



... WHEN THE CONVERSATION IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE WINE

FALL 2015

# The Mad Scientist

## ...ON COCKTAILS & FINE WINE

Remember that jug of wine sitting on the family dinner table? We've come a long way since then! Curiosity got the best of us, so we asked winemaker Chris about the evolution of California wine and explored a bit of history along the way.

**Q:** *I remember watching old black-and-white TV shows and seeing housewives make a martini every night for their husbands. Was there no wine in those days?*

**Chris:** Oh, there was wine. It just wasn't very good – at least not what was widely available for the average family. People growing up in the 1950s, 60s and 70s have vivid memories of “supermarket wines” – you know, those inexpensive jug wines.

Don't get me wrong. California had a burgeoning wine industry as far back as the mid-to-late 1800s. Charles Krug started the first winery in 1861 and Shramsberg, Beringer and Inglenook soon followed. Within a couple decades, there were 140 wineries in the Napa Valley region. Then phylloxera struck and wiped out 80% of the vineyards.

**Q:** *But, obviously, the wine industry returned.*

**Chris:** Right. Napa rebounded quickly and was soon producing quality wines again. But the wine industry was hit with a double whammy – first phylloxera and then Prohibition, which started in 1920, not too long after the phylloxera epidemic. The number of wineries in California dropped from 700 to less than 100. Those that remained were only allowed to make sacramental wine for the Catholic Church. The result? Acres and acres of wine grapevines were torn out and replaced by table grapes.

The good news is that Prohibition lasted only 14 years. It had put a huge dent in tax revenue for the federal government. When

the Great Depression hit in 1929, politicians were desperate to replace the lost revenue, and the move was on to repeal Prohibition.

**Q:** *So how did we end up with jug wines?*

**Chris:** Interestingly enough, it seems the Zinfandel grape may have saved California's wine industry from short-term extinction. The vines have a high yield, so Zinfandel had been used extensively in making sacramental wine, and the winemakers who had access to the grapes experimented with it in secret. Once Prohibition was lifted, wineries took full advantage of the grapes' high yield, and jug wines became popular.

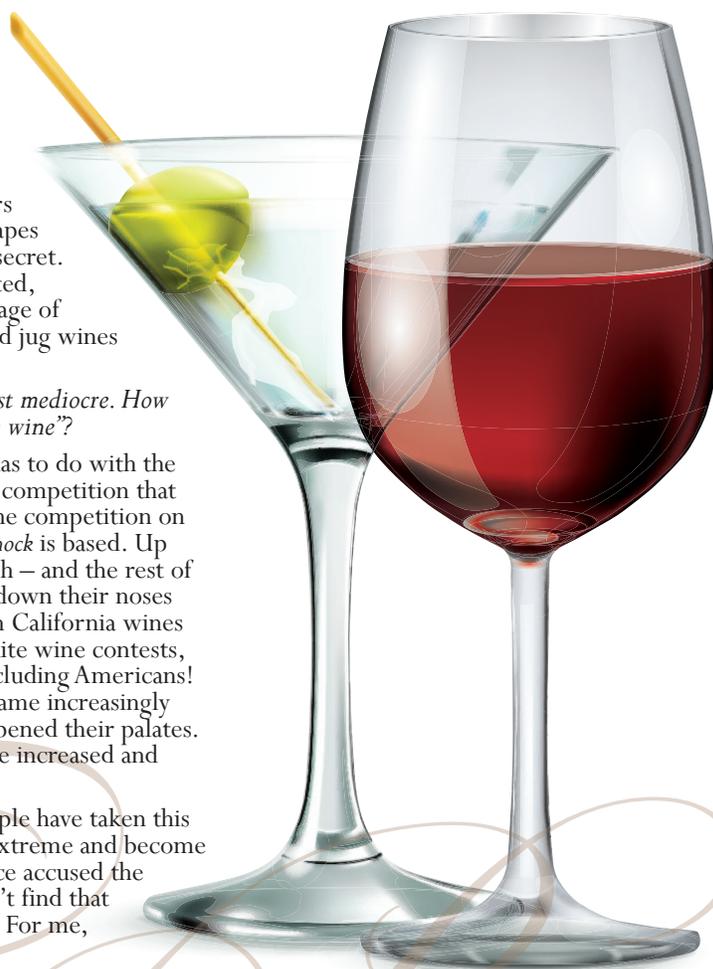
**Q:** *But those wines are just mediocre. How did we get to modern “fine wine”?*

**Chris:** I think a lot of it has to do with the Judgement of Paris wine competition that took place in 1976. It's the competition on which the movie *Bottle Shock* is based. Up until that time, the French – and the rest of the world, too – looked down their noses at American wines. When California wines won both the red and white wine contests, everyone took notice, including Americans! Learning about wine became increasingly popular, and people sharpened their palates. The demand for fine wine increased and wineries responded.

Unfortunately, some people have taken this whole wine thing to an extreme and become the “wine snobs” they once accused the French of being. You won't find that at Middle Ridge, though. For me,

the neat thing about America's growing fascination with wine is the way it brings people together. There's nothing more fun than gathering with friends – old and new – and sharing a good bottle of wine.

*I'll drink to that!*



*Wine in the Times*

# BOTTLE SHOCK

## THE MOVIE & THE MYTH

Many wine lovers have enjoyed the movie *Bottle Shock*, a romanticized Hollywood version of the wine industry and the competition that, overnight, thrust California and the Napa Valley from scoffed-at obscurity to darlings of the wine world. Although some view the film as a bit of a history lesson, there's a lot of fiction going on, too.

The movie tells the story of Chateau Montelena Winery which was purchased by Jim Barrett and another investor in 1972. At the time, Napa was producing quality wines, but they were rarely consumed outside of the United States – haughty French wine producers and French wine drinkers had no respect for California wines, nor did the rest of the world.

A few years later, in 1976, a wine competition was conducted in New York City as part of America's 200th birthday celebration. To the surprise of many, Napa wines dominated the awards. The French did not believe the results, of course, and blamed their poor showing on the impact of shipping their wine such a long distance.

The contest caught the eye of Steve Spurrier, a British ex-patriot living in Paris who had founded the Academie du Vin and also owned a wine shop. Convinced that French wine experts would select France's best red and white wines over California's upstart wines, Spurrier organized the Paris Tasting of 1976, more commonly known as the Judgment of Paris.

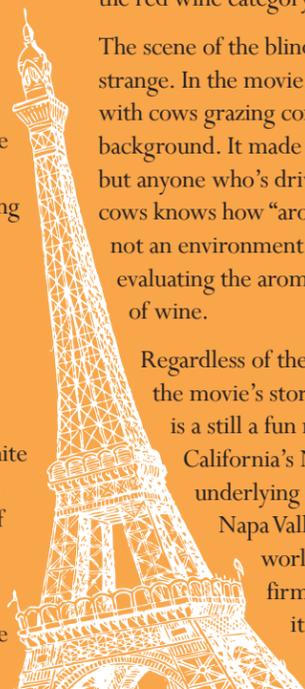
However, there is not much else in the movie that follows the true story of

Chateau Montelena and its award-winning 1973 Chardonnay. Most folks would be surprised to know that, contrary to the movie, the wine did not develop the dreaded bottle shock, nor was Jim Barrett's son Bo instrumental in "saving" it just in the nick of time to be included in the competition.

And oddly, winemaker Mike Grgich – who later started his own legendary wine label, Grgich Hills – is not mentioned at all in the movie even though he made Chateau Montelena's 1973 Chardonnay that beat out the vaulted French white Burgundies. Also unfortunate is that the movie fails to mention (until the closing credits) that Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' 1973 Cabernet Sauvignon triumphed over the French in the red wine category.

The scene of the blind tasting is also strange. In the movie, it is held in a field with cows grazing contentedly in the background. It made for beautiful footage, but anyone who's driven past a field of cows knows how "aromatic" it can be – not an environment for expertly evaluating the aromas and flavors of wine.

Regardless of the liberties taken in the movie's storyline, *Bottle Shock* is a still a fun romp through California's Napa Valley. And the underlying truth – that, in 1976, Napa Valley's spot on the world's wine stage was firmly established – make it a much loved movie for wine aficionados.



## BOTTLE SHOCK... WHEN A GOOD WINE GOES BAD

*Bottle shock* is often used to describe a wine that has taken a plunge in quality – the aromas and flavors are muted, and the alcohol may be more noticeable as well.

The most common explanation for bottle shock is that it occurs when wine absorbs too much oxygen in too little time. Wine can handle the slow, gradual infusion of air that occurs when it's ageing in a barrel, but during bottling, oxygen is picked up when the wine is pumped into the filling machine bowl, again when the wine is poured into the bottles through the filler spouts, and yet again during corking (when the headspace air in the bottle is forced into the wine by the insertion of the cork).

The good news is that bottle shock is a temporary condition and, with a little rest, the wine will recover – usually 8-12 weeks after bottling. It is a bit like letting a premium steak "rest" for 5 minutes after grilling to perfection. You want to give it a chance to let the flavors firmly develop internally before cutting into it...or popping the cork!



# Middle Ridge Winery Tasting Gallery

## ... A PERFECT PAIRING OF WINE & ART

Middle Ridge has been popping open bottles for its devoted fans since 2009, but the biggest party of all is yet to come. After years of searching for the perfect home, the grand opening of Chris and Melody Johnston's newest endeavor, Middle Ridge Winery Tasting Gallery, is taking roots in the heart of downtown Idyllwild.

A dream come true, Chris began making wine in what is now the Innovation Lab at their Idyllwild home in 2005. As plans for the commercial winery and the need for space grew, wine production was set up in a shared facility in nearby Temecula. "Idyllwild was where we really wanted to be," Chris explained, "but the costs were crazy and the budget was in low Earth orbit."

It wasn't long before Middle Ridge wines started winning one award after another and the Johnston's were ready to open their own tasting room. The challenge was finding a home that would support their vision.

"It's been a long search," Melody explained. "We explored space in San Diego, Temecula, and Murrieta – the gateway to wine country. We would have been the first winery in Murrieta, and that was an exciting idea." But not exciting enough.

"We put together business plan after business plan," she continued, "but there was always something missing. It took a while, but we finally figured it out – our hearts were in Idyllwild, and that's where our tasting room needed to be, too."

It won't be your typical tasting room, though. "As long-time supporters of the arts, we

some of Southern California's most talented artists," described Melody. To make this happen, the Johnston's asked the Art Alliance of Idyllwild to manage the gallery.

As Melody explained, "The Art Alliance has fabulous artist members, many of whom don't have a place to show their work. With exhibits that rotate every two months, there

will be plenty of opportunities for their work to be shared with the public." If it all comes together as planned, the Middle Ridge Winery Tasting Gallery may be the first private / non-profit collaboration of its kind.

"We enjoy sharing our passion for wine in comfortable and fun ways," the Johnston's agreed. "And creating a new Idyllwild cultural destination is an exciting way to do that. We may not have views of vineyards to share, but we have breathtaking

views of towering pine trees on steep mountainsides set against beautiful blue skies. And more importantly, the town offers a rich mixture of people from all walks of life and from around the world. There's also a vibe here, something that tells you you've found the good life." And, yes, that includes wine and art!

"The Middle Ridge Winery Tasting Gallery will be a rustic, elegant gathering place where people can relax with a glass of wine amidst beautiful works of art designed by

views of towering pine trees on steep mountainsides set against beautiful blue skies. And more importantly, the town offers a rich mixture of people from all walks of life and from around the world. There's also a vibe here, something that tells you you've found the good life." And, yes, that includes wine and art!

(Middle Ridge Winery Tasting Gallery will be located at 54301 North Circle Drive, Idyllwild, CA 92549.)



# Holiday Entertaining ... WITH MIDDLE RIDGE

With fall upon us, calendars start filling up with plans for holiday gatherings with family and friends. For those who love entertaining, menu planning takes center stage with both food and wine vying for attention. Need a little help? We have some great suggestions for both!

## LINKS

-  **Middle Ridge Website**  
[www.middleridge.com](http://www.middleridge.com)
-  **Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/middleridgewine](http://www.facebook.com/middleridgewine)  
[www.facebook.com/cocktailssurlie](http://www.facebook.com/cocktailssurlie)
-  **Twitter:**  
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-  **YouTube:**  
[www.youtube.com/user/MiddleRidgeWinery#p/u](http://www.youtube.com/user/MiddleRidgeWinery#p/u)

Come taste Middle Ridge wines at Crush & Brew in Old Town Temecula, which serves as our tasting room, and at special events in Idyllwild.



Crush & Brew  
28544 Old Town Front Street  
Temecula, CA 92590



[www.middleridge.com](http://www.middleridge.com)



**2014 Pinot Grigio**  
*Blue's Creek Vineyard, Temecula Valley*

This crisp, white wine has punchy aromas of tree fruits like apples and pears, and it delivers a rich, weighty feeling on the middle of the tongue along with a persistent and refreshing finish. It goes extremely well with savory stuffing, especially recipes utilizing mushrooms, garlic, onions, sage, rosemary, and thyme. It is an excellent pairing with turkey and mashed potatoes slathered in gravy made from pan droppings – the acidity of the Pinot Grigio balances the rich fat in the gravy. And that holiday favorite – green beans made with mushroom soup and topped with crispy onions – tastes even better when accompanied by a sip of Middle Ridge Pinot Grigio.



**2014 Vin Gris of Pinot Noir**  
*Santa Rita Hills*

This deep salmon colored wine with copper highlights is made in the traditional, dry style of French rosés. The tannins remind you of stone fruit plucked fresh from the tree, and bright acidity assures that this wine is anything but boring! It is a great addition to a holiday meal and perfect if you are serving goose or pheasant. The strawberry and peach flavors nicely complement cranberry relish and pair well with candied yams. And a gourmet-style stuffing that incorporates oysters, apples or pears is also a great match for Middle Ridge Vin Gris.



**Lily Rock 2009 Merlot**  
*Russian River Valley*

Do you prefer red wines? If so, pop open a bottle of Lily Rock Merlot. It has the depth of flavor to pair well with a hearty stuffing made with giblets or those using dried fruits like apricots, figs or raisins. With very mellow tannins, it will not overpower dark meat, especially if you like it drenched in gravy – the dryness of the wine complements the richness of the gravy. For dessert, serve Lily Rock Merlot with pumpkin pie topped with fresh whipped cream or a decadent pecan pie.