

Vineyard designation is not just a bone thrown to wine geeks but an overriding philosophy in wine making.

creamy 1995 Paradigm Merlot illustrates this beautifully.

Hands-on experience rather than text-

book prescriptions has also paid off for Jo Ann and Tony Truchard of Truchard Vineyards. They were surprised to discover that Syrah, usually considered a warm-climate grape, produced lovely, distinctively peppery wines when planted on their relatively cool Carneros estate. Truchard now makes one of California's most distinctive Syrahs as well as a complex, layered Cabernet from Carneros fruit.

Ironically, it may be America's turn now to give Europe lessons in personalized wine crafting. When California Syrah specialist Bob Lindquist, owner of Qupé Wine Cellars in Santa Maria, took on additional duties as wine maker at Château Routas in the south of France, one of his first decisions was to replace Routas's expensive stainless-steel fermenters with more antiquated wooden barrels. It was a bold move that tweaked a few berets along the Rhône, but the wines have convinced even the phlegmatic French. Steel and oak aside, Lindquist believes that the grapes always come first, whether here or abroad. "Good grapes always rise to the top," he remarks, and sourcing excellent fruit remains a top priority of the auteur wine maker.

From earth to vine to fruit to glass, wine makers Daryl Groom (above) and Heidi Peterson Barrett (far right) stay close to every part of the process.

The other element reshaping wine making today is the reappearance of the deceptively minuscule insect called phylloxera. The aptly named *Phylloxera vastatrix* ("the devastator") first laid waste to California vineyards in 1873 and became a perennial headache. During the '60s and '70s, most of the North Coast vineyards were replanted with what was thought to be a phylloxera-resistant rootstock called AxR1, but in 1983, there was disheartening proof that AxR1 couldn't thwart all forms of phylloxera. By the early '90s, vast stretches of Napa and Sonoma had been pulled up and were covered with mustard and wildflowers, awaiting replanting with newer, more resistant vines.

To date, nearly 15,000 acres in these two counties alone—about 20 percent of the total vineyards—have been replanted, and the process has cost California vineyardists an estimated \$1 billion. The work is likely to continue for yet another decade.

Strange as it may seem, the net effect of phylloxera has not been entirely negative. Some turned crisis into cash by replacing out-of-fashion varieties such as Chenin Blanc and Semillon with darlings of the day such as Merlot and Chardonnay and hot new grapes like Sangiovese and Syrah. Others were more conservative. When Heitz's renowned Martha's Vineyard, one of the most famous Cabernet plots in California, succumbed to phylloxera in 1992, the winery replanted with budwood from the original vines to preserve the classic style of their wine. As Kathleen Heitz jokes, "We didn't just drive to the garden center and ask for Cabernet vines." The first release from the newly planted vineyard, the 1996, will be in February of 2001.

Still others used the phylloxera scourge as a chance to reorganize their vineyards with better vine density and with varieties more suited to the specific site. Daryl Groom, the savvy Australian who oversees wine making at Geyser Peak Winery in Sonoma, admits phylloxera was a "blessing in disguise." He reports that the winery has replanted with improved trellising systems and clonal selections, replacing Chenin Blanc with the better-suited Cabernet and Semillon with several exciting new Chardonnay clones that will be used for blending. Joel Butler of Beaulieu Vineyards says that BV, too, replanted with a wider variety of grapes in order to expand the winery's varietal lineup. "New varieties give the wine makers lots of room to be creative," Butler says.

Replanting lets the wine maker consider *terroir*, the French term used to describe the combined effects of geology, geography, and climate on finished wines. As wine makers stress the importance of *terroir*, we will likely see more vineyard-designated wines and more narrowly delineated appellations in the coming years. Right now, an appellation can be a catchall like Central Coast, a long-established region like Napa Valley, or a narrowly defined area like Mount Harlan, a 47-acre appellation in San Benito County that is home to a single winery, Calera. Official appellation status (granted by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) is in process for several already recog-

nized growing areas, such as Calistoga and St. Helena. New appellations have been granted for lesser-known areas, such as the recently declared Mendocino Ridge and the Yorkville Highlands, sanctioned only since June of this year. "The new appellations are an attempt to be distinctive,"

