

Halton Lane Winery makes strawberry wine with a 'kick'

By JEFF HUDSON

Santa Cruz County — and the Pajaro Valley in particular — are widely recognized as a terrific place to grow fruit. Apples, strawberries, and

olallieberries are among the well-established crops.

It's little wonder, then, that many home wine makers take advantage of this abundant local supply for their projects. Among these are Watsonville residents Mike Erickson and Jim Mychajlonka, who have made wine under

the "Halton Lane Winery" home label. Henceforth they'll be making wine under the "Old Mule Shoe" label.

Last year they made two wines, from local strawberries and pears. The pear wine won a third prize ribbon at this year's County Fair, and the "Halton Lane" label also placed third in the label contest.

But the strawberry wine — bottled only a week before the fair — didn't snare the judges' attention. This surprised Erickson, since the strawberry wine was his personal favorite. "It has a bite that the ones in the store don't have," he says, "and it's nowhere near as sweet." It is also "wine with a kick" (as the "Old Mule Shoe" label gleefully suggests). Erickson claims the alcohol content is around 16 percent.

Currently Mychajlonka and Erickson are at work on a "razzolla" wine (made from raspberries and olallieberries), which they crushed the first week of Novem

Ninth in a series

ber. Their basic method starts with 80 to 100 lbs. of fruit, which is juiced and combined with 15 gallons of water and varying amounts of sugar (needed to balance the acid content of the fruit). Mychajlonka makes a point of the fact that they use champagne yeast in the fermentation.

The fermenting wine is stirred periodically and monitored with a hydrometer. Finally it is racked and put in small containers, allowed to settle and racked again.

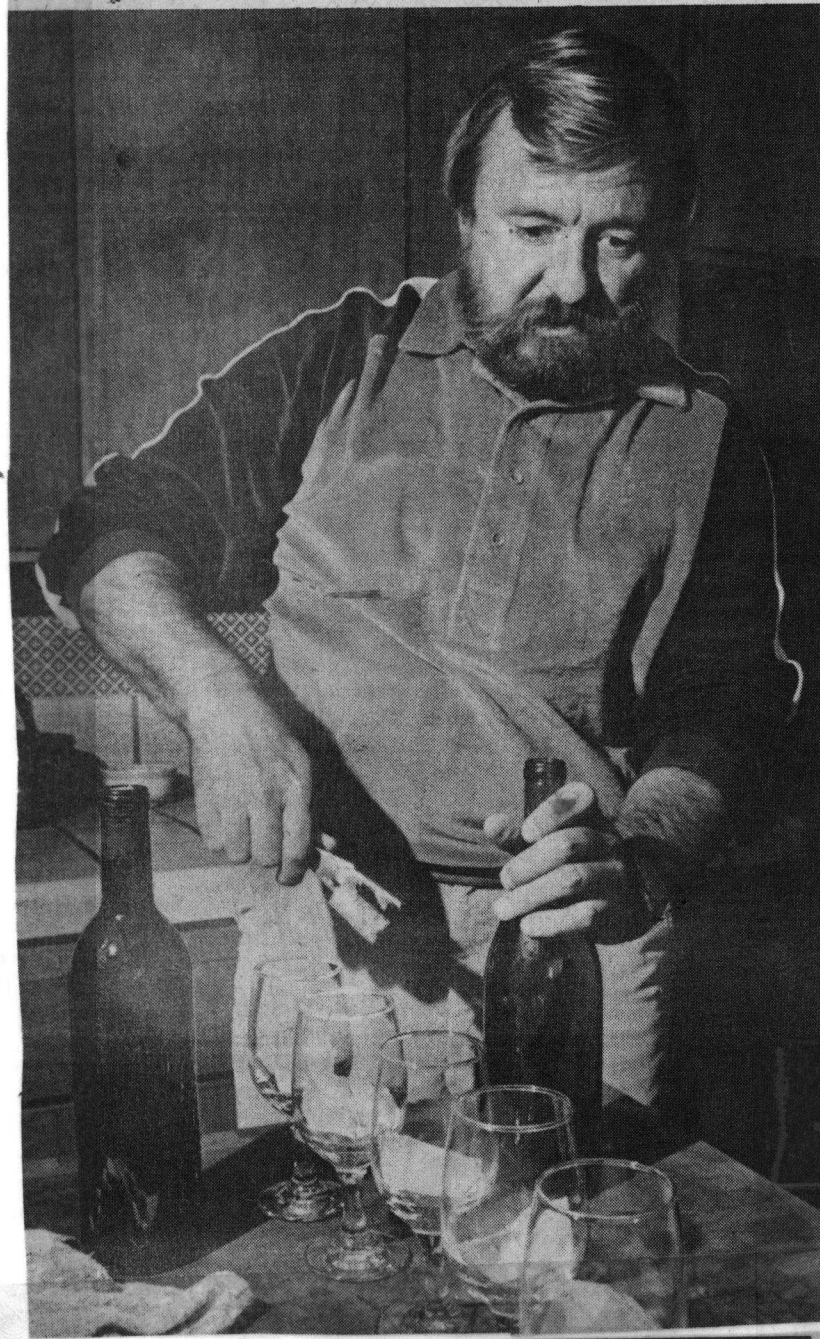
Mychajlonka, who works at a grocery in Aptos, originally started making wine with neighbor Ted Lux in 1978. Erickson, a math teacher and cartoonist, joined

when he moved into the neighborhood a few years back.

Future projects may include wine from strawberries (this will probably be the next fruit in season), apricots, and loganberries (which Erickson describes as "Watsonville's berry" because of its local origin).

Mychajlonka, who also makes beer on his own, says that living in this area has helped their wine making immensely. "There's so much fruit readily available ... This is the best berry producing area in the country."

Mychajlonka and Erickson also offered the following advice to any beginners: "Get a good recipe and follow it. And keep it clean — keep your instruments sterile. Sanitation and cleanliness are very important."



Mike Erickson, upper right, admires the amber color of his strawberry wine in the sunlight, and in the glass, lower left, for special occasions. He also designed his own wine label, right.

Photos by Sam Vestal

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REFERENCE

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