



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Ken Burnap, who has owned the county's oldest winery for more than a quarter-century, is selling his Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries.

grape expectations

County's oldest winery for sale as vintner decides to move on

Wineries *7-7-02*

By MARGO MATEAS
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Ken Burnap is a lot like the pinot noir wines he produces for Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries: robust, richly textured, subtly complex and full of character.

And, like his wine, Burnap's life gets better with age. At 70, he's saying goodbye to the winery business and preparing to sail off into the sunset with his 48-year-old bride-to-be. The retiring vintner is marrying Nancy Gaffney, the former chief executive officer of his favorite cheese company. The couple have commissioned a 56-foot French yacht, which will be named Notre Vie, French for Our Life.

"It's time," Burnap tells caller after caller who ring the winery to see if the news is true. "I've really enjoyed this. It's been a passion of mine for many, many years," he says with more than a tinge of sadness in his voice. "I'll miss the business, that's for sure. But it's time to move on and do new things."

Since 1974 Burnap has owned and operated Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries, a small winery specializing in pinot noir, cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah and duriff wines. The winery produces an average of 3,000 cases each year, shipped to fine restaurants and wine shops throughout the United States and Japan. Prices range from \$10 to \$30 a bottle.

Perched atop a mountain ridge with views of the Pacific Ocean, Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries stretches across 26 acres in what is considered one of the prime vineyard locations in California because of its cool, dry climate and even temperatures. Priced at \$4 million, it is one of the oldest continuously operated vineyards in California, begun in 1863 as the Jarvis Brothers Vineyard.

Burnap hopes that the new buyer will continue the vineyard's legacy for quality and freshness.

"I guess you could use the land for something else," he says, "but why would you? Someone who has a passion for wine but doesn't have the experience, could step into this place and start making wine tomorrow. Everything is here, ready to produce world-class wine."

Burnap got into wine as a way to impress a girlfriend when he was 19.

"I took her to the nicest restaurant in town, and the waiter was a graduate of the School of Intimidation," he says. "I went ahead and ordered the wine in French, and he wasted no time in letting me know I had butchered the pronunciation. From that night on, I read every book I could find on wines. And I've never looked back. All my life it's been my avocation, my passion."

"From the outset I wanted to create a grape here in California that rivaled the best in Burgundy, France. So I went to Burgundy and studied how they made wine,

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Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries

PROPERTY: 26 acres of vineyards and winery located in Santa Cruz.

OWNER: Ken Burnap.

SELLING PRICE: \$4 million.

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AGENT: Sue Williams, Prudential California Realty.

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KEN BURNAP, SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAIN WINERIES

Winery

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everything about it, from the climate to the acidity content to how they're harvested and fermented."

It didn't take Burnap long to realize his dream of near-perfection in a glass.

"I got lucky my first time out. I kept trying it and adding things until it was right. My first bottle sold for \$12. I'm still trying to duplicate that mix," he says, jokingly.

The winery revolves around his old-fashioned attention to detail. Grapes are harvested by hand and crushed within 20 minutes of being picked. Fermenting caps are hand-punched. Specially constructed tiers allow the wine to flow naturally from press to barrel through gravity.

No pesticides or insecticides are used. Even the fermenting yeast is gathered from wild yeast within the vineyard.

General Manager Jeff Emery has been with the winery since 1979, and is eager to stay on with the new owners if the situation presents itself.

"I've taught him everything I know about wine-making, and darn, if he isn't better at it than me now," Burnap says.

Still, it'll be difficult to see the Santa Cruz Mountain Wineries label with someone else's wine inside, he says.

"That's going to be strange. It's been mine for 28 years. I loved this business. I am really going to miss it."

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