to biodynamics, and, with the guidance of the gifted and indefatigable Alan York (who had helped Jim Fetzer convert McNab Ranch to biodynamic farming), Benziger has become one of this country's most energetic spokesmen for the farming practice.

Randall Graham

From Rhône varieties to screwcaps, Randall Graham has been ahead of the curve for most of his career at Bonny Doon Vineyard in Santa Cruz. In the last ten years he's

plumbed the mysteries of terroir with the dogged zeal of a detective, converting to biodynamic farming in order, he says, to 'elucidate' terroir. More recently Graham has been exploring the use of crystal formation (created by adding copper chloride to a tiny amount of wine or plant material) to visually map the terroir expression of a site. Not everyone buys into his interpretation of the results, but few would deny it's compelling.

Doug Tunnell

In 2003, former CBS newsman and winemaker Doug Tunnell helped organize a biodynamic study group with winemakers and vineyard managers from across the Willamette Valley. Many of the members—such as Moe Momtazi, owner of Oregon's largest biodynamic vineyard, Maysara—have become active participants in the natural wine movement in Oregon. And Tunnell is their eloquent (albeit unofficial) spokesman, working closely with Demeter and the Oregon Wine Board to urge other growers down this path. The results at Brick House, Tunnell's winery in the Dundee Hills, are apparent in his vivid 2006 chardonnays and pinot noirs, such as the earthy, violet-scented Cuvée de Tonnelier Pinot Noir.

Ed King III

At King Estate's remote locale south of Eugene, Oregon, Ed King III first laid down his vineyards using sustainable viticultural practices in the mid-nineties. He then took the next step, to organic farming, while converting newly purchased adjacent land along the way. By 2002, the entire estate had been certified organic by Oregon Tilth. At more than 1,000 contiguous acres, King Estate, Oregon's largest winery, manages the state's largest vineyard, which also happens to be its largest organic vineyard.

Christophe Baron

Since 1994, when Christophe Baron planted syrah in the rocks of an ancient riverbed on the Walla Walla Valley floor, he has been the poster boy for terroirists in Washington State. In 2002, when he wanted to improve what little soil was lodged between rocks on his land, he consulted with Philippe Armermier to convert to biodynamics—a first for Walla Walla. The locals thought he was crazy to plant a vineyard in the rocks—crazier still to employ biodynamic preparations—but even through the heat and cold of a Walla Walla season, he's getting great results at Cayuse. ■