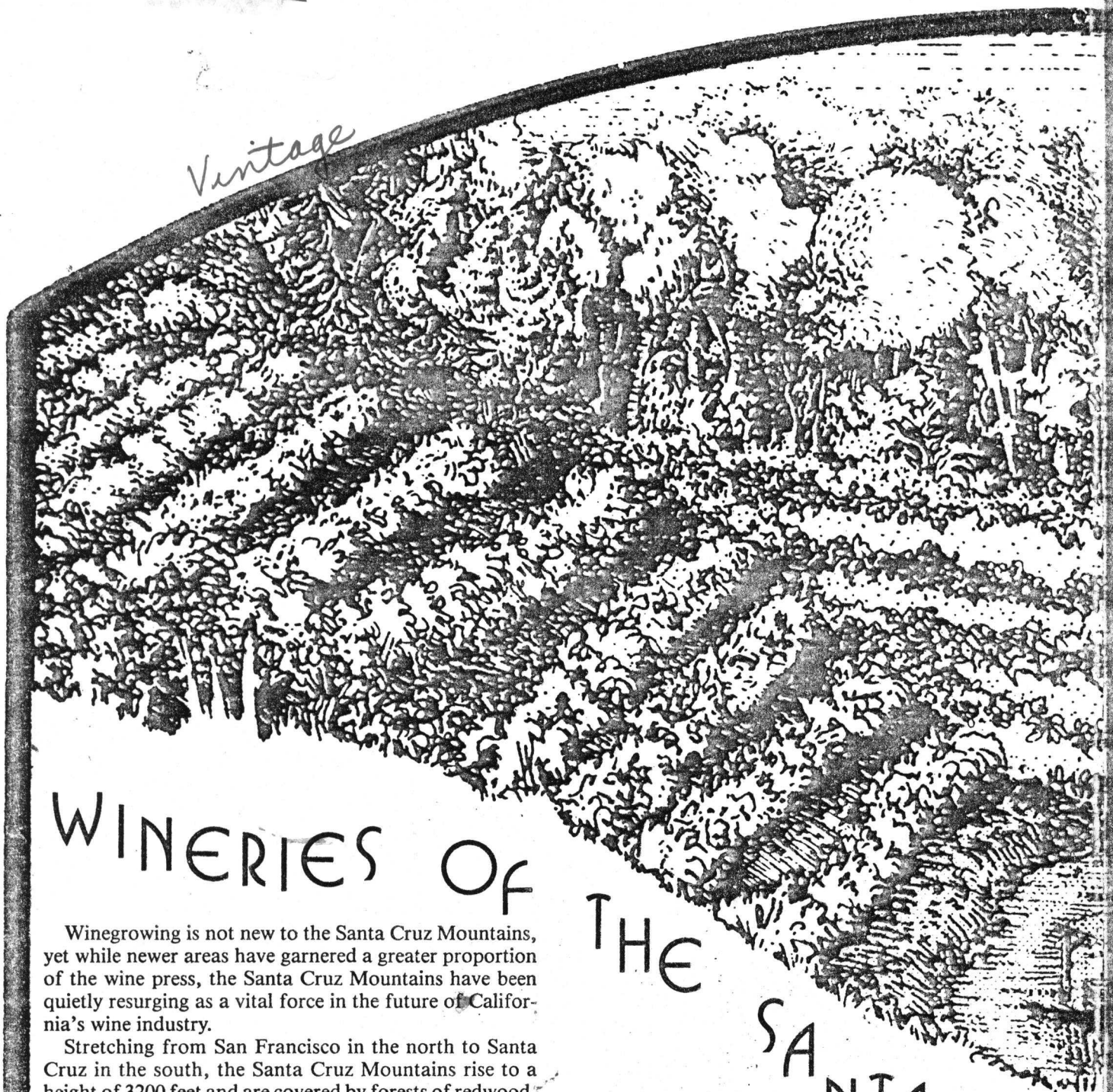


Wine (Wineries)

Vintage



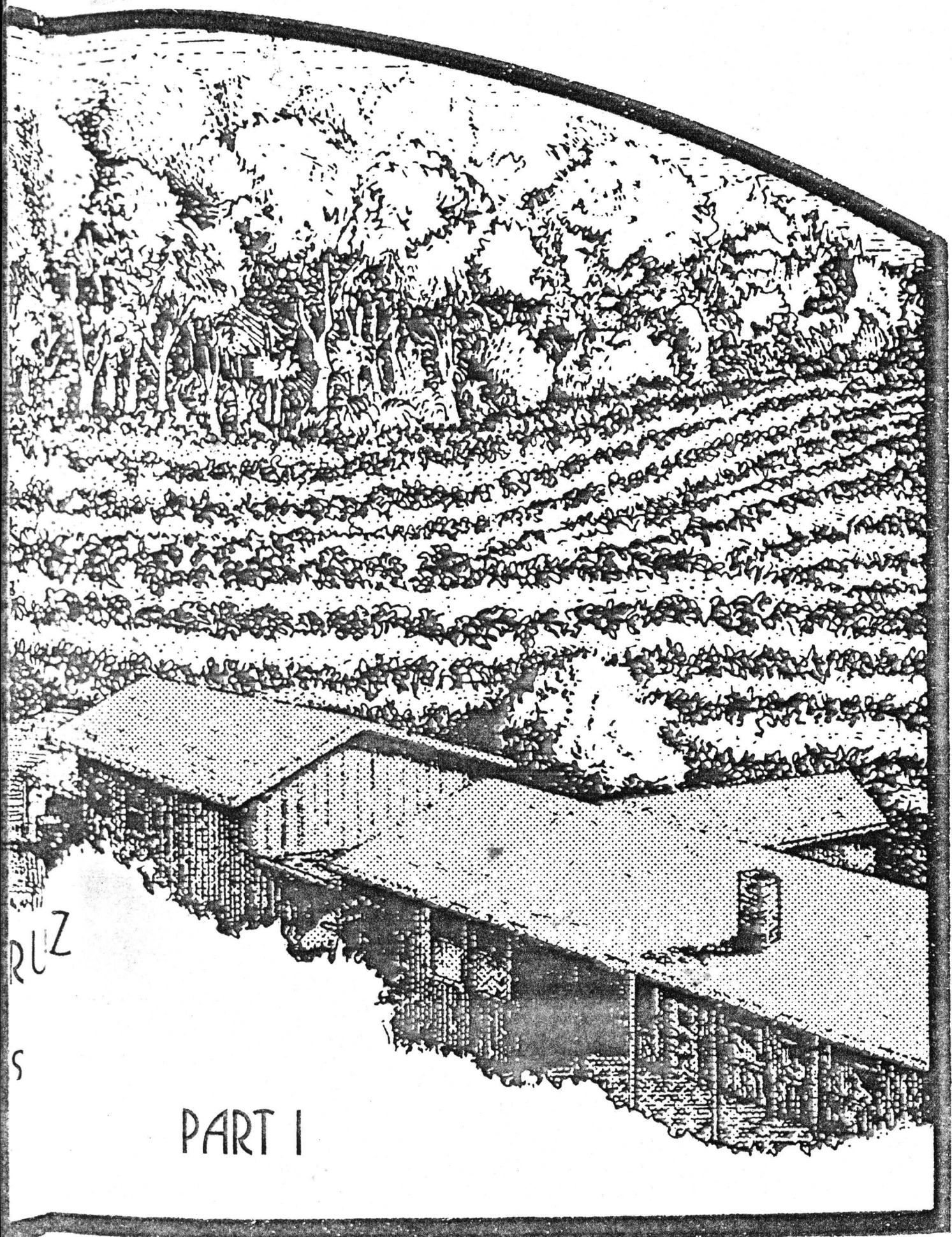
WINERIES OF THE SANTA CRUZ

Winegrowing is not new to the Santa Cruz Mountains, yet while newer areas have garnered a greater proportion of the wine press, the Santa Cruz Mountains have been quietly resurging as a vital force in the future of California's wine industry.

Stretching from San Francisco in the north to Santa Cruz in the south, the Santa Cruz Mountains rise to a height of 3200 feet and are covered by forests of redwood, oak and madrone.

Politically the mountains are divided into three counties, San Mateo in the north, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara back to back at the southern end of the range, with the bulk of the vineyards falling into Santa Clara County at the eastern side of the ridge. On the west side, Santa Cruz accounts for about one tenth of the currently planted acreage. The acreage in San Mateo County is miniscule. Prior to Prohibition there were close to 10,000 acres of vineyards in Santa Clara and Santa Cruz, while today there are only about 2,500. Most of the Santa Cruz vineyards have reverted to forest or have made way for Christmas tree farms, and the Santa Clara vineyards, which for the most part survived Prohibition, fell victim to the urbanization of the '60's and '70's.

BY SCOTT CLEMENS



PART I

RUZ

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The acreage under vine is sure to increase significantly over the next decade. Aided by soil samples, charts of degree days, and a better understanding of how viticulture affects viniculture, the vineyards should yield quality grapes and will offer us another distinct appellation from which to choose. We should certainly see an expansion of California Pinot Noir in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

We're all familiar with the largest Santa Clara wineries, Almaden and Paul Masson, and with such luminaries as Ridge, Martin Ray, and Mount Eden. But in the past decade about twenty new wineries have sprung up. Unlike a few wineries that came and went in the early '70's, the Santa Cruz Mountains wineries have tenaciously built a foothold in the industry by starting small, staying small, and keeping solvent. Nearly all the winemakers in this region started out as home winemakers, few are U.C. Davis trained. Many have been drawn to the area because of its proximity to San Jose and its industrial suburbs of Sunnyvale, Mountain View, and Palo Alto. Given the vicissitudes of winemaking, most of the Santa Cruz Mountains wineries started out as basement operations on the weekend, with the winemaker doing double duty during the week to support the costly equipment and the inevitable mistakes.

Yet proximity to other employment isn't the only reason winemakers and growers have chosen this area to start their operations. The Santa Cruz Mountains are bordered on the west by the Pacific Ocean and on the east by the San Francisco Bay, which provides a stabilizing maritime environment, and there are enough valleys, slopes, ridges, and elevations to provide the discriminating winegrower any microclimate desired within Regions I and II. These mountains seem particularly well suited to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and White Riesling.

Many have openly discarded newer techniques . . . in an effort to turn out a better wine.

The size of these wineries ranges from around 1,000 to 10,000 cases annually. There is not only diversity of size, but of approach, from the winemaker who buys his grapes from outside the appellation and sells on a national scale, to the winegrower whose wines are available only at the winery; from the producer of a full line of varietal wines, to the producer who concentrates on only one varietal. Nearly all came from successful careers outside the wine industry. All hold one thing in common—an understanding of modern methods coupled with a very real respect for traditional methods (sometimes out of necessity). Many have openly discarded the newer techniques (like some of their Burgundian counterparts) in an effort to turn out a better wine.

The seven discussed here, representing approximately half the new wineries in the area, were picked arbitrarily but present a good cross section of this old and resurgent wine region.

FELTON- EMPIRE

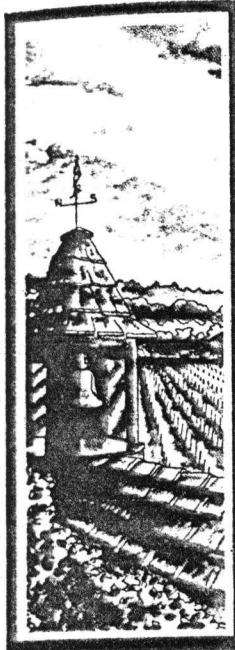
Starting from the town of Santa Cruz and following the San Lorenzo River inland for about seven miles through the redwoods you'll come to the town of Felton. The late Chafee Hall's fifteen acre Hallcrest Vineyard on Felton Empire Road is now leased to the three partners of Felton-Empire winery, Leo McCloskey, John Pollard, and Jim Beauregard. They own and lease about thirty-five acres of Cabernet, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, and White Riesling in Bonny Doon and Felton, the remainder coming from growers they have under long-term contracts.

Felton-Empire is the only winery here discussed with a professional winemaker at the helm; as biochemist at Ridge, Leo shares winemaking duties with Paul Draper. John Pollard, the financial part of the trio, flies for Western Airlines one day a week, and Jim Beauregard is a vineyard manager and grape grower with vineyards in Bonny Doon.

Felton-Empire had its first crush in 1976, and will reach the 10,000 cases mark this year. Like Ken Burnap's Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Felton-Empire will produce a small line of wine on the side while centering most of the attention on just one varietal, White Riesling (85% of current production is in this varietal). The idea came from Leo's experience at Ridge, where production is centered around Zinfandel, and he intends to use the same vineyards year after year much as Ridge has. Each bottling will be 100% varietal and come entirely from the vineyard named on the label.

The winemaking philosophy is very succinct—they want to produce German style Rieslings in California. For years we were told that the climate wasn't right, and that any comparison between the two was useless. Now finally we have Rieslings that are as good as or better than many of the Germans. "It's a unique combination," says Leo, "using American science to figure out how to get into this German tradition. We'd like to expand on that, but we have to learn the tradition before we deviate from it. It's complicated. Usually winemaking is maybe 30% of what goes on, while in White Riesling it's probably 50 or 60%. You can make it into junk or into something really fine." The German tradition, as Leo sees it, is made up of three categories, sugar, alcohol, and aging potential.

Sugar relates to the style of wine, and Felton-Empire produces three styles, a dry wine for use with food, a wine with about 6% residual sugar for use by itself or as an aperitif (like a German Spätlese), and a wine with 10 to 12% residual sugar for service after a meal. "That's how we present the wine, no matter whether they've been late harvested, or botrytised, or whatever; the important thing is the sugar. And we're not going to be merging them.



FELTON-EMPIRE

SANTA CRUZ

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

1976

BEAUREGARD-HALLCREST VINEYARDS

Produced and bottled by
Felton-Empire Vineyards
Felton, California

Alcohol 13% by volume

This wine is 100% Cabernet from Santa Cruz County. It is 80 per cent from the first cabernet grapes harvested at the Beauregard Ranch and 20 per cent from the Hallcrest Vineyard. This wine promises to be very good and shows off the first Cabernet from Beauregard Ranch as a big wine that may be laid down for at least some 6-8 years before drinking.

Visits to the winery are on Thursday and Sunday by appointment.
Telephone 408-335-3939



We're going to try to be very distinct." To help the consumer, the percentage of sugar is printed in a box on the label, along with appellation, vineyard name, and grape variety.

Traditionally, German wines have been low in alcohol and that's the second thing Felton-Empire is aiming at. Their 12% residual sugar Riesling has only 7-1/2% alcohol. "The approach is just that wine is a fruit juice product rather than an alcoholic beverage. If you treat it as an alcoholic beverage then you get an alcoholic taste, hot, hard, without fruit. And it's bad wine that is always a distance away from being a juice product. Whereas we're really oriented towards it as a food." To achieve both high sugar and low alcohol Leo stops fermentation by chilling the juice when alcohol, sugar, and acid have reached the desired proportions.

"The third aspect that I'd like to get across this year is that our wines are made for bottle aging. They are white wines meant to be laid down." This year Felton-Empire has begun adding aging estimates to the label. Leo is quick to point out that these are on the conservative side, three to four years for the whites, six or eight years for the reds, but, "I've only made wine for nine vintages, so how could I ever say a wine will go fourteen years? As I get older I'll write bigger numbers, if it's true."

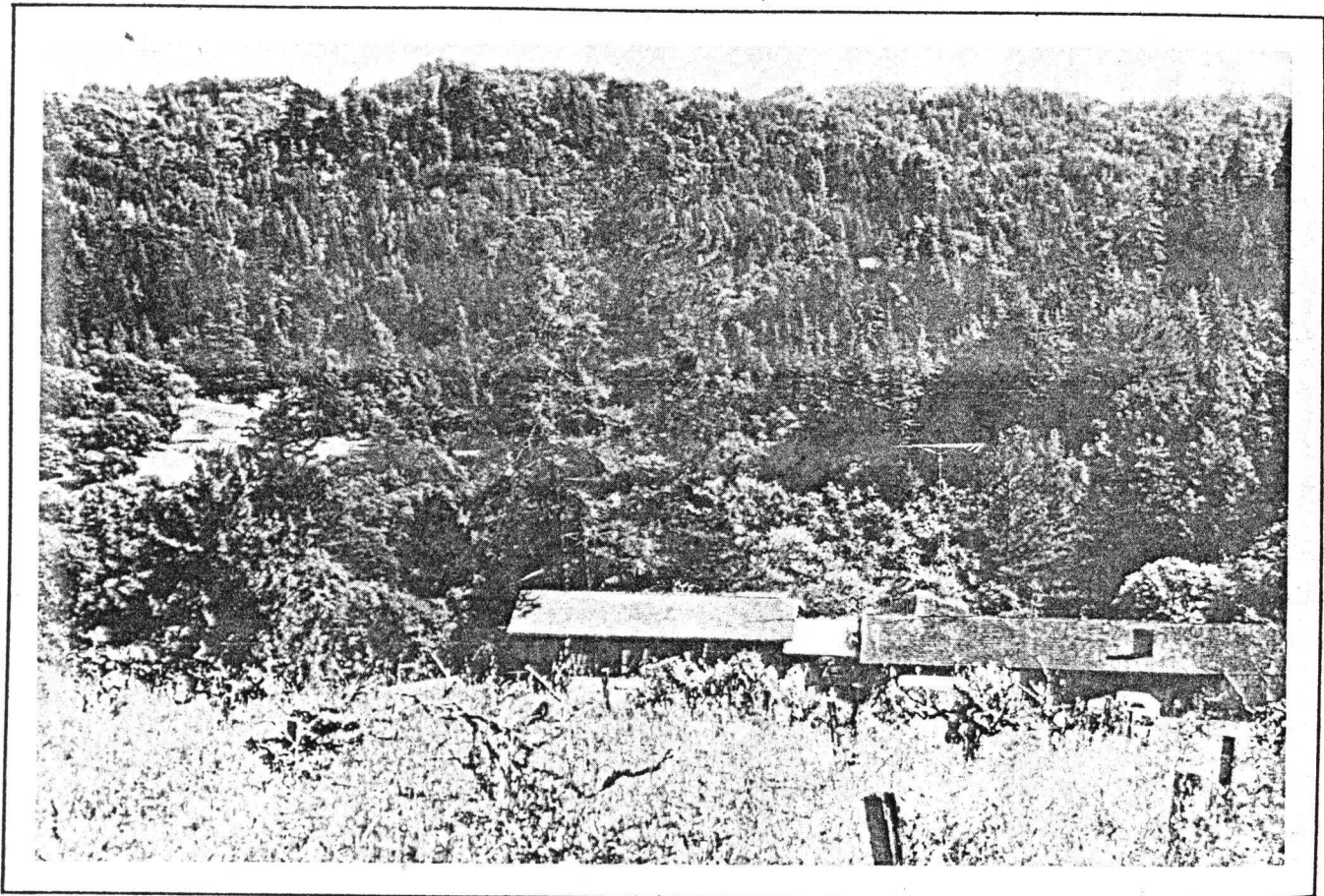
Felton-Empire is the most exciting producer of white wines to appear in California since Château St. Jean came on the scene. The quality level is so high that it is one of the few wineries whose wine I'd buy untasted. It's also one of the few to hit full stride in just two vintages. Luckily for all of us, Felton-Empire wines will this year be available in most major markets.

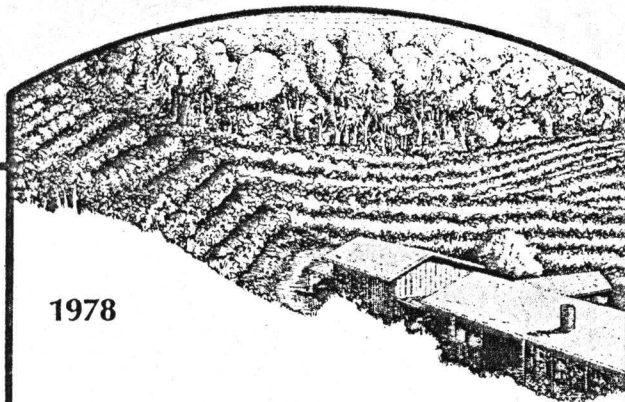
SMOTHERS

You have to speak of Felton-Empire and Smothers in the same breath, because until 1979 Smothers was really just an extension of Felton-Empire.

Two years after Dick and Linda Smothers moved into their home off Vine Hill Road, not far from Bob Roudon and Ken Burnap, Dick bought the Vine Hill Vineyards from Dave Bennion of Ridge, and contracted his friend John Pollard and Jim Beauregard to manage the vineyard. Felton-Empire leased the vineyards for a year, after which Dick decided he wanted a winery of his own. He set up fermentation tanks in the garage, a six car garage. Leo McCloskey was brought in as enologist and did the 1977 and 1978 vintages. I almost hate to mention it because awards are of dubious distinction these days, but the first wine he did for them, a 1977 Gewürztraminer, won the grand prize at the L.A. County Fair (and incidentally, the first wine Leo produced for Felton-Empire in 1976 won the only gold medal for late harvest Riesling given at the fair in '77).

Smothers has fourteen acres planted to Sylvaner, Riesling, and a field blend of Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay, which accounts for approximately 10% of the present production of 3,000 cases.





1978

SMOTHERS

CALIFORNIA

WHITE RIESLING

This wine is 85% White Riesling, 10% Gewurztraminer and 5% Sylvaner. The addition of small quantities of Traminer and Sylvaner to this White Riesling has resulted in a well-balanced, dry wine especially suited for consumption with meals.

Alcohol 10% by volume.

Produced and Bottled by Vine Hill Wines, Inc. Santa Cruz, Ca. 95065

This year Smothers has brought in chemist Bill Arnold to take over the winemaking chores, while Leo McCloskey will remain as consultant. The entire makeup of the winery will be changing from predominantly white wine production (77% in 1978), to predominantly red (about 60%). Eventually they hope to build up to 8,000 cases annually.

Also this year, Tom Smothers will be planting some thirty acres of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc on his property in Sonoma, not far from Château St. Jean, and that will go to his brother when the vines reach maturity.

Obviously with so much change in the air it is impossible to judge just how Smothers will end up, what styles of wine they'll achieve, etc. So for the time being Smothers bears watching as they regroup and start in a new direction. One ray of light shines through the uncertainty, however, and that is that Smothers' wines are available in twenty states, so at least you'll get to taste a few to see how they're coming along.

PHOTOS

Pg. 40 *The Smothers Brothers Winery is nestled among towering evergreens and ancient vines.*

Pg. 42 *Congress Springs Winery*

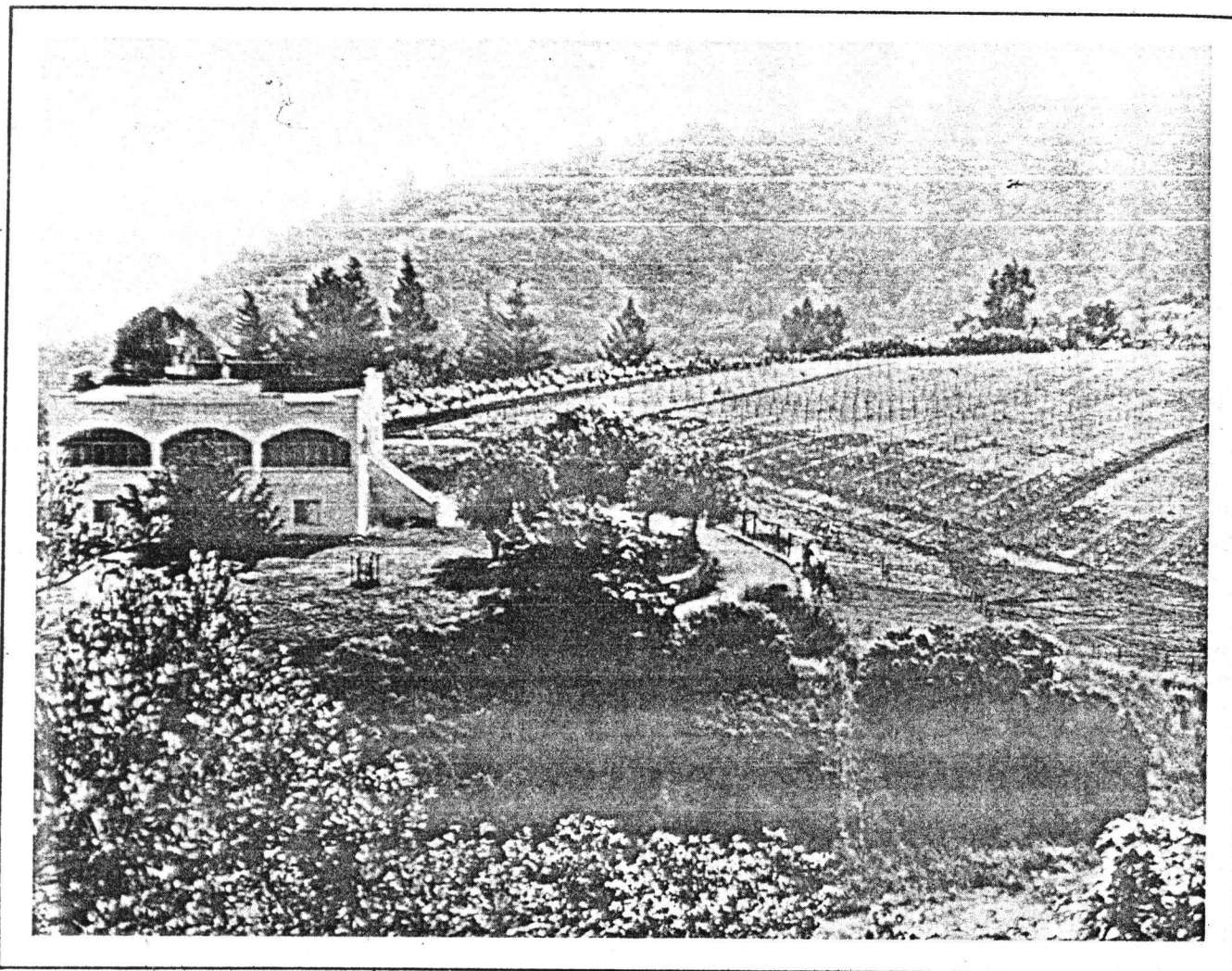
Pg. 43 *Top: Ancient vines adjacent to Congress Springs Winery Bottom: Winemaker uses wine thief to check recent vintage.*

CONGRESS SPRINGS

Dan Gehrs of Congress Springs would agree that wines are best left alone. "We're firm believers that the wine is essentially made in the vineyard, and the winemaker's job is simply to husband the wine through the fermentation and aging process into the bottle with a minimum of interference, and that includes not getting involved in a lot of filtration or fining."

If you drive west up Saratoga Avenue from the Paul Masson Champagne Cellars the name changes to Congress Springs Road, where Dan, his wife Robin, and their infant daughter, Jennifer, live at the winery. When Gehrs (that's pronounced gears) became disillusioned with his post graduate studies in Political Science he found a job in the Paul Masson tasting room and began making wine at home. Three years later with no possibility of getting into the production end he left Paul Masson, and persuaded his landlord, San Jose industrialist Vic Erickson, into partnering a new winery. The place wasn't hard to find; Erickson already owned the defunct Pierre Pourroy winery on a ridge above Congress Springs Road, as well as twelve acres of old vines on the property.

Congress Springs had its first crush in 1976, and in 1978



produced about 600 cases, available only in California. This year the production will double, and eventually he hopes to produce about 8,000 cases a year.

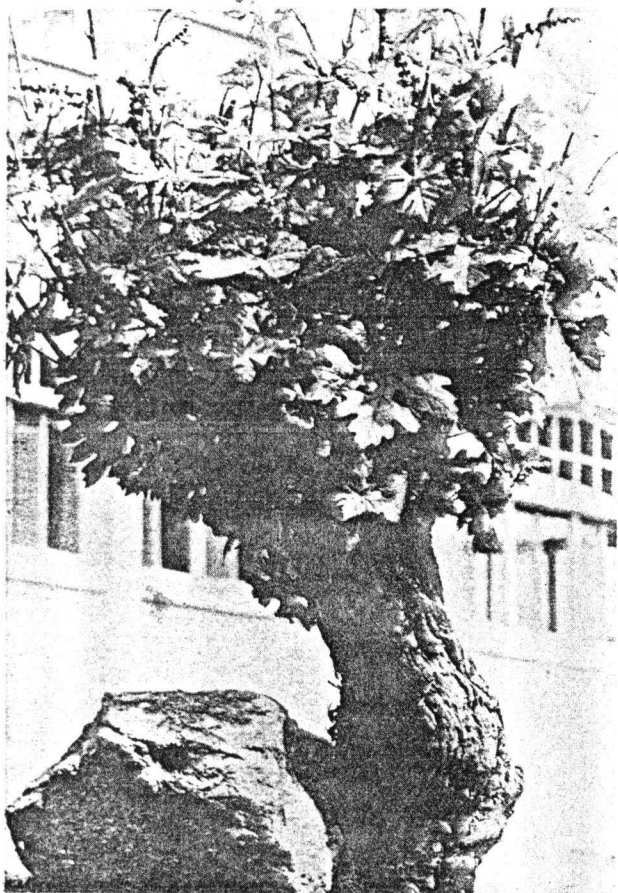
Besides the twelve acres of vines on the property, Congress Springs leases fifty-three acres of the old Noviate properties near Bear Creek, managed by Dan's brother, Jim. This makes Congress Springs the only winery of the seven here discussed to use grapes exclusively from Santa Cruz Mountains. "They're all old unirrigated vines," says Dan. "Some are as young as twelve to fifteen years old, but the great majority are forty to forty-five years old." Because the vines are old the yield is low, sixty-five acres yielding only fifty-eight tons last year. Fifty-eight is also the number of acres planted to white varieties. Because acid levels tend to be quite high in Santa Cruz Mountains' grapes, Dan picks by the acid rather than the sugar, a practice shared by some of his neighbors.

At the moment Congress Springs has a full line, including Fumé Blanc (a field blend of 94% Sauvignon and 6% Semillon), Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Pinot Noir. In the future this will probably be trimmed a bit. "We basically make a white Burgundy style of white, that is, they are often given some skin contact and they're generally fermented in the barrel, which is the most traditional technique. I think that it definitely enhances the varietal character, and gives more roundness, softness, and

smoothness than a stainless steel fermentation. We don't cold ferment.

This year we're particularly excited about our Pinot Blanc. We have twenty acres of forty-year-old Pinot Blanc and we got an extremely nice wine in '78. Some people have mistaken it for Chardonnay. As I understand it, in Burgundy there are still a lot of mixed plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc and those are some of the classic white Burgundies. Pinot Blanc is a variety with a future in California." The reds are also made in a fairly traditional manner with extended skin contact. Gehrs ages them in fairly neutral American oak for the first year, before determining how much if any new oak is going to benefit the wine.

Gehrs thinks that in the future winemakers in the Santa Cruz Mountains will turn more toward the Burgundian varieties, noting that fine Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs are already being made by David Bruce, Mt. Eden, Martin Ray, and Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard. He might have added Congress Springs, for his Pinot Noir comes from just four acres of forty-year-old vines, and is a real eye opener. "We're looking to produce a big, rich style of Pinot Noir. We ferment the Pinot Noir right down to dryness on the skins until the skins sink, and then and only then do we press it. It's fermented on the vineyard's own yeast so it's a spontaneous fermentation to get more complexity out of the grape."



Tasting Notes

FELTON-EMPIRE

'78 Potter Valley Vineyards, Mendocino White Riesling. 10% alcohol. Dry. Clear in color, light varietal nose, good balance, clean steely and Moselle-like in flavor, with a rather short finish. (\$5.75).

'78 Hallcrest Vineyard, Santa Cruz White Riesling. 8% alcohol, 6% residual sugar. Clean, delicate, varietal nose, nice balance, delicate flavors and sweetness on the order of a Moselle Spätlese, with a hint of spice in the fruity finish. (\$8.50).

'78 Edna Valley Vineyards, San Luis Obispo White Riesling. 7-1/2% alcohol, 12% residual sugar. Slightly straw in color with green tints. Spicy, clean sweet nose, big body, excellent balance, spicy yet with a clean Moselle-like steeliness in the flavors, quite sweet (between an Auslese and Beerenauslese in sweetness) with just a hint of honey (botrytis) overtones, and a pleasant finish. (\$10.50).

'78 Tepesquet Vineyards, Santa Barbara Gewürztraminer. 8-1/2% alcohol, 10% residual sugar. Very subdued citrusy nose, big body, citrusy flavors and good acid to balance the sweetness, some spice, good finish. (\$8.50).

'76 Beauregard-Hallcrest, Santa Cruz Cabernet Sauvignon. 13% alcohol, .75 acid, 3.55 pH. Vines were planted in 1941. Bouquet of grass under fruit, medium body and good balance, weedy Cabernet flavors with plenty of fruit under loads of tannin. Long tannic finish. (\$7.00).

SMOTHERS

'78 Edna Valley Vineyards, San Luis Obispo White Riesling. 10% alcohol, 6 to 7% residual sugar. Apple-like nose which follows through to the mouth with some spice and sweetness, medium body, pleasant finish. I would have preferred a touch more acid, but overall a clean well-made wine. (\$9.00).

CONGRESS SPRINGS

From the barrel:

'78 Fumé Blanc. 13.4% alcohol, .85 acid. Has 5 to 6% Semillion. Citrusy nose, perfect balance, good fruit flavors with some varietal smokiness, and oak. Decent finish.

'78 Pinot Blanc. 13.9% alcohol. Apple-like nose, good acid edge, lots of body, fruity with just enough oak and a hint of spice. Good finish.

'78 Pinot Noir. 13% alcohol. Rich Pinot Noir aroma, lots of glycerin, good balance. The intensity of the fruit makes it seem sweet, and there are nice spice and floral overtones to add depth. The finish is long and spicy. A rich Burgundian style.

'77 Zinfandel. 14.1% alcohol, .68 acid. From vines planted around 1910. Dark purple, low varietal nose, fantastically spicy concentrated fruit, and a long, long spicy finish. Very similar in style to the Pinot Noir.