

WINE IN THE VALLEY OF THE MOON

Valley of the Moon

SONOMA VALLEY

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THE WINE ISSUE

BEYOND WINE

BUILDING THE NEW ECONOMY
JON SEBASTIANI & SAL CHAVEZ

BART PARK REBORN

HOW TO MAKE A VINEYARD

OTHER WORLDLY WINES

BARTHOLOMEW PARK

Back from the fire with a brand new winery.

PHOTOS Steven Krause

There is no other winery in Sonoma Valley like it, almost certainly no other winery in Sonoma County like it. Probably no other winery in California like it. Maybe no other winery in the world.

Why should there be?

It does not have a business model driven by profit, although profits are important. The tasting room is small

and unpretentious, although there is a dandy art gallery just down the hall, curated by Sonoma Plein Air.

There is no resident winery dog, although visitors are allowed, if not encouraged, to bring dogs of their own.

If you want to, you can ride horses there, or picnic on the lawn, without ever buying a single glass of wine.

There is a year-round creek that

winds through a redwood grove, and a three-mile trail that takes you to spectacular heights and stunning views

And it has a tranquility to it, a serene silence, that invites people to find a place on the lawn, or on a wooden bench, or up against a tree, where they can close their eyes, breathe deep, and just drift into the pervasive peace.

It is, in short, the best-kept secret in Sonoma, a place that most locals know about, and yet is never crowded. There is ample parking, and the parking is free, as is access to the entire property.

You may buy some wine just because you think you should, as a way of paying it forward. But you don't have to, and no one will approach you and tell you that you should.

Here and there are artifacts of history that take you back to the birth of Sonoma winemaking and, therefore, to the dawn of commercial winemaking in California. The property itself is a historical treasure, quietly cloistering a profoundly important past.

And, perhaps most remarkable of all, it is approximately – depending on traffic – five minutes from the Sonoma Plaza.

You may think you know its name but you are probably just slightly off.

If you want to say Bart Park, you should, because that's its popular name. But the official name is now Bartholomew Estate Winery, a new enterprise between the Frank H. Bartholomew Foundation, caretakers of the historic property, and winemaker Kevin Holt.

The joint venture is structured to split the profits from wine sales between the foundation and Holt, who is also winemaker for Beltane Ranch and worked as winemaker at MacRostie Winery for 10 years. The Bartholomew fruit had been used by Gundlach-Bundschu under a long-term contract that expired in 2018.

The Bartholomew Foundation was established by Frank and Antonia Bartholomew to preserve the 375-acre property in perpetuity, including its historic vineyard. Bartholomew was the president of United Press International and chair of the news agency's board for 10 years, up to 1972. He had a legendary record of accomplishment,

ART IN THE TASTING ROOM,
TRAILS THROUGH THE
REDWOODS, WINE IN THE GLASS,
PICNICS ON THE LAWN.
WHAT’S NOT TO LOVE?

as a combat correspondent during World War II, and as a witness to major events in world history, including the Bikini Atoll atomic bomb tests, the fall of Shanghai to communist insurgents and Japanese prime minister Hideki Tojo’s confession of guilt over the war. Inbetween foreign journeys, Frank found, fell in love with and bought the run down ranch.

He and his wife revered the Sonoma property and established the family trust as a means to protect it after they were gone, and to keep it accessible for public use. The winery they established, and named Hacienda, was intended to help subsidize care of the property, which originally included the historic Buena Vista Winery next door.

Public has been precluded for more than a year, following the wildfires of October 2017. Flames came within feet of the tasting room, and the hillsides were charred to cinder. But the scars have faded, the trails are open, and Bart Park is back on its feet.

The Bartholomew foundation has minimal staff, a general manager (Scott Clyde) and a single trustee, Anna Pope, who has a parallel career as a San Francisco transactional real estate attorney.

Holt says his production ambitions don’t go beyond 5,000 cases, and that he intends to only make estate wines, because, “I think it’s important for the people who come here, as part of the genuine experience they’re going to have when they’re here, that they are experiencing the land in all of its

forms, that the wines are from here, and that that’s what the wine should be doing, speaking of being from here.”

It’s a subject dear to Holt’s heart. “There’s a reason,” he says, “that you go for wines from certain places, because they have something to say that is unique and that you can’t get from anywhere else. And I’m not, and never have been, interested in making cookie cutter wines. I’ve always wanted to do wines that have something that is of a place, where it’s more than just making wine that’s good enough to drink, it’s making wine that is special.”

Given the history behind the property, everything about it is special. The land is part of the original 6,000 acre rancho acquired by the



Hungarian Count Agoston Haraszthy, the founder of Buena Vista Winery and the father of California’s wine industry. But Haraszthy, it turns out, wasn’t the earliest winemaker on the property. Recent research by Sonoma dentist and historian Peter Meyerhof has established that a syrah vineyard bloc on the southwest edge of the Bartholomew property is the precise spot where a Native American, with



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the adopted name Viviano, took possession of some land granted by the Sonoma Mission and planted a vineyard in 1832, long before the arrival of Haraszthy. Pope was thrilled to hear the news.

“Oh it’s so fun. In fact I was so enthusiastic about it that I laminated the vineyard map and handed it to all the tasting room staff and said, ‘Make sure you tell people this.’”

These days, Pope is knee deep in wine, history and preservation of the Bartholomew legacy. The decision to

launch the winery project, she says, was all about “maintaining this property, trying to make the most beautiful and representative wine from this amazing historic site, and educating the public about viticulture and vinology.”

Pope became trustee of Bartholomew because a partner in her law firm, Bill Goddard, had been the first trustee and helped Frank and Antonia form the foundation. Because she lived in Sonoma and handled real estate matters, Pope worked with Goddard on the trust for several years until, at the

age of 100, he decided to retire and appointed Pope as trustee. Goddard lived to 105.

The formation of the trust is what makes Bart Park such a cherished space. It is the only private property – perhaps anywhere – that is also a public park, with groomed lawns, picnic facilities, a maintained trail system, a redwood grove, a trove of historic artifacts and a winery.

The chronology of important events and the record of owners and occupants of the property could fill a book, and perhaps a TV mini-series.

Pope’s husband Frank is a retired venture capitalist with a penchant for the intricate details of history, especially the history of Bartholomew Park, which includes the creation of a castle. Pope explains, “When Count Haraszthy’s Buena Vista Vinicultural Society went belly up in 1879, the property was bought by Robert Jackson, who was one of the wealthiest men in San Francisco, and he and his wife Kate built what’s known as Buena Vista Castle, which is why we have Castle Road. And it was a 40-room mansion with three floors and a six-story tower. They planted large gardens and lots of sculpture. They could have cared less about wine, they were much more into art, and they traveled through Europe and had huge art collections, both in the city and here. Which is why we have the Castle Lawns, and most of the trees are the original trees that they planted in 1880. So we have the big monkey pod tree that everybody loves. And then there’s a couple of concrete foundations where the front steps were, and the little yew trees that were on each side of the front steps are now 30 feet tall.”

After the Jacksons died, says Pope, “a guy named Cailleau bought it at auction, and was running it as a resort. So you could stay in the castle, and there’s lots of ads for \$10 to \$15 dollars a week, American plan, food included. You could play croquet, you could hunt, you could fish. There were apparently three major hot springs and a soda water mineral spring on the property. So you could do that. They had a bowling alley. But along came World War I, and that wasn’t the best time for resorts.





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YOU COULD PLAY CROQUET, YOU COULD HUNT, YOU COULD FISH, THERE WERE APPARENTLY THREE MAJOR HOT SPRINGS AND A SODA WATER MINERAL SPRING ON THE PROPERTY.

And so he sold it to the state in 1919."

The stories go on and on and both Popes are hopeful that at some point, the property's elegant villa, built by Antonia Bartholomew after her husband's death, will some day become a comprehensive museum, perhaps housing collections from across the Sonoma Valley.

For the time being, their energies are invested in assuring the success of the winery, and keeping the park's gate open so that continued generations can share in the beauty, the peace and the solitude, as well as the wine, of a truly unique part of the history of the Valley of the Moon.

Bartholomew Estate Winery is located at 1000 Vineyard Lane, with tasting room hours daily from 11 to 4. For information, call 707.509.0540. The park is open, free of charge, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day, but entry and trail gates close at 4:30 p.m. 🍷

