



## **Democratizing Visions of Luxury and the Good Life in California Wine Country: Wine Tourism from Repeal to the Eve of the “Wine Revolution”**

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This paper describes the origins of California wine tourism in the era before the “wine revolution,” when table wine consumption begins to take off in the United State. After the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, wine tourism initially developed in response to state legal exemptions to the national three-tier system of alcohol distribution that allowed California wineries to conduct retail sales on site. Most wineries encouraged tourism primarily to educate alcohol distributors and retailers as well as consumers in order to help build the market for table wine; a few wineries developed it as a significant outlet for retail sales. The combination of activities now considered standard elements in the wine tourism industry – touring wineries, tasting their products, and purchasing them on site – first emerged at Charles Krug winery in 1950. These practices were encouraged by the Wine Institute and adapted industry wide by 1962, the year table wine consumption began to dominate the California wine market.

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My goal in this project is to understand the evolution of California wine tourism from its origins as a minor part of wine industry promotion in the wake of Prohibition’s repeal into an increasingly important retail sector in its own right by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wine is one of those rare global commodities whose production remains tied to particular locations, making it a natural fit for tourism. To quote a standard wine industry textbook on the subject: “tourism is fundamentally about the difference of place, while wine is one

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of those rare commodities which is branded on the basis of its geographical origin.”<sup>1</sup> While the scope of tourist activities today ranges increasingly far from the vineyard to include restaurants, spas, resort hotels, and various recreational pursuits, the mix of core activities popularly associated with California wine tourism have not varied much since the emergence of the industry in the 1950s and 1960s: attending winery tours, participating in tastings on site, and purchasing winery products.

Wine historians have attributed the growing popularity of this particular form of culinary tourism by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to a number of factors, foremost of which are the growing table wine market with the emergence of “foodie culture” in the 1970s United States and international recognition of high quality California table wines beginning with Steven Spurrier’s “Judgment of Paris” tasting in 1976. Yet California wine tourism predated both of these cultural leaps forward in the refinement of American taste. Tourism was a promotional strategy embraced as a lifeline by a wine industry sent reeling by the disappearance of its market in the wake of Prohibition; by onerous rules impeding national wine distribution after Repeal; and by a wartime economy that transformed the conditions of its production. In the post-WWII period, California wine producers responded to this series of shocks by learning how to appeal to consumers’ experience of place and empowering their sense of taste in order to help create consumer demand for table wine. They firmly believed that growing their market depended upon consumer education, and that one of the best way to educate consumers was by encouraging them to acquire direct knowledge and experience of winery sites of production rather than simply encountering a mass produced bottle on a store shelf.

National Prohibition was a fatal setback to the fledgling American wine industry, setting it years behind other food and beverage industries in solving problems of standardized quality and market expansion, as well as adding new problems. Though some producers survived and even thrived during Prohibition through contracts to provide sacramental, medicinal, and cooking wines, or by growing grapes for the legal homemade wine market, most of California’s more than 700 wineries in operation before Prohibition went out of business. Even more perplexing, Prohibition transformed the American consumer market for wine. Before Prohibition, traditional dry table wines prevailed in the national market; yet after Repeal, an estimated 80percent of the market was dominated by sweet or “dessert” wines, fortified with brandy and up to 20percent alcohol by volume. US consumers during Prohibition had developed a preference for the stuff through their exposure to a bootlegging culture focused on selling high proof alcohol. The three-tier system of alcohol distribution imposed by the federal government after Repeal did nothing to encourage the reemergence of a quality table wine market; rather, it created massive roadblocks in the distribution system that facilitated fortified wines continuing to dominate the national marketplace. In an effort to prevent the re-emergence of a liquor trust dominating saloons, the federal government required the separate licensing of producers, wholesalers, and retailers and allowed for taxation of alcohol at each step of the supply chain. Additionally, the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment devolved regulation of the alcohol trade to individual states, leading to a crazy quilt of laws that made interstate commerce an extraordinarily complicated maze. The type of wine

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<sup>1</sup> C. Michael Hall, Gary Johnson, and Richard Mitchell, “Wine Tourism and Regional Development,” in *Wine Tourism Around the World*, ed. C. Michael Hall et al., (Oxford UK, 2002), 196-225, quotation on p.196.

products that most readily navigated this tortuous route of interstate commerce tended to be precisely those fortified bulk wines that cost least to produce, could survive being shipped in barrels or tanks on long-distance rail journeys, and promised ready markets in the Northeast and Upper Midwest. Bulk wines typically were bottled by wholesalers in the receiving state under a myriad of local labels for sale to retailers, often leaving their California producers anonymous.<sup>2</sup>

The California wine industry feared their lack of control over distribution under the federal three-tier system, which placed the fate of their products in the hands of separate wholesalers and retailers who knew little about wine and often were simultaneously carrying alcohol products far more popular with the American public, such as beer and spirits. They organized politically to influence the enactment of new state laws on alcohol production and distribution in accord with the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment, seeking to mitigate the burdens imposed by the federal system and provide avenues to support wine distribution channels separate from other types of alcohol. A group of vintners, who founded the influential industry group The Wine Institute in 1934, recruited a member of the California legislature to sponsor a bill giving the industry unique exemptions to the national three-tier system that in later years would become crucial for the development of wine tourism. The bill stated that wine should be treated differently than beer or distilled spirits because it was an agricultural product destined for consumption with meals and mostly used in the home. Creating the legal category of “farm wineries,” wine producers, unlike beer or spirit producers, were exempt from having to use separately licensed wholesalers to reach consumer markets in the state of California. Like any farmer, wineries could sell their farm products directly to retail stores, restaurants, and consumers. A significant part of the industry’s successful lobbying for the law entailed legally redefining vintners from “wine manufacturers” to a neologism that is so ubiquitous in wine tourism today as to receive little attention: “winegrowers.” The nonsensical nature of the concept of winegrowing was not lost on Jefferson Peyser, the politician who sponsored the legislation and later became the Wine Institute’s legal counsel. He fielded cracks from vintners and politicians alike to the effect of, “I never saw any of this wine growing out of the ground.”<sup>3</sup>

The wine farm exemption was a signal achievement for the California wine industry that allowed wineries to exert greater control over the distribution and marketing of their products than was given to any other alcohol producer in the nation. Unlike beer and spirits, which had to work through the segmented channels of the three-tier system, California wine producers were able to develop products for niche markets of uncertain profitability that wouldn’t attract attention from distributors interested only in proven volume sellers like fortified wines. So empowered, producers began to take an active role in reviving the lost table wine market. Industry leaders recognized the problem at hand

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<sup>2</sup> Pinney, *A History of Wine in America* “From Prohibition to the Present” (Berkeley CA, 2005), 34-52. Leon Adams interview, December 1972, transcript pp. 66-67, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

<sup>3</sup> Jefferson Peyser interview, August 3, 1972, transcript pp. 11-14, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Victor Geraci, “The Family-Wine Farm: Ventibusiness Style,” *Agricultural History* 72:4 (2000) 419-432. Despite industry lobbying efforts, other states did not pass similar “wine farm” legislation until the 1970s. See Leon Adams interview, April 1986, transcript p. 3, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

as one of education and promotion to raise the profile of wine all along the distribution chain in order to stoke distributor and retailer interest, and consumer demand. Leon Adams, public relations executive for the Wine Institute, believed consumers could develop a taste for table wine over fortified wine if they learned how to appreciate the process of wine production, the different varieties of wine available, and techniques for pairing wine with food. Yet he also recognized the primary need to educate wholesalers and retailers in the pleasures of good table wine in order to encourage them to supply these products to the consumer market. In 1936, the Wine Institute began an educational campaign targeting distributors and retailers with instructional booklets, classes, and local tasting events on wine types and their uses, on the assumption that informed salespersons would choose to stock table wines and persuade the buying public to purchase these products.<sup>4</sup> In 1938, the newly formed California Wine Advisory Board began an institutional advertising campaign targeted directly at American consumers which similarly sought to educate them in the types and uses of wine in order to cultivate the wine market.

From the earliest days of the industry's promotional efforts after Prohibition's repeal, some industry leaders recognized the important role that winery tourism could play in such educational outreach campaigns. At the Wine Industry Conference of Vintners and Allied Interests held in 1935, one speaker suggested that "visitors be invited to the wineries and vineyards, so they may be imbued with the love of wine, and learn to know it."<sup>5</sup> Years later, the Wine Institute's Leon Adams neatly summarized the important role winery tourism could play in promoting sales, stating that "wine tastes best at the vineyard." He further elaborated: "a farm winery can exist because of the romance, the charm, the beauty of a vineyard... That element, the appeal of the wine tasted at the vineyard with the grape vines in sight, keeps the farm wineries profitable."<sup>6</sup>

As early as 1934, a handful of the California wineries that had survived Prohibition embraced tourism as a promotional strategy, opening the doors of their sites of production to public tours and direct sales. The Montepulciano Winery in Healdsburg (later renamed Simi Winery), a small producer that rode out Prohibition selling wine to local Catholic dioceses, may have been the first California winery to establish a public tasting room with direct sales. Vintner Isabelle Simi Haigh embraced the trend toward novelty roadside attractions then emerging with the fast-growing American car culture, building her tasting room inside of an enormous 25,000 gallon wine cask placed in view of the Redwood Highway, the major roadway of Sonoma County. Haigh spent her days sitting outside of her spectacular cask, hailing passersby like a carnival barker to stop in, sample her wine, and purchase a few bottles for the road.<sup>7</sup> Such whimsical architecture no doubt stoked the interest and patronage of locals and tourists alike, promoted the winery without having to invest in traditional advertising, and provided a revenue stream to supplement their sales to high end hotels, restaurants, and wine merchants.

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<sup>4</sup> Adams interview, December 1972, pp. 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> Pinney, *A History of Wine in America: From Prohibition to Present*, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> Adams interview, April 1986, pp. 3, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Rossi, Jr. interview June 1989, transcript p.129, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Georgette Moger, "A Look Back at the Life of Isabelle Simi," *Wine Enthusiast Magazine* online, March 7, 2014, viewed on June 1, 2015. URL: <http://www.winemag.com/April-2014/A-Look-Back-at-the-Life-of-Isabelle-Simi/>

Large-scale producers promoted winery tourism in the 1930s primarily as a type of institutional advertising cultivating brand recognition rather than as a source of sales revenue. When Roma Wines, the largest bulk producer in the country, centralized its winery and bottling operations in an enormous modernized plant in Fresno in 1934, they erected a movie theater-style neon marquee announcing, "World's Largest Winery. Visitors Welcome."<sup>8</sup> Guided tours awed visitors with the spectacle of state-of-the-art mass production technology in place of romantic vines and old world-style estates. Roma's wine factory and its standardized quality products impressed upon tourists the company's capacity to reach consumers nationwide and spoke to its attempts to create a national brand identity for its wines despite the segmentation of the three-tier distribution system.

Tourism became an important brand promotional strategy for the few large-scale industrial wine producers whose wines were bottled and distributed under the wineries' own label. The Italian Swiss Colony (ISC) was a well-known producer of bottled table wine with a storied past as a 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian-American wine co-operative in the picturesque village of Asti in Sonoma County. The winery survived Prohibition by becoming one of the largest producers of grapes and grape concentrate for the legal homemade wine market; therefore it was well positioned to quickly revive its wine business post-Repeal. After Congressional passage of the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment in early 1933, ISC swung back into wine production, purchasing existing stocks from other wineries to blend with new product in anticipation of releasing a 1933 vintage following state ratification. Leon Adams, the Wine Institute's future public relations director, came up with the idea of inviting journalists and newsreels to document the first shipment of California wine to markets in the East. He persuaded ISC to stage a vintage festival, a community celebration of the harvest, as a photo op to accompany the firm's first rail shipment from the winery in Asti for the assembled national media. The winery brought in students from nearby Cloverdale High School to populate their fake festival and hired accordion players to perform next to departing train cars stacked with bulk wine barrels. Anne Matteoli, one of the participants, described the scene as follows:

All of us girls were given Italian Swiss costumes to wear... We were photographed by many newspapers and Pathe newsreel... I was one of the two girls to roll the first barrel of wine into the waiting 'boxcar' ... I remember a group of us going to Healdsburg to the movie so we could see ourselves on the Pathe newsreel. I felt very important.<sup>9</sup>

In reintroducing the brand to the post-Repeal national market, ISC cloaked its modern industrial plant and mass-produced wine products in the mystique of the wine farm, borrowing the trappings of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Asti village life. This template characterized ISC's approach to promotional marketing post-Repeal and may be responsible for the unusual degree to which the firm emphasized winery hospitality in rebuilding its market. Andrea Sbarboro, founder of the original colony, was renowned in 19<sup>th</sup>-century California wine circles for his hospitality, entertaining dignitaries, politicians, and the wine trade

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<sup>8</sup> John B. Cella interview, November 18, 1985, transcript p. 24, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

<sup>9</sup> Jack W. Florence, Sr., *Legacy of a Village: The Italian Swiss Colony Winery and People of Asti, California* (Phoenix AZ, 2004), 167.

who made the trek by train from San Francisco to Asti. By 1934, ISC was actively engaged in hospitality for the new era, inviting distributors and retailers to visit Asti, tour the winery, and sample the firm's wines in its corporate sales office. In 1937, ISC further expanded its hospitality operations, building a dedicated tasting room and opening its doors for organized public tours. When the Golden Gate Bridge opened that year, making Asti newly accessible from the city by automobile, ISC took out advertisements in Bay Area newspapers inviting urban motorists to visit "the village in a vineyard." Instead of luring tourists with images of a state-of-the-art wine production facility, as Roma did, the ISC ad featured one of the most picturesque elements of Asti village life: a little wine barrel-shaped Catholic chapel surrounded by vines. By the end of the 1930s, an estimated 10,000 visitors a year were touring and tasting at Asti.<sup>10</sup> ISC did not take advantage of the wine farm exemption by making retail sales directly to consumers at the winery, perhaps because they already had robust distribution networks and a recognizable brand. They did not open a gift shop for purchases at the winery until the 1950s. Nonetheless, winery tourism became an important promotional tool and helped distinguish the brand in the consumers' minds. In the 1940s, after Italian Swiss Colony was sold to the liquor conglomerate National Distillers, the winery began referencing scenes of Asti village life in national advertising campaigns, solidifying a brand identity rooted in images of Asti as a tangible and accessible place. Purchasing Italian Swiss Colony's Tipó wine in its rustic raffia-covered jug promised to connect consumers nationwide to this place and its romantic vineyard landscape out of time.

Winery tourism was a relatively inexpensive promotional strategy that could stand in for more expensive print or radio advertising campaigns, which were beyond the reach of most California producers in the 1930s. Fred Abruzzini, manager of Beringer Brothers winery, became convinced that tourism could generate valuable free media publicity after participating in St. Helena's vintage festival, which was revived in 1934. In addition to the traditional parades, performances, and exhibits at the festival site, the town's wineries opened their doors for tours to a crowd estimated at around 40,000 people. Beringer had as many as 500 visitors a day touring the winery. *The Wine Review* lauded the inventiveness of the open house idea, stating that "Inviting the public to inspect a winery is a phase of merchandising that could well be made a regular affair."<sup>11</sup> Abruzzini agreed, explaining years later:

The thing about it is if you can show people. Nobody knew anything about wine. You had to... talk it up, how to use wines and there was only one way: to show people the winery, where it's made, how it's made.<sup>12</sup>

Abruzzini thereafter permanently opened the winery for public tours that he personally conducted. During the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939, he printed up maps

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<sup>10</sup> Florence, *Legacy of a Village*, 187; Adams interview, December 1972, pp.64-65. Rossi, Jr, interview, pp.127-9. Gail Unzelman and the Wine Library Associates of Sonoma County, *Sonoma County Wineries* (Charleston SC, 2006), 99-125.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Abruzzini interview, 1975, tape #1 transcript p.1, Napa Valley Wine Library, St. Helena, CA. James T. Lapsley, *Bottled Poetry: Napa Winemaking from Prohibition to the Modern Era* (Berkeley CA, 1996), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Abruzzini interview, 1978, transcript p.17, North Bay Ethnic Archive box 2 folder 3, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA.

to Beringer calling it “One of California’s most delightful one-day trips.” Each night he and his family traveled from Napa County to San Francisco’s Treasure Island to stand in the California wine exhibit handing out maps and inviting fair goers to visit the winery. Often these visitors showed up the very next morning.<sup>13</sup>

Abruzzini did not merely rely on tourists generating buzz about the winery by word of mouth; he went so far as to orchestrate promotional tours of the place designed to garner media attention. Like Sbarboro and other early California vintners, Abruzzini lavished hospitality on the rich and famous, inviting politicians and dignitaries to tour and taste at Beringer. He used his connections in Hollywood to get movie stars to visit the winery and to get tabloids to cover these events. He gave away cases of Beringer wine to celebrities hoping they would recommend it in the press. Abruzzini’s biggest promotional coup was getting a film shot in the Napa Valley, 1942’s *They Knew What They Wanted*. He gave film star Carole Lombard and her husband Clark Gable a winery tour, cases of Beringer wine, and even set up a display of Beringer wines at the film’s premiere in San Francisco. Gable and Lombard became such big fans of Beringer wine they requested it be carried at the famous Brown Derby restaurant in Los Angeles.<sup>14</sup> Beringer thus became one of the first Napa wineries to become popularly associated with glamour and wealth, a promotional strategy which came to dominate the valley by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Most innovatively, Beringer took advantage of the state’s wine farm exemption by establishing the first retail sales room at a winery doing significant volume sales direct to consumers. The winery established the retail sales room in 1934 to provide an outlet for its bottled table wines, which constituted about 40,000 cases a year in the 1930s, a mere 20percent of its total production. By selling to winery tourists, Beringer was able to bypass needing to find a distributor willing to take a chance on carrying wines with an unproven market or retailers willing to sell it. As Abruzzini recalled:

...I figured there would only be one way to really sell wine and that’d be to sell it at retail because people wouldn’t buy wines; a restaurant would buy but no off [site] sales. Stores would buy, [but] no sales. So what you had to do was to introduce people to buy wines so I started inviting people to come to the winery.<sup>15</sup>

Although Beringer continued to make most of its revenue from bulk wine sales to distributors, by 1940 direct retail sales from the winery accounted for one third of Beringer’s bottled wine sales.<sup>16</sup>

Yet as innovative as Beringer was in making direct sales, Abruzzini never offered the public hospitality in the form of wine tasting, which would become central to the wine tourism experience by the 1950s. Beringer didn’t construct a tasting room until the early

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<sup>13</sup> Fred Abruzzini interview, 1980, Napa Valley Wine Library, St. Helena, CA. Fred Abruzzini interview, 1984, transcript p. 12, Napa Valley Wine Library. Abruzzini interview, 1975, tape #2 transcript p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Abruzzini interview, 1975, tape #1 transcript p. 11. Abruzzini interview, 1980, transcript pp. 41-42. Abruzzini interview, 1975, tape #2 transcript, pp.10-11. Abruzzini interview, 1978, transcript p.19.

<sup>15</sup> Fred Abruzzini Interview tape #2, p.6.

<sup>16</sup> Lapsley, *Bottled Poetry*, p. 82.

1950s, after other wineries had made the connection between tourism, tasting, and direct retail sales. In the 1930s, Abruzzini came closest to the wine tasting approach when he hosted barbeques at the winery to instruct his guests in the proper use of wine with food. Initially these were merely part of winery promotion, with celebrities, dignitaries, and politicians invited to wine and dine. Yet by the late 1930s, Abruzzini began using the barbeques as a selling tool, inviting business groups and social organizations in order to generate direct sales. He said that “when these groups left they would buy wine because they figured they were obligated to some... so I was really selling a lot of wine.”<sup>17</sup>

Until well into the 1940s, the California wine industry used its direct marketing channel to build the wine market by selling the American public on the spectacle of roadside attractions, large-scale wine production, romantic vineyard landscapes, and wine’s consumption by celebrities and other opinion leaders rather than appealing directly to the tastes of consumers themselves. The impetus for creating a winery tourism industry based on individual consumer tastings came from the transformation of the industry during WWII and its aftermath. In short sequence, wartime conditions caused an explosive growth in the production of bottled table wines, despite the absence of any growth in consumer demand for the product. Federal price controls under the OPA drove much of the industry from selling bulk wines to out of state bottlers to the more profitable business of bottling their own wines in California for distribution. This shift to vertically integrated bottling operations also had the effect of giving more California wineries their own brand identities attached to their retail products. Simultaneously, wartime rationing of cheap table grapes pushed the industry into using higher quality varietal grapes better suited to table wine production than fortified wine. Moreover, the entrance of distillers into the industry, who bought up many California wineries in search of alcohol made from non-rationed farm products, forced a scaling up of wine production to satisfy their large national distribution channels. While the wine industry had been working long and hard to develop a consumer market for bottled table wine since Repeal, this expansion in distribution was entirely driven by wartime supply chain needs, not by consumer demand. Consequently, in 1946, after rationing and price controls ended and American consumers returned to consuming their usual beer and spirits, there was suddenly an enormous glut in the supply of bottled table wine in the US market.<sup>18</sup> California vintners thus entered the postwar period needing to convince the American consuming public of the pleasures of drinking table wines more than ever.

The vintner who first created the winery tour, tastings, and direct sales model that did so much to rebuild the table wine market after WWII seems to have been Robert Mondavi. The Mondavi family made the transition from bulk wine producers to bottled wine purveyors with their purchase of Napa’s historic Charles Krug winery in 1943. Unfortunately, they released their first vintage in 1947, the peak year of the wine glut on the national market. Conditions were so terrible that their wholesaler broke their contract, returning the entire release of 80,000 cases to the winery and claiming they could not find retail outlets willing to stock the wine. The Mondavis were forced to find distribution outlets for their wines themselves to avert financial ruin. “That taught me a

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<sup>17</sup> Abruzzini interview, 1975, tape #1 transcript p.7-8. Abruzzini interview, 1978, transcript p.18.

<sup>18</sup> Pinney, *A History of Wine in America: From Prohibition to Present*, 118-138.

lesson,” Robert recalled years later. “From now on, we’re going to do our own selling.”<sup>19</sup> What made the Charles Krug marketing approach truly innovative was that the winery bypassed targeting their promotions to suppliers or tastemakers and instead made direct appeals to the consuming public. The idea was to generate consumer demand for Charles Krug wines, so the public would request them at restaurants and retail stores and thus exert pressure up the supply chain to carry their products.

Mondavi hired Frances “Paco” Gould to develop winery promotions in 1949. He opened the winery for daily public tours led by Gould and established a “Visitor’s Room” as a point of departure for the tours and a place for sampling and selling wines afterwards. This hospitality room Mondavi described in his recollections was very primitive: “(W)e took an old storage shed, emptied it out, slapped on a coat of whitewash, and put in some tables... We served cheese and crackers along with our wines.”<sup>20</sup> Yet it quickly attracted “hundreds” of Napa Valley weekend tourists. Buoyed by its popularity, Mondavi came up with the idea of offering full wine tastings to the public as a way to educate consumers. He modeled these “amateur tastings” on the professional tastings performed for his growers and production staff by his consultant, Andre Tschelistscheff, the most respected winemaker in the Napa Valley. “Since our production tastings were so successful, we thought why don’t we have wine tastings to introduce our wines to the public?” he later explained.<sup>21</sup> The Charles Krug “Tasting on the Lawn,” first held in 1950, sought to educate consumers on the process of production and the ability to evaluate and appreciate the quality of the wine itself. The tastings were designed to give the consuming public an immersive experience in what it was like to be a vintner, placing them in the role of active evaluator and allowing them to choose their preferences among the wines presented. Mondavi’s trust in the educated consumer’s palate was a far cry from the winery as promotional spectacle approach to tourism of the 1930s. And it proved to be an effective retailing strategy. “(T)his is how we built up our business,” Mondavi stated. “We had wine tastings on the lawns and people became interested in our wines, talked about them, and began ordering them in restaurants and retail outlets.” Wholesalers began to approach the winery requesting to stock Charles Krug wines based on consumer demand for the brand.<sup>22</sup>

*Bottles and Bins*, the winery newsletter written by Paco Gould, captured the atmosphere of educated consumer as wine evaluator the winery sought to instill in its visitors:

Our public activities take into consideration that in the United States we have a relatively low per capita wine consumption... In America, a promotional and educational program is required. Charles Krug gives this high priority. Seeing is believing. Visitors are graciously welcomed, taken on guided tours of the grounds and buildings and then escorted to the new Tasting Room to sample the wines. Our competent guides receive frequent

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Mondavi interview, April 1984, transcript p. 26, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

<sup>20</sup> Mondavi, *Harvests of Joy: My Passion for Excellence* (New York, 1998). 61.

<sup>21</sup> Mondavi interview, April 1984, transcript pp. 26-27. Robert Mondavi interview, 1978, transcript p.10, Napa Valley Wine Library, St. Helena CA.

<sup>22</sup> Mondavi interview, April 1984, transcript p. 27. Mondavi interview, 1978, transcript p.10.

compliments on their hospitality and willingness to impart wine information.<sup>23</sup>

A retail list of wines available for sale in the Visitors' Room perfectly summed up Mondavi's experiential approach to wine tourism that appealed to the consumer's educated palate, stating that consumers should "Drink the Wines You Enjoy – Enjoy the Wines You Drink!"<sup>24</sup>

The California wine industry as a whole soon began to develop promotional strategies that echoed Mondavi's approach by focusing less on persuading wholesalers and retailers of the virtues of selling table wine to consumers and more on offering consumers the opportunity to taste the pleasures of table wine directly for themselves. The Wine Institute started promoting public winery tourism and direct retail sales by all of its members, publishing its first visitors' map of California wineries in 1946. In 1949, the Napa Valley Vintners Association erected a road sign reading, "Welcome to this world famous wine growing region" along Highway 29, the main tourist route up valley. In 1954, The Wine Institute began publishing a guide to California wineries open for public tours, tastings, and sales entitled *California's Wine Wonderland*. The pamphlet enticed consumers with the promise of immersing themselves in a landscape of vines, family estates, and artisanal craftsmanship far removed from the realities of industrial wine production:

Vine-green hillsides and valleys at vintage time, picturesque, old-world wineries with their year-'round welcome to visitors, choice wines aging in cool, pleasant cellars – all with an exciting overtone of beauty, color, and romance – offer an unforgettable experience to travelers along California's popular and historic wine trails.

Here vintners eagerly engaged the educated consumer in conversation, making personal connection and enhancing his or her knowledge of wine:

...(T)he old world tradition of the vintage tour has been building steadily and the wine people now find they have the privilege of being hosts. The wine men and their families accept this responsibility gladly and extend a cordial welcome to this colorful, romantic land of wines and vines....<sup>25</sup>

The 1954 edition listed 100 wineries open to the public, 74 of which retailed wines on site.

The wine industry's direct consumer sales appeals, aided by the growing popularity of automobile tourism in the postwar period, paid off. In 1954, the Wine Institute claimed that 250,000 tourists were visiting California wineries each year.<sup>26</sup> Wineries became top tourist destinations in the state during the decade; by 1962, Italian Swiss Colony alone drew nearly 400,000 visitors a year to its theme park-style Swiss village and was the

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<sup>23</sup> "Charles Krug Winery, 1861-1961," *Bottles and Bins* (1961), pp.15-16.

<sup>24</sup> "Charles Krug Napa Valley Wines California Descriptive List." St. Helena, CA: Charles Krug Winery, n.d., Tavistock Books website, viewed June 1, 2015, URL: [http://www.tavbooks.com/tavistock/images/pdfcatalogs/5\\_catalog.pdf](http://www.tavbooks.com/tavistock/images/pdfcatalogs/5_catalog.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Wine Institute, *California's Wine Wonderland* (San Francisco, April 1954 revised edition).

<sup>26</sup> Pinney, *A History of Wine in America: From Prohibition to Present*, 218.

second most popular tourist attraction in the state behind Disneyland. Its tasting room was staffed with costumed serving maids in braids and dierndl skirts and a man dressed as the “little old winemaker” of its national television ad campaign pouring the wine behind the counter. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, wineries statewide transformed their sites of production into sites of experiential consumption and began augmenting their wine offerings with cultural events designed solely to increase tourism. In 1958, the Paul Masson Winery of Saratoga began a summertime concert series called “Music in the Vineyards.” Management transformed the vineyard’s hilly landscape into a natural amphitheater, setting up chairs in the courtyard and using the winery’s reconstructed 12<sup>th</sup>-century Romanesque church façade as a proscenium. Visitors listened to world class musical acts while taking in the vineyard surroundings, sipping wine, and purchasing bottles to take home. The Paul Masson Champagne Cellars, opened near the original winery in 1959, was reputedly the first California winery built with tourism primarily in mind. Its audacious architecture served as a roadside attraction for the burgeoning fine wine tourism industry of the postwar period, including a massive “champagne fountain” surrounded by reflecting pools; a circular entry walkway reminiscent of New York’s Guggenheim museum; elevated observation decks across the entire production plant for tours; a restaurant; an elaborate wine tasting room appointed in rich wood paneling; and a gift shop for wine sales and tourist mementos.<sup>27</sup>

By the early 1960s, wine tastings had emerged as the signature event of the California winery tourism experience. The 1963 edition of *California’s Wine Wonderland* placed new emphasis on wine tasting as the centerpiece of the visit. “Tasting rooms, where fine wines are sipped, are carefully furnished and decorated and are often the showplace of the winery, reflecting the character and the tradition of the entire operation,” it states. The pamphlet concludes by offering the consumer the ability use their newly refined discriminating palate – honed by touring the plant, talking with vintners, and sampling wines – to make their own selections in the winery salesroom. “Many wineries offer their wines for sale at retail price and visitors, having become fully aware of the steps from vine to wine, may handpick a selection of the vintner’s wares to proudly take home.”<sup>28</sup>

The growing popularity of California wine industry tourism during the 1950s and 1960s dovetailed with the increasing popularity wine drinking both in California and the nation as a whole. California wines vastly improved in quality since the end of WWII, thanks to viticulture and enology research by the University of California and technological advances in the industry. Table wine in particular became a more reliably palatable product, and a mass market in these wines finally took off in the 1950s. Sales more than doubled across the decade, while fortified wine sales remained stagnant. In 1962, table wine sales surpassed fortified wine for the first time since Prohibition in the state of California; the rest of nation caught up with the trend in 1967.<sup>29</sup>

The California Wine Revolution of the last 40 years has taken experiential wine tourism to new and fantastic heights unimaginable in the relatively modest Wine Country landscapes of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet its core tourism approach still bears the traces of

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<sup>27</sup> Alfred Fromm interview, November 1985, transcript pp.138-40, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Robert Lawrence Balzer, *This Uncommon Heritage: The Paul Masson Story* (Los Angeles, 1970), 65-69.

<sup>28</sup> Wine Institute, *California’s Wine Wonderland* (San Francisco, 1963 revised edition).

<sup>29</sup> Lapsley, *Bottled Poetry*, 137.

the mid-century industry that preceded today's excesses: an escape into a romantic landscape of refined living; the ability for consumers to exercise judgment, discrimination, and choice therein; and the selection of souvenirs of the experience in the form of purchasing wine. The more wine as a commodity becomes a routine part of everyday life for diverse Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the more fantastic winery landscapes and experiences necessarily become in order to sustain this tourist effect. But its core dynamic remains one of democratizing access to luxury and the good life for the mass consumers who can only fleetingly purchase such intangibles one day trip or week's vacation at a time.