

Bargettos of Soquel — 300 years of winemaking

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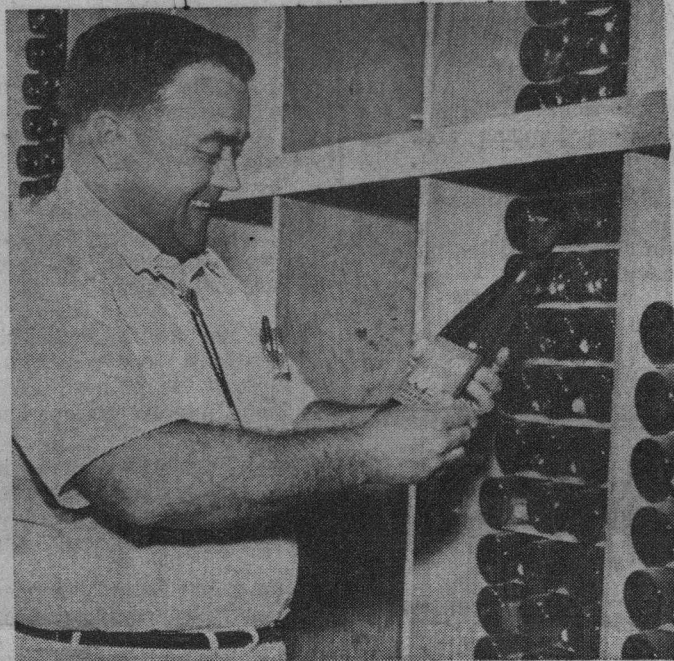
Wineries
by WINIFRED GAUVREAU

The truth of the old adage that practice makes perfect is demonstrated by the Bargettos of Soquel. They have been a wine-making family for 300 years or more and last year brought home ribbons for 14 of the 16 entries they had at the California State Fair at Sacramento.

The original Bargetto to go into the industry was born in the Piedmont area of Italy, at Asti, near the Swiss border. Guiseppe Bargetto, grandfather of the present owners, came to the United States in 1870. He got as far as Mountain View and although a wine maker in Italy he lacked capital so he farmed for a living. The going must have been rough since the minute he acquired enough money to go home he returned to Italy and never came back. He must have intrigued his sons, however, with stories about California because around the turn of the century Philip and John emigrated. First came Philip who made his way to San Francisco and worked at the old Dalmas Winery for many years. John, father of the present wine makers, followed and he made his living trading in grapes for different wineries. By 1933 when prohibition ended, the brothers had sufficient capital to launch the Bargetto winery on North Main St. at Soquel, where it continues to operate.

Although now a larger operation than in those early days it has remained a family business and will no doubt remain one. Ralph Bargetto, secretary and treasurer of the corporation, who recently went into real estate, has nine children, of which five are boys. Lawrence, who is the active wine maker and supervisor of the operation, has four youngsters and of these three are sons. Before the summer is over there will be an addition to each family.

Both Larry and Ralph were trained in the making of wine which is accomplished by time honored traditions. In fact it's been going on for so many thousands of years its beginnings are lost in time. References to wine are found in the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt and Babylonia. The writings of the Greeks and Romans are full of references to wine as an accessory of life, health and



Bob Hannah is Bargetto's tasting room host

in California began in the early 1860s with the growing of European grape varieties in all sections of the state.

In Santa Cruz County there are five types of wine grapes grown. For its white wines Bargetto's uses the Pinot Chardonnay, a white Burgundy grape of France; a Johannisberger Reisling, which is for the best wines of the Rhine and Moselle types; and a Sylvaner which makes a wine of a certain distinction of character with a good balance of sugar and acidity. The two red wine type grapes are the Cabernet Sauvignon which yield a claret-type wine; and the Pinot Noir which produces wines of very fine quality.

The grape harvesting season is, of course, the period of greatest activity around a winery and that includes Bargetto's. "There are few absolutes in wine making," says the Wine Institute of California. "No two wineries use exactly the same techniques, the same equipment, the same blends of grape varieties." Larry Bargetto has improved on some of his father's procedures and although the first step — that of starting the grapes on their way to winehood — is in the late fall, the process of wine making continues until it is sold and, some say, until it is consumed.

"Back of the wine is the vintner. And back through the years his skill. And back of it

tumbler and crushes them by impact sending the stems out one opening while the juice, skins, seeds and pulp drop through holes in the revolving cylinder to a tank underneath. Called "must" the fresh juice is pumped through hoses to the fermenting tanks. The fermentation for white wines is begun without skins, seeds and pulp.

One of the modern procedures is to add a yeast culture even though the skins of ripe grapes carry a wild yeast which could begin the fermenting cycle. The starter yeasts which are added are usually made from strains of pure wine yeasts and they promote clean and uniform fermentation. The fermentation process takes anywhere from four or five days to a week or two, depending on the type of wine being made and the amount of natural sugar which is to remain in it. As it ferments the amount of natural sugar decreases. California vintners are not permitted to add sugar to their wines because it would increase the alcoholic content beyond the maximum for wine.

Grape skin and seeds color the wine. The juice is usually drawn off from the solid matter, after several days, to continue fermenting in another container. Following the fermentation the new wine goes into storage casks of oak or redwood to begin the aging process. Larry Bargetto prefers oak for this container which is

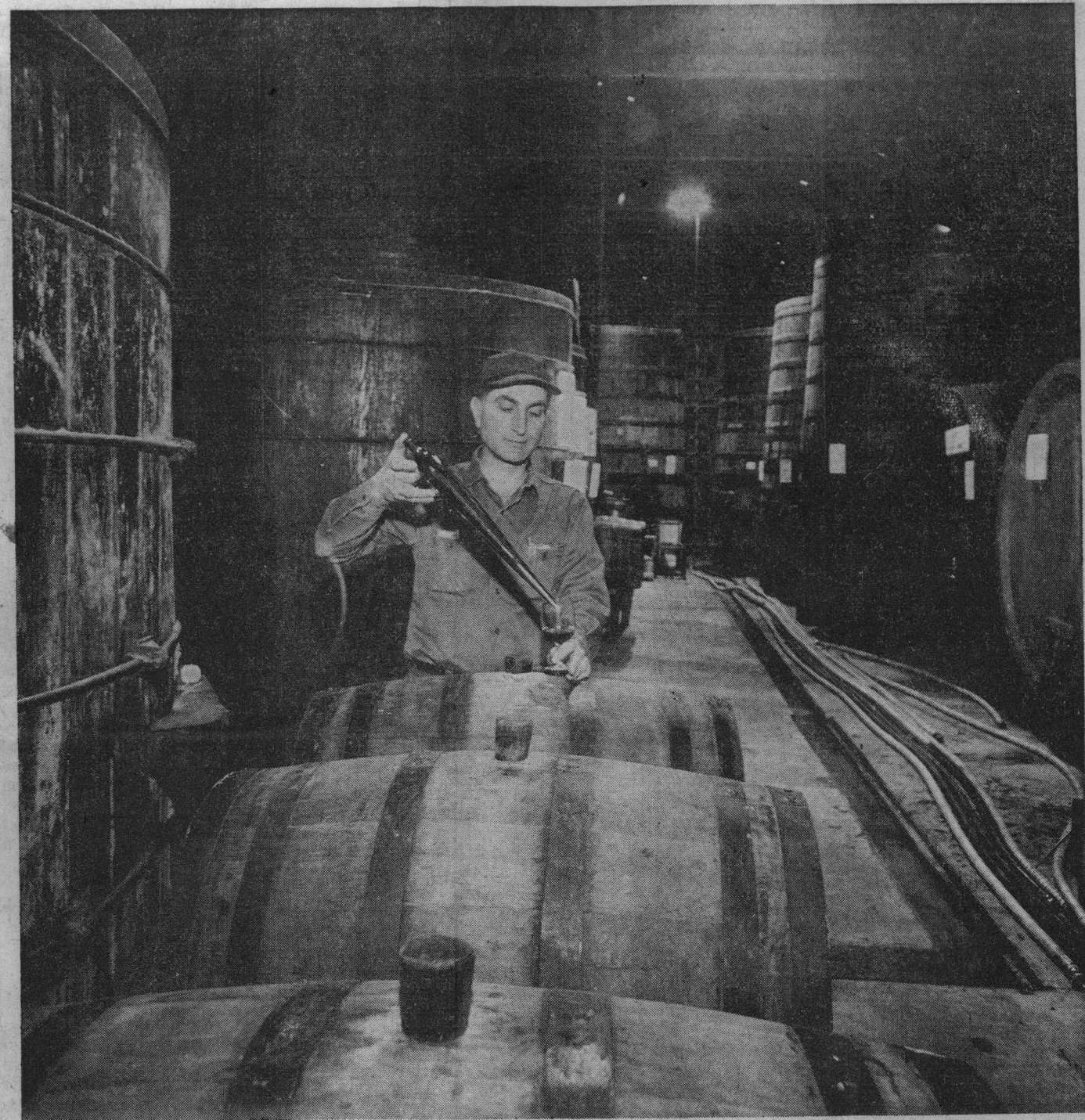
drawn off from one container and put into another to clear it of sediment. There are also the fining and filtering procedures. For fining, diatomaceous earth is introduced and the solids remaining in the wine cling to it as it drops to the bottom. Filtering, as with other liquids, is passing the wine through a series of filter pads. In the old days Larry's father dropped the wine from the eaves of the building through a series of filters. Today, sophisticated and expensive machinery pumps it through pads and over stainless steel plates. This first aging takes from several months to several years. The second stage is after bottling. One of the Bargetto exhibits is a bottle 22 years old. Most winemakers keep their wines for some time so they will be properly "bottle aged" before they are distributed. The bottles are placed horizontally in storage racks, as they should be by the home wine buyer, particularly if the bottle has been closed by cork. (Cork must be kept moist to avoid the forming of an air pocket.)

The Bargetto tasting room at one end of its plant exhibits not only the different types of wines made in this family winery but its many ribbons, newspaper clippings containing a mention of their wines, a variety of gift items, some gourmet foods, and cook books focusing on wine cookery. Here sales manager Bob Hannah serves as host and tour guide.

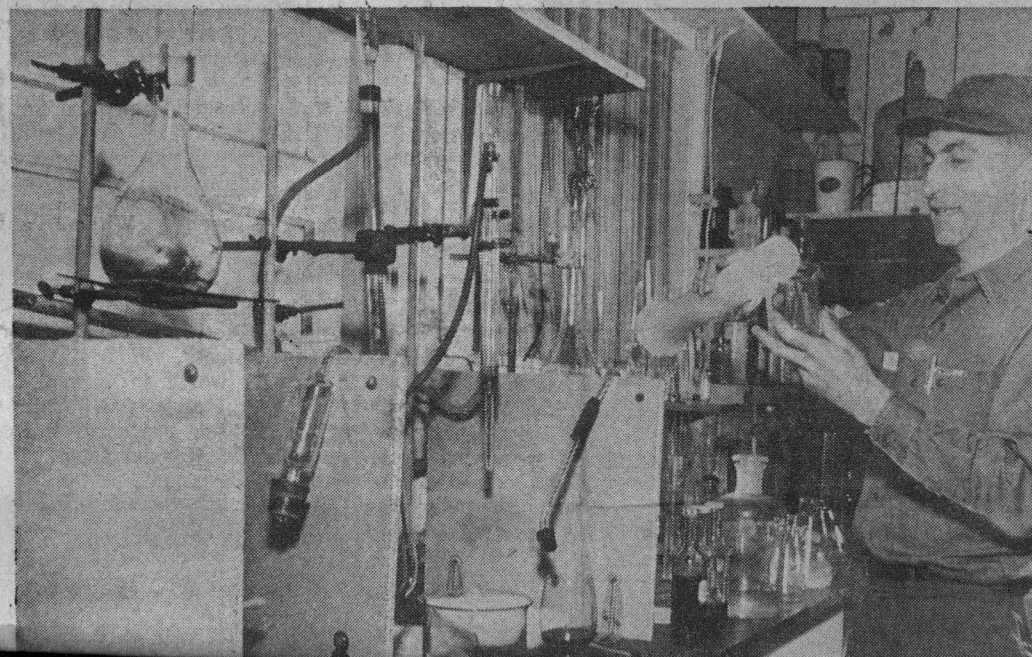
Following the tour of the winery visitors gather in the tasting room. There, Bob explains and discusses the history of particular European varietal wines, tells how the grape vines were brought to this country and by whom, and how the American counterpart was developed. Guests sip and sample some of the wines which Bob told them about during the tour, and compare different types of both white and red.

Many people are timid about wine. There is a feeling that there are so many mysteries and traditions about the kinds of wines, the foods with which they should be served, and the glasses in which they must be poured, that the problems are practically insurmountable.

"There isn't any mystery about wine," says Bob. "There are traditions but these are not so rigid they can't be broken. Wine is a natural beverage and can be enjoyed with little fuss."



Using what is known as a "wine thief," Larry Bargetto draws sample in dimly lit aging room



thousands of years its beginnings are lost in time. References to wine are found in the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt and Babylonia. The writings of the Greeks and Romans are full of references to wine as an accessory of life, health and happiness.

The Phoenicians took the "vine that bears wine" to Ancient Greece. The Greeks were the first Europeans to grow wine and they taught the Romans. In turn Rome established wine growing as an important agricultural industry in Western Europe following Caesar's conquests. Since the Roman era every European country has produced wine. It is Europeans who brought the industry to the United States. As a matter of fact it was the Spaniards who established an industry beginning in Mexico and spreading into California where Padre Junipero Serra is said to have found particularly favorable conditions for wine growing.

Commercial wine making

grapes on their way to winehood — is in the late fall, the process of wine making continues until it is sold and, some say, until it is consumed.

"Back of the wine is the vintner. And back through the years his skill. And back of it all are the vines in the sun. And the rain and the Master's will" is an old motto found on a 19th century California wine cask. From it there is the impression that lots of rain is needed. Far from true. Rain holds down the natural sugar content of grapes. Sun and heat bring it out.

Bargetto's buy its grapes from the surrounding area, and like other modern vintners use power operated crushers to extract the juice and to de-stem the fruit within hours of picking. As the grapes are taken off the truck they are inspected and weighed and then moved into the crusher - stemmer on a conveyer. Called a "Garolla" it paddles the grapes within a

drawn off from the solid matter, after several days, to continue fermenting in another container. Following the fermentation the new wine goes into storage casks of oak or redwood to begin the aging process. Larry Bargetto prefers oak for this container which is technically known as cooperage and varies in size from a modest 25-gallon barrel or keg to a huge container as tall as a house and holding as much as 5,000 gallons or more. The aging rooms of the winery are dim and cool and almost frightening with the rows of immense cooperage. But it is these rooms—red wine in one, and white in the other — which keep the winery busy the rest of the year. During the aging the vintner must "top up" wine, replacing that which is lost through evaporation since air is the enemy which may injure the wine. This is done every four to six weeks to keep pockets from forming. Wine must also be "racked" or

glasses in which they must be poured, that the problems are practically insurmountable.

"There isn't any mystery about wine," says Bob. "There are traditions but these are not so rigid they can't be broken. Wine is a natural beverage and can be enjoyed with little fuss." According to Hannah the matter of red or white wine, dry or sweet, light or heavy is strictly one of individual taste. "And the shape of the glass has nothing to do with flavor," he adds. Wine glasses like silver add to the decor of a table but if nothing better is available, a glass of wine will taste fine out of a water tumbler. Both Bob and his wife drink wine each evening at dinner. The Bargetto brothers drink it twice a day—at lunch and at supper as do their wives and on special occasions their children. "Children," says Larry Bargetto, should realize that wine is part of a meal and that one does not gorge on wine anymore than on food. Children should learn about wine in a family atmosphere." The children's glass of wine is more water than wine, but the flavor is the thing.

"Every major civilization since ancient times has made wine and poets, painters and writers have praised it," so writes Vincent Price and among those he quotes is Benjamin Franklin who noted: "Wine is constant proof that God loves us and loves to see us happy."

It certainly can't be by accident that the Wine Advisory Board is located in San Francisco, and has been for years. California has more vineyards than almost any other state in the Union. Not only that but the grape growers concentrate on those varieties which are needed by wineries.

By the time the juice of the grape has become a wine fit to drink there has been a great deal of thought and work on the part of a lot of people including the Bargetto family.



Larry Bargetto runs quality control test in winery's laboratory



Group of visitors after a tour taste Bargetto's wares