

Wineries and Art

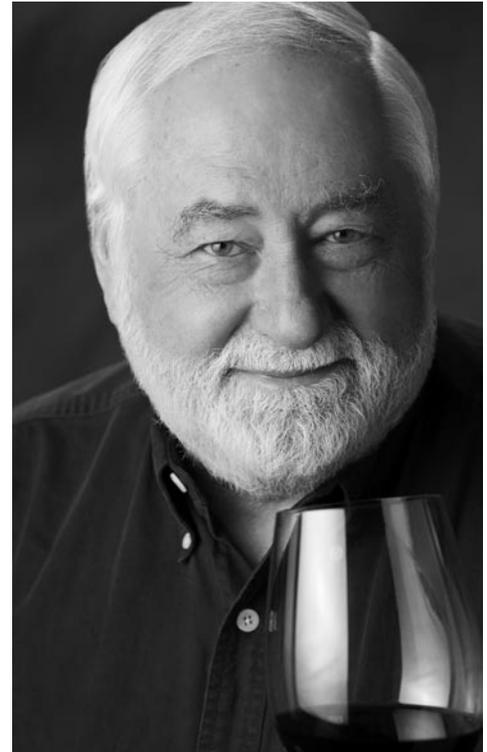
IN A PREVIOUS ISSUE, I ATTEMPTED TO ANSWER WHETHER WINE IS ART. While that article was more philosophical in nature, this piece will focus on several wineries that are art as well as wine centric.

The Hess Collection Winery, situated on Mount Veeder in Napa Valley, Calif., is owned by Swiss magnate Donald Hess and his family. Hess produces the usual white and red wines of Napa, but is most known for its cabernet sauvignons of which it produces three different wines in normal years. Due to the thin volcanic soil and the high elevation on Mount. Veeder, these wines are very flavorful. While the wines are very good, many of its wine fans are even fonder of Hess' art collection. In fact, I'm told a substantial number of winery visitors make the pilgrimage up the mountainous road principally to view the art. Although I haven't visited there in a decade or so, I remember feeling that I had actually been to a museum. The art is mainly modern, and Donald Hess actively follows 20 living artists, often for decades.

There is another Napa winery noted for art as well as wine. Clos Pegase is located in the northern part of the valley near the town of Calistoga and is owned by Jan Shrem, who built a publishing empire in Japan. He commissioned Michael Graves, the winner of a 96-architect competition, to build a "temple to wine and art." Shrem is well-known for assembling a substantial art and

sculpture collection at his winery, and the beautiful grounds are made even more attractive by the well-placed sculptures. Art is displayed very tastefully throughout the winery and the cellar. Several years ago, I hosted a wine and food event for a small group in the cellar and people still talk about this memorable experience. Clos Pegase produces both white and red wines garnering increasingly impressive reviews. Each bottle has a replica of one piece of the estate's art collection. My favorite Clos Pegase wines are the cabernet sauvignons and chardonnay labeled as "Hommage."

One of the world's most beautiful wine regions is Margaret River in Western Australia. Situated a three-hours drive south of Perth, it is a fascinating place to visit. The most famous winery here is Leeuwin Estate, owned by Denis Horgan. I met Denis through our mutual friend, Len Evans (profiled in the Nov/Dec. 2006 QB). Denis has consistently produced one of Australia's best and most famous wines - Leeuwin Estate Art Series Chardonnay. I often reminisce of a night in Singapore, at an International Partner's meeting where I was hosting a dinner table attended by European managing partners. I arrived early and ordered the 1991 vintage of this wine to be poured before my guests' arrival. They all tried to guess which Corton Charlemagne (Grand Cru Burgundy) I had ordered as they all knew it is my favorite white wine. All thought I was not serious when, in response, I



Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

asked them to guess from which hemisphere the wine came. When I told them what they had been drinking, none (especially the French) believed me. Because the bottles had already been discarded, we ordered another bottle to prove my point. Although not inexpensive (approximately \$80), it is worth much more.

Leeuwin produces a wide range of wines and names its premier bottling of sauvignon blanc, cabernet sauvignon, riesling, shiraz as well as chardonnay with the Art Series designation. These bottles also have attractive labels with prints of leading Australian artists. In addition, Leeuwin annually hosts some of Australia's most famous

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Works by Robert Rauschenberg in the Hess Art Museum. On the wall is *Tabernacle Fuss*, (from the *Urban Bourbon Series*), 1992. In the foreground is *Empire I* (from the *Combines Series*), 1961.

Photo by: Paul Kirchner, San Francisco, Calif.



musical performances by world-known artists on its property.

Finally, one of the most famous wines of the world has the longest-standing art connection. For 28 years before Chateau Mouton Rothschild became a First Growth Bordeaux (1973), the owner, Baron Philippe de Rothschild, formed a close bond between wine and art. His fame and stature as one of France's most famous citizens was due to crossing professional boundaries from playwright, screenwriter, poet, theatrical and film producer to Grand Prix motor driver to owner of one of the world's most famous wineries. As a result, he was able to interest world renowned artists to compete to design a winery label for each vintage of this famous wine from 1945 until his death in 1988, and continued by his daughter Baroness Phillipine de Rothschild to present.

The first label was in 1945 by Philippe Jullian which featured a rather straightforward "V" for the allied victory ending World War II (which claimed the life of the Baron's wife). Since then, there has been a non-stop series of the world's most famous artists annually competing to have their label design chosen for this esteemed wine. Winners have included Marc Chagall, Juan Miro, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Henry Moore, Salvador Dali, César, John Huston, Saul Steinberg, as well as many other renowned artists. If chosen to do the label, each one is paid the same as those before – 10 cases of the current release of Mouton Rothschild, complete with their label on each bottle.

In addition to the winery's famous labels, it is widely known for its Museum of Wine in Art. I spent a most enjoyable day at this property and was almost overwhelmed by the experience as this is one of my all-time favorite wines. The museum is worthwhile due to its ability to attract unique art-related items. A Santé! U



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