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FEATURE By Michael Politz
Photos by Gary Quiring



“Choosing the right rootstock and the correct clone for each variety has been a labor of love and his life’s enjoyment is sharing these grapes with other wineries that have that same passion”.

Growing up with the vineyard as his playground, Michael Yates was destined to become a winemaker. Both his father and grandfather shared their passion for fine wines with Mike at an early age, and he dreamed of one day managing a vineyard. To fulfill this dream, he graduated from Chico State University in 1977 with a degree in Agriculture, specializing in Trees and Vines. With his background in farming, Mike knows that all great wines come from great vineyards, and for him choosing the right rootstock and the correct clone for each variety is a labor of love. “The soils provide the vine it’s identity as to root and leaf growth. The sun exposure gives the fruit its flavor components. This individuality creates characteristics unlike any other in the world,” notes Michael.

That brings us to the wine. And what delicious wine it is! The Yates Family wines, products of geographic serendipity and an almost mystical feel for the wine-making process, have their own deep, luscious and complex flavors. The 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon with its nose of black cherry, hints of sassafras, allspice, vanilla and white pepper, is full and provocative. The rich, wonderfully concentrated flavors of this wine seduce the tongue and the great tannin structure carries the fruit and spice into the long, long finish. The 2005 Fleur de Veeder is mountain grown 100% Merlot at its finest. Exploding with plum, cherries and blueberries, its exclusive velvety quality gives it a lovely mouth feel that goes on and on. The 2005 Alden Perry Reserve, named in tribute to Michael’s father Alden and his grandfather Perry, has big high tone aromatics of licorice, sassafras and allspice, with a hint of white pepper. On the palate beautiful flavors of black cherry, Bing cherry and anise on the entry are complemented by a suggestion of clove, cinnamon and ginger. These three wines are just an overview of what the Yates Family Vineyard has to offer.



How many people get to work side-by-side with their two daughters, farming the family historical vineyard and making great cult-style wines? This is how Michael Yates spends his days.

The Yates Family Vineyard

A family that grows together



The Yates Family Vineyard is located on the slopes of the Mayacamas Mountains, nestled in the hills between the Napa and Sonoma valleys. The Yates vineyard, 35 acres of steep hillside planted with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Viognier grapes, lies at the end of scenic Redwood Road, and has been in the family for more than 60 years. Recognized as the “Mount Veeder Appellation”, this mountainous area, with an average elevation of over 1,100 feet and its combination of micro-climates and volcanic soils, produces incredible grapes with intense fruit flavors. “These elements all contribute to the extremely long-lived wines from this vineyard,” explains Whitney Yates, Mike’s oldest daughter.

The property became a vineyard more than 100 years ago, and traces of its early history still remain. There is a “ghost winery” on the site – one of Napa Valley’s original gravity flow wineries. Perched on a cliff overlooking the valley, the winery produced fine California wine from the 1800’s until Prohibition. A huge Roman press, made out of one enormous old-growth redwood log, is still housed underneath the old building in what was the press room, and as you walk down the arched tunnel that leads from there to the cliff-side, you rub shoulders with the ghosts of men rolling heaping wheelbarrows of pomace to dump over the cliff’s edge.



says Mary, adding, “It’s not easy to farm a mountain vineyard. You have to get down and dirty with the land.” Together they are replanting the vines that Michael first planted when he was in high school. Yates Family Vineyard produces approximately 800 cases total of their four wines, Fleur de Veeder (100% Merlot), Alden Perry Reserve (Bordeaux Blend), Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cheval (100% Cabernet Franc). These wines have received many awards and high ratings from the wine publications. Starting in 2008, the family added a white wine to the portfolio, and now make about 50 cases of a 100% Voignier. “Our job as winemakers and grape growers is to let the grapes, and this phenomenal location, express what the region offers us” states Michael. “Ultimately the telling is in the tasting. We hope you will avail yourself of the opportunity to discover our very special wines.” *

In keeping with family tradition, the winery and vineyard are now staffed by Mike and Lynn’s two daughters, Whitney and Mary. Though Whitney serves as the vineyard manager and co-winemaker, and Mary heads the administrative/sales department, everyone steps into whatever needs to be done, especially during the busy times. “Come harvest, it’s all hands on board!”