

WINES & VINES

THE VOICE OF THE WINE INDUSTRY

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Wines That Changed the Industry

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WINES THAT CHANGED THE INDUSTRY

By Jim Gordon

with Linda Jones McKee
and Hudson Cattell

Technical breakthroughs and stylistic leaps in North American wines over nine decades

As *Wines & Vines* marks its 90th anniversary, it seems appropriate to publish a historically oriented piece on the many achievements of our audience during those nine decades. Rather than retelling the history of winemaking, as many authors have already done so well in book form, we conducted the thought-provoking exercise of picking out individual wines from the last 90 years that embodied important advancements in premium grapegrowing and quality winemaking.

The wines described below reflect innovations that stuck with the wine industry for an extended time, and in many cases still represent the industry standards. The innovations in some cases were actually returns to traditional methods. We ruled out wines famous mostly for winning competitions or high scores, as well as wines known largely for their marketing accomplishments. We did not consider sales success alone a deciding factor.

It was a fascinating but forbidding task. We consulted and interviewed dozens of winemakers, growers, academics, suppliers and contributing *Wines & Vines* writers for ideas. With limited space in our magazine, we certainly have omitted many worthy wines, whole technologies and professional areas of accomplishment among growers and winemakers, as well as geographic regions of importance. This is not a definitive list, but an attempt to illustrate the progress of North American winemaking through a few concrete examples.

We encourage you to follow up this article by sending your own nominations

for "Wines That Changed the Industry" to edit@winesandvines.com, and we will print as many as possible in a subsequent issue. Or go to the electronic version of this article at winesandvines.com, scroll to the bottom of the article and click "Post a Comment" to submit your thoughts directly to the website.

1920s Sweet and sacramental

1922 Concannon Angelica
Livermore Valley

1930s Enduring collectible

1936 Beaulieu Vineyard Cabernet
Sauvignon Private Reserve 1936

1940s French hybrids arrive

1945 Boordy Vineyards Baco Noir

1950s First eastern *vinifera*

1955 Brights Wines Pinot Champagne
and 1956 Pinot Chardonnay

1960s New York's transition

1960 Gold Seal Vineyards Pinot Noir
and Chardonnay

1970s One man's vision

1970 The Eyrie Vineyards Pinot Noir
Willamette Valley

1980s A Rhône ranger rides

1984 Bonny Doon Cigare Volant California

Probably the first red-wine blend of Rhône varieties in the U.S., this California "cryptoneuf-du pape" as its pun-loving inventor Randall Grahm called it, got lots of attention for its unique flavor profile and its tongue-in-cheek name,



which referenced a flying saucer sighting in the French district of Chateauneuf-du-Pape. Joseph Phelps and Estrella River wineries already had bottled Syrah, but this was apparently the first commercial wine to use three of the principal grapes of France's Southern Rhône valley. Bonny Doon founder Grahm said he made about 1,300 cases, sourcing mostly Grenache from the Besson vineyard in Hecker Pass, and blending in a minority of Syrah from Estrella River and Mourvèdre from a San Joaquin Valley vineyard.

1990s Going organic

1990 Bonterra Red Wine
Mendocino County

2000s Too early to tell?