

Harvest Preview

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

14 **The Lions Release Dinner** Join **Tim** and **Sabrina**, fifth-generation **Hess** family members, and the winemaking team for their annual feast. Enjoy a garden reception followed by a formal dinner by Executive Chef **Chad Hendrickson** in the Hess Art Museum. Tickets: \$300/\$240; hesscollection.com/event/release-the-lions-19



14 **V. Sattui's Annual Harvest Ball** Celebrating its 35th year, the V. Sattui Harvest Ball promises to be memorable. Enjoy a culinary journey through Italy prepared by Michelin star chef **Stefano Masanti**, paired with V. Sattui's top tier wines — including the winery's highest-rated cabernets, perfectly aged large formats and other rare selections. Tickets: \$260/\$280; vsattui.com/events/harvest-ball

21 **Inglenook Harvest Party** Celebrate the official release of 2016 Rubicon at the annual Inglenook Harvest Party, an always festive occasion featuring colorful decor, a seasonal menu by Estate Chef **Alex Lovick** and strains of music filling the air. Tickets: \$300; inglenook.com/events

31 **Ballentine Harvest Dinner** Experience vineyard dining on a silky autumn evening alongside Ballentine winemaker **Bruce Devlin** and owners **Betty** and son **Frank Ballentine**. Enjoy a multicourse dinner along with live music and plenty of Ballentine wine. Tickets \$165/\$135; ballentinevineyards.com/wine-events



OCTOBER

7 **Baldacci Family Vineyards Harvest Dinner** Enjoy a festive and family-style meal with magnums from the cellar, special holiday wine offers and live music to keep the beat. Tickets: \$175/\$100; baldaccivineyards.com/events

WINEMAKERS

VINEYARDS OF DREAMS

BY BOB COOPER

When the number of Napa wineries multiplied in the '70s and '80s, workers were needed for the harvest, and Mexican American immigrants began filling that need. Many who came from Mexico to pick grapes as teenagers settled in the Napa Valley and now have grandchildren. A few eventually opened their own family wineries. But none have more dramatically catapulted themselves from underpaid teenage pickers to wine producers, driven by a passion for viticulture, than **Amelia and Pedro Ceja, Rolando Herrera and Bulmaro Montes**. Here are the stories of how they willed their American dreams, against all odds, into existence.

Amelia Moran Ceja was raised to dream big, so it came as no surprise to her dad, **Felipe Moran**, when she made a bold declaration while they worked in a Napa Valley vineyard.

"One day I will have a vineyard," she told him, to which he replied, without a hint of condescension, "Of course you will." Now 92 and still living in Napa, Felipe had marched with **Cesar Chavez** and later headed the United Farm Workers. He embraced the union's unofficial slogan, *Sí, Se Puede* ("Yes, it can be done"). Like father, like daughter, as young, ambitious Amelia would eventually get that vineyard and much more.

It was around this time in the vineyards that Amelia again showed her determination when a fellow 12-year-old immigrant from Mexico, **Pedro Ceja**, offered to lend a hand. "I was there with my mom and sisters, and I saw this short girl trying so hard to dump

her grapes into the gondola [tractor-pulled trailer]," recalls Pedro, his sun-weathered face creased in a smile. "She let me know that she did *not* want my help." She didn't hold the chivalrous act against him, however, and continued to notice the quiet, handsome young *campesino* in the Merlot vineyards and middle-school hallways.

Time passed. Amelia returned to Mexico for two years, then attended U.C. San Diego on a full scholarship. But during a summer at home between terms, spent planting vines and working as a server, she bumped into Pedro again. He asked her to slip away to Lake Berryessa for a picnic, she agreed, and five years later they were married in Yountville.

Amelia became a winery consultant and Pedro an electrical engineer — surely a success story for two kids whose first 11 years were spent in Mexican towns while their fathers sent money home from California

harvest jobs. But Amelia's vineyard vision tugged at her, and it soon became shared by Pedro and their parents and siblings.

"We wanted to grow our own grapes," says Pedro, whose nine brothers and sisters also immigrated to the Napa Valley. "My brother **Armando** was getting his enology degree, my father worked as a foreman for **Robert Mondavi**, and Amelia knew everything about the wine business, so we had all the fundamentals. We just needed land."

It was Pedro's mother, **Juanita**, who spotted the For Sale sign on a quiet road in the Carneros region in 1983. Savings were pooled, and the 20-acre lot was purchased. It was five years before the first harvest came in, with the grapes sold to **Domaine Chandon**, then 11 more years before Amelia was able to launch Ceja Vineyards. She was the first Mexican American woman to be president of a U.S. winery, and Ceja would

soon become the first California winery to pair Mexican food with wines — Amelia's idea, now a common practice. "The wine industry, which wouldn't exist without Latinos, ignored people of color," she says, "so I saw an opportunity." Half of Ceja wine club members today are Latinos.

Channeling her father's activism, Amelia doesn't merely talk politics. She attended President **Barack Obama's** first inauguration, where Ceja wines were poured in the White House, and her lobbying contributed to the passage of a 2015 law that keeps minors out of the fields when harmful pesticides are used. "Unfortunately, the current administration is trying to overturn it," she laments.

Pedro's parents, **Juanita** and **Pablo**, now live in a house on the vineyard property, where grandchildren come often to visit and to help out in the Ceja Vineyards offices.

Pedro's daughter, **Dalia**, an MBA graduate, now serves as Ceja's marketing director; sons **Ariel** and **Navek** consult on business operations and manage Ceja's tasting room near Sonoma, respectively; their uncle, **Armando Ceja**, is Ceja's winemaker and viticulturist, and his daughter, **Belen**, is director of wine production.

"I'm convinced these kids will take it to the next level," says Pedro. If so, it will be at splashy new digs. A chapel built on the Carneros spread is the first stage of a 9,000-square-foot, mission-style hospitality center that will include a plaza, small museum, and spacious tasting room and demonstration kitchen for food-and-wine experiences. The complex should open in three years. *Sí, se puede*.

Amelia Moran Ceja and daughter Dalia, who serves as Ceja Vineyards' marketing director, sample the fruits of the family business.

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MUST HAVES

Wine Country Edition

BY DAVID NASH



Property Envy. Set on six acres, the newly reimagined MacArthur Place Hotel & Spa in Sonoma unveiled its \$20 million renovations in May. The luxury boutique hotel, with its nicely appointed 64 rooms, also celebrated the property's 150th anniversary. The full transformation debuted last month with a completely new food and beverage program that includes Layla, The Porch and The Bar at MacArthur. Take a well-deserved staycation and treat yourself to one of their signature spa amenities like the Wine Country Detox (\$235). Seasonal rates. macarthurplace.com



Class Act. Voted "One of America's 100 Best Wine Restaurants" by *Wine Enthusiast*, Compline is more than a local watering hole. Located on First Street in Napa — and celebrating its second anniversary this month — the wine bar, restaurant and merchant from master sommelier **Matt Stamp** and **Ryan Stetins**, former wine director at Charlie Trotter's, is the place to go to buy unusual wines and for unique tasting experiences. Take one of Compline's wine classes or "World Tours," where you can taste the wines of Santorini (\$75), indulge in all things Champagne (\$100), or learn about the wines of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia in its "Post-Communist Bloc Party" (\$75). complinewine.com

Turn the page for more Must Haves

Harvest Preview



The name of the winery says it all: *Mi Sueno*. “My Dream.” **Rolando Herrera** was advised against using the name that naysayers deemed unpronounceable to Americans, but he wouldn’t back down. “Mi Sueno connected with my passion for what I do,” he explains. The dream has since branched out like one of his well-tended grapevines to enter the minds of his wife and six children, whose names adorn seven Herrera wines (Mi Sueno’s premium label).

“I named each wine after their personality traits,” he says. “So **Rebecca**, my oldest, is a mature, consistent wine [served at Obama’s first state dinner]; **Rolando Jr.** is a strong, monster cab named for my athletic son; **Esmeralda** is a mischievous, flirty pinot; **Victoria** is a temperamental malbec; **Perla** is a vibrant white wine named for her pearly white skin, and **Valeria** is a confident, stubborn petit verdot. And then there’s **Lorena**, named after my wife — a stable, warm, beautiful Bordeaux blend.”

The robust, bearded winemaker, whose powerful handshake is forged by a life of physical work, sits at an outdoor table behind the barrel room, recounting his circuitous journey. “I lived in St. Helena from 8 to 13, sometimes working in the vineyards after school, and then the family returned to Mexico. But

I wanted to come back, so when I was 15, I returned with my 17-year-old brother.”

While living in a plant nursery and then a one-bedroom apartment shared by 18 people, he attended high school and worked in restaurants, orchards and vineyards. But his dream took shape when he began working the 3-to-midnight shift at Stags’ Leap, the same day that senior-year classes started at his high school. “The vineyards and the barrels smelled like paradise to me,” he says. “I knew from that day that that’s what I wanted the rest of my life.”

A series of wine industry jobs followed, often demanding 10- to 16-hour workdays. While taking U.C. Davis viticulture classes, he became one of the first Latinos to work in a Napa Valley cellar, at Stags’ Leap. In 1997, he married longtime sweetheart Lorena, also the progeny of vineyard workers, and used all of his savings and credit to produce the first 200 cases of Mi Sueno wines.

Flash-forward to 2019: Rolando’s wife, two brothers and two oldest children all work for Mi Sueno, and everyone in the family helps out during busy times. “You should see us during harvest and bottling,” says 20-year-old Rolando Jr. “We’re all busy,

Rolando and Lorena Herrera pose with their six children, for whom they’ve named six of their vibrant wines. After a stint at Stags’ Leap, Rolando opened the family’s winery, Mi Sueno, or “My Dream,” more than 20 years ago.

even Valeria [age 12]. I’ve shown my sisters how to prune, and we each take a row.” He’s helped bring in the harvest for most of his life.

“By the time I was 12, I was spending all summer in the vineyards and cellar, and I’m now spending three mornings and every Saturday out here. I want to learn

it all.” After earning enology and viticulture degrees, Rolando Jr. aims to work in wineries, though not Mi Sueno at first. “I want to learn from other winemakers and then hopefully develop my own wines.”

Rolando Sr. is a baseball fan, and Mi Sueno is filled with the framed autographed jerseys of major leaguers who have visited, including former Giants **Barry Bonds**, **Chili Davis** and **Rich Aurilia**. His wines have also been sipped by former Mexican president **Vicente Fox** and former first lady **Barbara Bush** at a White House state dinner in 2001, with Barbara liking it well enough to order an extra case. Rolando Sr. wants everyone to partake and to follow their dreams. “Dreaming is free,” he is fond of saying, “so dream big!”

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MUST HAVES

Wine Country Edition

BY DAVID NASH

Over a Barrel. Earlier this year, Jordan Vineyards & Winery released the 2015 Jordan Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$57), the label’s first red wine aged exclusively in French oak barrels. Predominantly a blend of cab and merlot, and aged for 13 months in 47 percent new and 53 percent 1-year-old barrels, it offers more black fruit and deeper, complex flavors. *Wine & Spirits* magazine’s “30th Annual Restaurant Poll” recently rated Jordan’s Russian River Valley Chardonnay ninth (\$36) and its Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon third (\$65) on its list of most popular wines by varietal. Visit its estate property in Healdsburg and see what you’ve been missing. By appointment only. jordanwinery.com



Jailbreak. Explore The Prisoner Wine Company’s passion for combining bold wines and culinary flavors with The Makery Experience: Wine & Food Pairing (\$125) from Executive Chef **Brett Young**. Located in St. Helena, its private tasting gallery, The Makery, also includes pop-up vignettes by local creatives including **Shujan Bertrand**’s Aplat culinary goods, Amanda Wright Pottery and the graphite artwork of Agelio Batle. In the wine department a clear standout is the *Dérangé* (\$100), a phenomenal red blend full of black cherry, clove spice, blackberry cobbler and vanilla toast. By appointment only. thepisonerwinecompany.com

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Harvest Preview

Tucked away on a quiet road in the hills of Coombsville, Napa Valley's newest wine appellation, Marita's Vineyard is typically unpretentious. The sign outside is smaller than a real estate agent's and the tasting room is inside **Bulmaro and Sara Montes'** home. Only the 2.6 acres of vineyards that surround the ranch-style property make it evident that this is not just another house on North Avenue.

When Bulmaro arrived in Rutherford from Oaxaca at 16 to join his father and older brother, they had already been working the vineyards since the 1950s. But field work didn't satisfy the teen, so in his spare time he began educating himself by learning English and devouring books about viticulture.

"My father told me that one day we'd have a vineyard and make wine, so I wanted to learn how to grow the best grapes,"

he says. By the time he was 23 in 1973 — the same year he first met his wife Sara at night school — he was already working at Joseph Phelps Vineyards, which began producing acclaimed Insignia wines the following year. Bulmaro would travel to France to soak in more wine knowledge and eventually become vice president of operations at Joseph Phelps.

Only after decades of working for winemakers did Bulmaro realize he still hadn't made good on his dad's declaration. It was now or never, so, in 2001, he emptied his life savings and retirement money to purchase the Coombsville land and began planting. "I did it for my family," he says. The first batch

of Marita's wine was bottled in 2005.

The harvests have been good to him. His daughters, **Mara** and **Sophia**, assist him when they can, even though both have full-time finance jobs outside the wine industry, and his wife assists during group and wine-club pairings at a long tasting table overlooking the vineyards. But only Bulmaro, 70, and his brother **Manuel**, 79, tend to the 5,000 vines, using no pesticides. "We have no help except during harvest and bottling," he says.

Harvest serves as an annual family reunion, with his daughters and five grandchildren all pitching in.

Marita's sells only three wines, all cabernet sauvignons. The pricing at \$125 to \$300 per bottle reflects the unique Coombsville terroir, French oak barrel aging, and the care the two septuagenarian brothers put into coddling the vines. Their finest wine, the Legacy, features an image of Bulmaro's granddaughters, **Chloe** and **Lily**, frolicking through the vineyards; all three wine labels display the shield of Huajuapán de Leon, his original hometown. It's a tribute to his family roots, which run as deep as the rich volcanic soil of his small but fecund vineyards. **NHG**



Bulmaro and Sara Montes enjoy a glass of cabernet sauvignon at Marita's Vineyard.

BEAUTY GOOD GRAPES

BY NATASHA CHALENKO

For all the enchantment and culinary pleasure that wine country provides, one very special — and unexpected — gift is the grape's contribution to some of the world's most prestigious beauty products.

Precious Harvest: Grape Pearls by The House of Oud captures the true essence of the wine country. It's made from the finest ingredients and creates a beautiful olfactory symphony. The effect is complex, delicious and magical. The exquisite bouquet opens up with velvety notes of morning flowers and frozen blueberries, then transforms into a mix of sun-warmed grapes surrounded by roses; a mouthwatering waft of coffee beans adds to the scent experience, which finishes with a heady flourish of amber, vanilla, musk and oud. Grape Pearls is a true masterpiece of perfumery; the vessel that houses this precious liquid is one of the most beautiful perfume bottles I've ever seen. The bottle's distinctive sculpted top-down design is reminiscent of a polished stone, and each is hand-glazed by a special marbling process so that no two are alike. It's a fabulous gift for the connoisseur who loves the finer things in life, whether it's perfume, wine or art. *The House of Oud Grape Pearls Eau De Parfum, \$220 for 75 ml; thoo.it.*



The Power of Grapes: In the beauty world, the brand Caudalie is famous for pioneering the use of grape-based ingredients in skin care and popularizing the ancient plant's potent anti-aging benefits. Caudalie was the first company to offer stabilized Polyphenols (grape seed extracts), which are known to contain some of the most

powerful antioxidants in the botanical world. Twenty-five years ago, founders **Mathilde** and **Bertrand Thomas**, who have winemaking roots, teamed up with **Joseph Vercauteren**, a professor of pharmacognosy (the study of medicine derived from plants) at the University of Montpellier in France; since then, they've poured immense effort into the use of a variety of natural ingredients, such as Resveratrol (extracted from grapevine stalks) and Viniferine (a grapevine sap extract). Their latest discovery is the patented complex **Vinergy**, one of the powerful ingredients in *The Serum* from Caudalie's Premier Cru collection. The product effectively tackles skin aging and was developed in collaboration with Harvard's longevity expert **Dr. David Sinclair**. *Caudalie Premier Cru The Serum, \$150; us.caudalie.com.*

MUST HAVES

Wine Country Edition

BY DAVID NASH



Noble Crafts. **Antoinette Von Grono** is anything but your typical Mendocino County-based artist. The German-born baroness, whose work can be found at Erickson Fine Arts in Healdsburg, attended the private haute couture school, Ecole Gogele, in Paris, where she earned a degree in fashion design. She's created iconic scarves for Hermès, Bogner and Leonard Paris, and pattern designs for companies like Villeroy & Boch. While you can find much of her new work at Erickson, including her Icons of Nature series — lifelike oil paintings of animals on gold leaf — her masterful hand-rolled silk scarves such as *Costa Rica* (\$155) can be acquired directly from the artist. Fine art pricing, upon request. ericksonfineartgallery.com, antoinettevongrono.com

Retail Therapy. Since opening in 2016, **Colby Hallen's** well-curated Yountville boutique, **Hunter Gatherer**, has stocked a chic array of artisanal offerings — from apothecary and home to fashion for men and women. Stop in between wine tastings to outfit yourself (and your home) in the Napa Valley style. Ladies will crush on the *Clare V Le Belt Bag* (\$275) in black-and-white python, and the men's *Corridor NYC Rainy Day M65 Jacket* (\$495) in yellow is ripe for the picking. The black-and-white striped Moroccan *Pom Pom Pillow* (\$115) is just too cool to pass up. huntergatherernapavalley.com



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