

Randall Grahm, Founder of Bonny Doon Vineyard

by Michelle Metter

AUTHOR, LECTURER, AND winemaking trailblazer **Randall Grahm**, a highly respected figure in the industry, is known for being a fierce champion of Rhône varieties in California (originally created as an homage to Châteauneuf-du-Pape, his flagship wine, Le Cigare Volant, has taken on an identity of its own).

Continuing his legacy of tireless innovation, the Bonny Doon Vineyard founder is currently focused on creating a truly original *vin de terroir* at his estate vineyard in San Juan Bautista. He'll also serve as a featured guest lecturer at SommCon San Diego, set for November 14–16.

Q: **Mr. Grahm, you are a man of many monikers. Is there one you wear most proudly?**

Randall Grahm: I was called at one point the original "Rhône Ranger," and I have greatly appreciated the fact that that little bit of publicity ultimately shined a light on an emergent category of wines in the New World. However, I do maintain that ultimately it is our job to discover what it is we're here to do in a more original, less derivative way—ideally as custodians of our unique terroirs. No one has called me this yet, but I'd much prefer to be the "San Juan Bautista Ranger," or even better, the "Pope (or Petit Prince) of Popelouchum." (*Editor's note:* Popelouchum refers to Bonny Doon's 400-acre estate vineyard.)

Q: **At SommCon San Diego this November, you'll discuss *vin de terroir* in the New World. Can you tell us a little about your plans to breed**



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10,000 new grape varieties and the effect this might have on the future of winemaking?

The plan has aspirational hopes for two benign outcomes. First, in the creation of 10,000 new things, there's the hope that there will be at least a few new biotypes with original, useful qualities that are not just agronomic, but also aesthetic. Second, the creation of a wine from a very large set of genetically diverse individuals all descending from common parentage may be the opportunity to fashion an utterly unique "wine of place." It would suppress its varietal characteristics in favor of the expression of, say, soil characteristics, making a more eloquent *vin de terroir*.

As far as effect on the industry, honestly, one never knows, but most likely it will not have much of an effect in the short run. When there is a strong desire within the industry to make a truly drought-tolerant or disease-resistant grape, I imagine that the

use of genetic manipulation will likely be the course we take, as we're generally always in a hurry to see things happen yesterday.

Q: **You have five minutes and one glass of wine. Who are you with, what are you drinking, and what's playing in the background?**

It's an older Burgundy out of a large-format bottle—maybe the '49 de Domaine Comte de Vogüé Musigny. My daughter, who's not yet of drinking age, has expressed a strong desire to learn more about Burgundy, so she'd be a good person to share this with. Bach's Cello Suites would be the way to go for a musical selection. *§*

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