

FALL 2019

# NAPA VALLEY

# life

MAGAZINE



# THE HARVEST ISSUE

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# DAY TRIP

## *Live a Little More in Livermore Valley*

BY LAURA LARSON

*Livermore Mayor, John Marchand proclaims “Livermore is a city of contrasts and superlatives.” Known as the birthplace of the California Wine Industry, Livermore Valley is one of the most historic in America’s wine history, yet it is also California’s center of innovation. It is home to the nation’s fastest supercomputer and two of the most state-of-the-art research and science centers, Lawrence Livermore and Sandia National Laboratories.*





Wente Flight at Vineyard to Table Tasting Lounge



Concannon Vineyard / Photo by Ron Essex

Situated between 4,000-foot mountain ranges and proximity to the San Francisco Bay, the 15-mile long appellation is ideal for growing grapes and has attracted winemakers as far back as the 1800s. A few of California's oldest family vineyards, Wente (acquired from Wetmore) and Concannon, were pivotal in the rising of California's prestige as a winemaking region. In 1889 Charles Wetmore propelled California wines into international acclaim when his Cresta Blanca Sauternes won the Grand Prize at the Paris International Exposition, 87 years before the famed Judgement in Paris. Wente and Concannon's cultivation of the first French clones of Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon in the late 1800s proliferated to become the defacto standard in California. Today 75 percent of California's Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon have been traced back to the original Concannon Cabernet and Wente Chardonnay clones.

Livermore Valley produces over 30 different grape varieties, some that are unique and fun to try. Known for its Rhone varietals such as Grenache and Syrah, it is also the home of Petite Syrah. Concannon was the first to produce it as a single varietal in the early 1960s, blazing the trail for label designation criteria. Zinfandel and Sauvignon Blanc both do well here, and the Tempranillo, Barbera, Sangiovese, and Albarino are all worth the drive.

The wine tasting scene in Livermore is relaxed and easy to maneuver. The wineries are casual and unpretentious, and it's not unusual to find the owners or winemakers on-site pouring wines and meeting with visitors. Wine prices are approachable; most between \$20-\$50 with modest tasting fees. Most of the wineries encourage guests to linger and also serve snacks, have pizza ovens or food trucks on site. A good percentage of their weekend visitors are winery club members local to the Bay Area, who enjoy spending the day or Friday afternoon happy hours. For those interested in beer or spirits, Livermore also has five breweries and three distilleries to add to the itinerary.

Livermore Valley, just 65 miles from Napa Valley, is not as well-known to the average wine country visitor as Napa Valley or Sonoma. But the people who live and work here don't mind. They're humbled and proud to be part of such a close-knit community deeply rooted in ingenuity and rich history. And of course there are the world-class wines, which are still making headlines after 125 years.

Livermore Valley has over 50 wineries to choose from, each with unique charm. Here are a few that are worth checking out. For a complete list, visit: [www.lvwine.org](http://www.lvwine.org)

## WENTE VINEYARDS

The Wente family plays a substantial role in the foundation of Livermore. They have two winery locations bearing the family name, the original Estate winery on Tesla Road and their "lifestyle" location on Arroyo Road which boasts an award-winning restaurant and 18 hole golf course. Murrieta's Well is also a family winery in partnership between Phil Wente and Concannon's winemaker, Sergio Traverso. The Estate Winery focuses on its premium wine label, Nth Degree and is the favored location for club members to enjoy tasting wine on the patio. Arroyo Road offers all of the Wente Family labels to sample or purchase in their Vineyard to Table Tasting Lounge and has an outstanding restaurant. Its sprawling lawns are busy with events and their legendary Wente Vineyards Summer Concert Series. Wente wines are approachable to the palate and the pocketbook and are all presented with impeccable, white-glove customer service, literally "setting the bar" for memorable guest experiences. [www.wentevineyards.com](http://www.wentevineyards.com) / [www.murrietaswell.com](http://www.murrietaswell.com)

## CONCANNON VINEYARDS

Concannon is one of Livermore's most historic landmarks, best known for cultivating the first cuttings of Sauvignon Blanc, Petite Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon in California. Since the winery's founding in 1883, it is still producing wines under the same label. For history buffs, the original Mother Vine from the first cutting is still producing grapes. The winery and vineyards are easily accessible on Tesla Road.





Mayor John Marchand and Steve Burman of 3 Steves Winery >



The 43,000 square foot facility comes complete with a massive barrel room with 4000 barrels, a tasting room, outdoor patios, and newly remodeled bistro bar. Petite Syrah and Cabernet are Concannon's namesakes; both presented in a lighter style than the wines coming out of Napa and Sonoma. The tasting menu varies and includes an excellent selection of all of their wines from current and prior vintages. Live music on the outdoor patio overlooking the vineyards is popular on weekends. [www.concannonvineyard.com](http://www.concannonvineyard.com)

## LAS POSITAS VINEYARDS

Las Positas Vineyards is one of Livermore's newer wineries. Opened in 2011, this boutique winery celebrates wine, food, and music. Their diverse tasting menu includes a great selection of Estate wines produced from their 17-acre vineyard to sample or buy by the bottle or glass. They produce over 15 different varietals in small lots of 200 cases or less. Las Positas is notorious for their unique small bite pairings such as bacon and cabernet, cheesecake cupcakes or Girl Scout cookies. Winemaker Brent Amos creates some outstanding Rhone

and Italian style blends, and an eclectic selection of hard to find wines such as Barbera, Tempranillo, Petite Syrah, Verdelho and white Muscat. Friday night happy hours are a weekend favorite for locals. [www.laspositasvineyards.com](http://www.laspositasvineyards.com)

## 3 STEVES

Known as the "Three Gringos," Steve Burman, Steve Ziganti, and Steve Melander partnered up to open this relaxed, small production winery, most notable for their interesting blends and Chilean Carmenere or Port produced from their site in Chile. Plan on an immersive experience, either chatting with one of the Steves in the tasting room, meeting new friends, sampling wine from the barrel room, and probably wanting to stay longer than planned. [www.3steveswinery.com](http://www.3steveswinery.com)



Posada owners, Eduardo and Blanca Posada

## Places to Eat

While some of the wineries have substantive food options, it's worth saving room for a few of Livermore's notable restaurants. A couple favorites:

### POSADA

Southwestern, flavorful food—A locals favorite. Eduardo and Blanca Posada's passion for food and wine is apparent on every single item on this contemporary Southwestern restaurant's menu. Eduardo's background specializing in Italian cuisine helped him develop his passion for creating memorable, full-flavor dishes designed to pair with wine, which complement their extensive wine list. The seasonal farm to table menu includes intriguing combinations of flavors such as parmesan crusted cauliflower, meat and fish tacos, braised short ribs and a signature watermelon salad with pickled cabbage, mango habanero dressing and queso fresco. They offer catering services to local wineries, which became so popular, they recently launched their own food truck. Open for lunch or dinner. [www.posadarestaurant.com](http://www.posadarestaurant.com)

### ZEPHYR GRILL AND BAR

This versatile American fare restaurant has an elegant dining room, a warm bistro, wine bar, and lounge. Chef Jesus Martinez creates a crowd-pleasing menu and extensive wine list which rotates each quarter. Popular entrée specialties include surf and turf and short ribs, and a fantastic list of appetizers including Asian chicken wings and a butternut squash soup that is so beloved by its patrons, it is served year-round. The wine list is rich with Livermore Valley labels; perfect to complement any vintners missed during the day. [www.zephyrgrilllivermore.com](http://www.zephyrgrilllivermore.com)

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# WENTE VINEYARDS

## *A Formidable Landmark in California's Wine Industry*

BY LAURA LARSON



Wente Vineyards is coming of age story of the wine industry in California. Registered as one of California's historical landmarks, it is regaled as America's longest, continuously operated, family-owned winery and ranks among the top 30 production wineries in the United States.

In 1883, when German immigrant Carl Heinrich Wente acquired the 47-acre vineyard, he had the foresight to realize the potential the Livermore terroir had to become a premier wine growing region in California. Wente's industry-savvy drove significant milestones in the development of California's wine industry beginning in 1889 when the vineyard's Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, made from cuttings imported

from Chateau d'Yquem, won the Grand Prize in the Paris International Exposition. In 1936, the Wente's acquired international acclaim with the release of their first Chardonnay vintage planted with cuttings they brought over from Montpellier, France. The family's ongoing dedication to meticulous growing methods and development of breakthrough anti-virus vine treatments elevated their Chardonnay clones to become the industry standard. Today Wente Clones #4 and #5 represent 75 percent of the Chardonnay grown in all of California. The Wente's continue to set standards in innovation, most recently in 2019 when they received a Certified Sustainable accreditation, an accolade attained by only 3 percent of California wineries.

Today Wente Vineyards owns and operates 2,500 acres of vines in Livermore and Arroyo Seco. They grow over 35 different varietals, harvested in small vineyard blocks. The blocks are managed separately so they can focus on which ones stand out each year and depending on the vintage, may produce fifteen small batch wines of just 100 cases each. The Wente Chardonnay maintains its' mantel as their flagship varietal, with over five different styles produced from each vineyard. Followed close behind, their Cabernet, Pinot Noir, and Merlot are produced as single-vineyard labels or in a variety of intriguing blends.

### **The Wente family name is a formidable presence in Livermore Valley.**

They have two destination-caliber winery locations, including the original Estate property on Tesla Road, where they showcase their premier label, Nth Degree, and their "lifestyle" winery property on Arroyo Road. The Arroyo Road location is home of their newly reimagined award-winning Vineyard Table and Tasting Lounge, which serves a wide selection of the Wente wine portfolio. The wines can be sampled alongside a curated food pairing or purchased by the glass or bottle off the farm to table bistro menu. Other tasting experiences include a vineyard and cave tour and blending experience in the Winemakers Studio. The Arroyo location is also acclaimed for its 18-hole golf course and legendary summer outdoor dinner-concert series, which hosts impressive line-up of Grammy award-winning artists such as Seal, Josh Groban, and The Doobie Brothers, to name a few.

The Wente's winemaking philosophy is predicated on producing beautiful, well-balanced wines reflective of the region and creating a lifestyle focused on making time for what really matters. Their wines are designed to be approachable enough to enjoy any day of the week only made better shared with family and friends.

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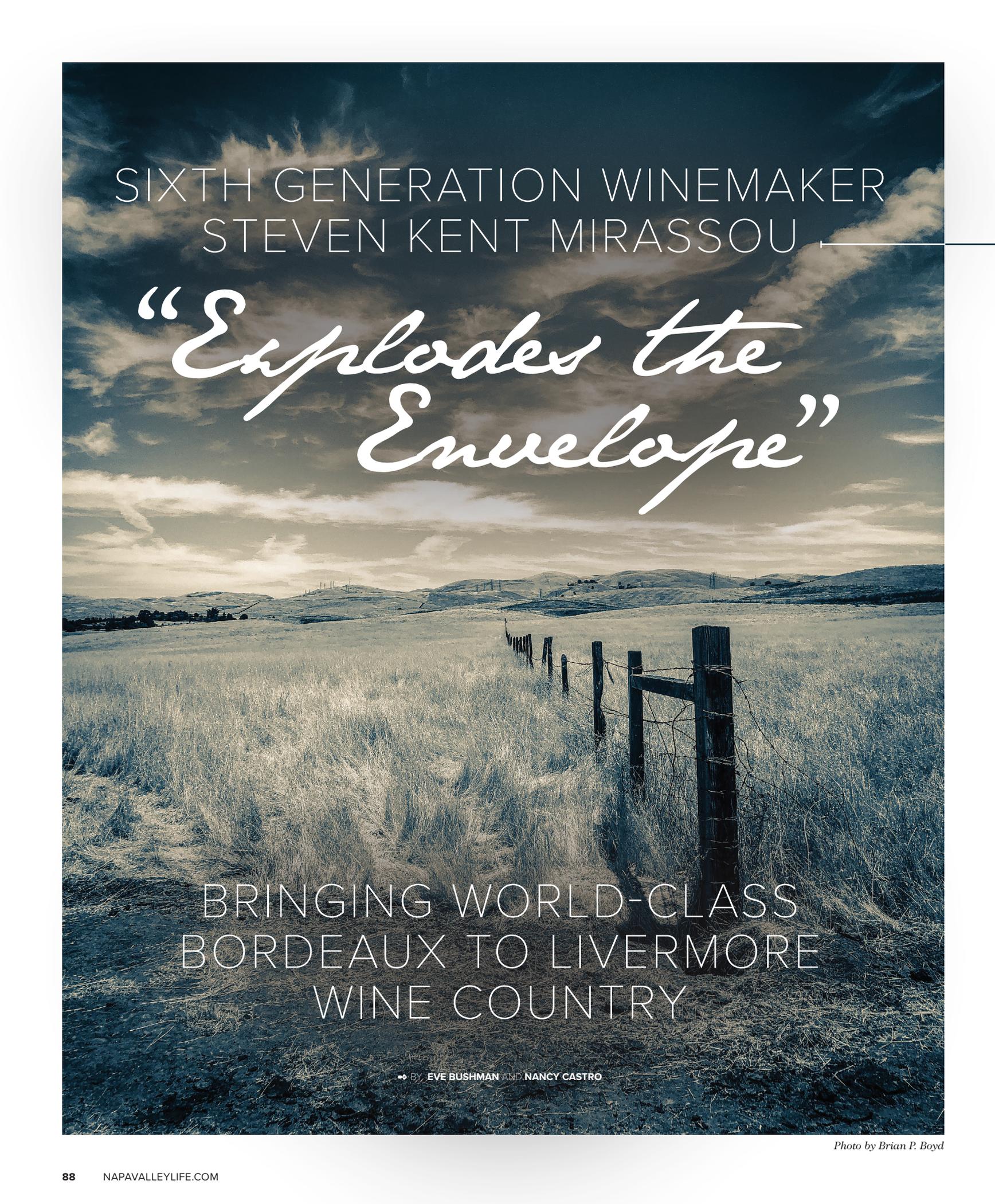
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SIXTH GENERATION WINEMAKER  
STEVEN KENT MIRASSOU

*“Explodes the Envelope”*

BRINGING WORLD-CLASS  
BORDEAUX TO LIVERMORE  
WINE COUNTRY

BY EVE BUSHMAN AND NANCY CASTRO

Photo by Brian P. Boyd

*Lineage Wine is part of an untold story: Livermore Valley's first-growth winery, 165 years in the making, circumscribing the entire history of the Mirassou family in America and tracing nearly the entirety of the Livermore commercial-wine experience.*

**“Lineage is imbued with the elegance, complexity, and age-worthiness that the best of these wines showcase,” is how this single wine handcrafted from the classic Bordeaux varieties is described by winemaker, Steven Kent Mirassou, sixth generation of America’s oldest winemaking family.**



Steven Kent Mirassou with son Aidan

The idea that an undiscovered gem of a wine-region like the Livermore Valley could ever aspire to Napa-level quality may seem implausible to some, however, the history of Livermore’s status as the first great wine region in California has been unfolding for over 100 years. Mirassou has long held that Napa is not singular in its ability to grow outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon though it is rightfully seen as the benchmark now. “The Napa Valley story is well-known and has been repeated so often that it has lost the power to inspire,” Mirassou says. “Why would one want to be the 500th person from Napa to attempt to make iconic wine when you can be the first from the Livermore Valley?”

### THE LINEAGE OF LINEAGE WINE

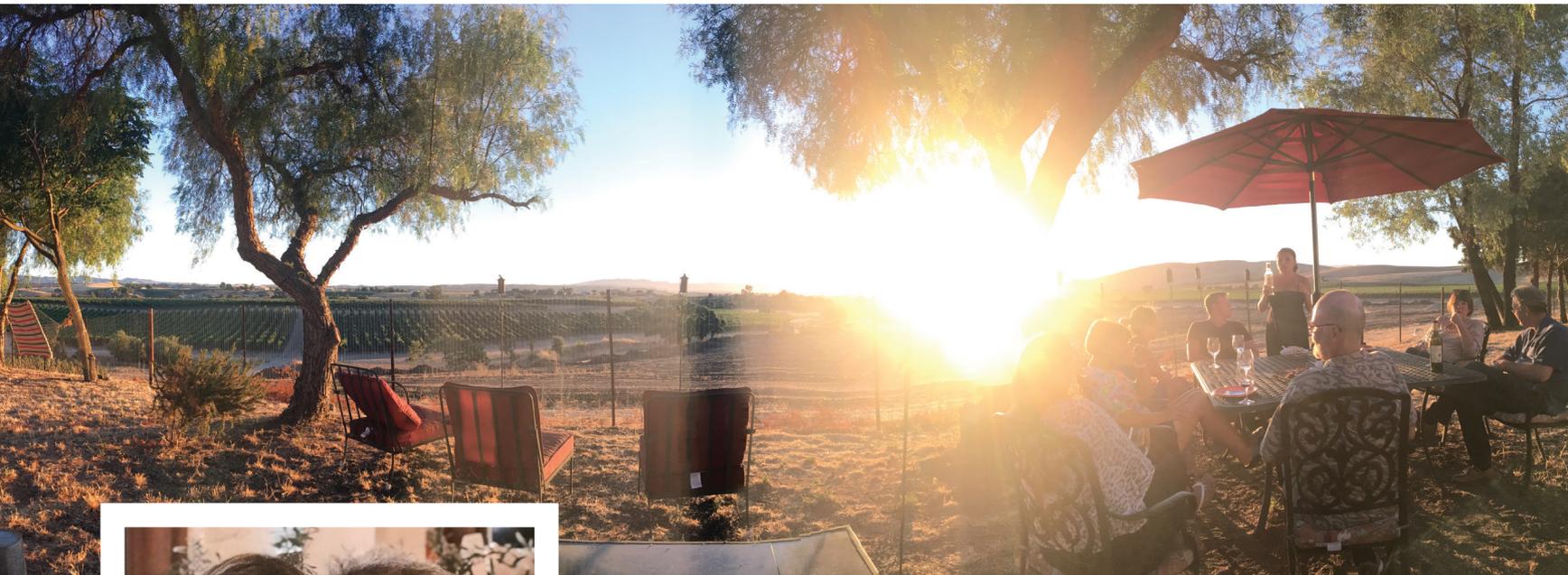
In 1889, Paris marked the completion of the Eiffel Tower with the Paris Exhibition which contained, among other things, a wine contest pitting thousands of wines from all over the world against each other. A Livermore Valley blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon from Cresta Blanca Winery captured the prize as the best white wine in the world.

The Livermore Valley is fewer than 40 miles from San Francisco Bay. And as the temperatures change east of the Altamont Pass, cool air from the Bay is vacuumed through Livermore Valley where it helps to create an ideal environment of daytime and nighttime temperature differentials - that lead to ripe fruit with plentiful acidity. Livermore is cooler than everything north of Rutherford, and its “Valley” is about 500 feet higher above sea level than Napa’s. Add relative temperature, elevation changes, myriad microclimates and soil types, 165 years of winemaking, and you get a world-class growing region that rivals any in the world for Bordeaux varieties.



Mirassou came to learn all of this and worked since the founding of The Steven Kent Winery to prove it. In the intervening years, there were a lot of positive words written about the Steven Kent Cabernet Sauvignons coming out of Livermore. In 2007, Mirassou decided that he wanted to tie himself to a legacy that would explode the envelope. With the amazing quality of all the Bordeaux varieties from the 2007 vintage, Mirassou felt that the time was right to create a singular blended wine that could rival the finest wines of its type in the world. The Lineage Wine Company (named for the long history of the Mirassou family and the Livermore Valley in California winemaking) was the vehicle by which this wine and story were to be communicated. Ten years later, he has made tremendous progress.

2016 Lineage marks the 10th Anniversary of this extraordinary wine. Each of these wines is a chapter in the winemaking book that Mirassou hopes has no end. His son, Aidan Mirassou, seventh-generation winemaker, has taken over assistant winemaking duties and is committed to continue moving the boundaries of quality for the wine. ➡



*Nancy Castro and Steven Kent Mirassou*

## **MORE ABOUT STEVEN KENT MIRASSOU**

Steven Mirassou comes from the oldest winemaking family in America. He grew up around the family winery in San Jose, working seut jobs traditionally taken on by young family members. At 18, Mirassou left home and ventured to the East Coast to go to college and graduate school proclaiming when he left that “he would never get into the family business.” Ten years later Mirassou did make his way back to California, creating The Steven Kent Winery brand with his father – the pair share the same first and middle names and couldn’t use the Mirassou name for legal reasons - and then went on to start the Lineage Wine Company in 2007. The Lineage brand was launched as a challenge to the wine world, reshaping the picture people from all over the world had of the world-class potential of the Livermore Valley wines.

## **ABOUT NANCY CASTRO, BRAND MANAGER LINEAGE WINE AND WINE SCHOLAR**

No matter the quality of wine one makes, if there is no mechanism to educate people about it, it does not truly exist. Nancy Castro, a long-time veteran of the wine hospitality business in Arizona, Napa, Sonoma, and now Livermore Valley, has joined The Lineage Wine Company as the Lineage Brand Manager. She will be instrumental in designing the soon-to-open Lineage Tasting Salon and creating high-end experiences that highlight the unique quality of Lineage, the wine, as well as opening a window on the winemaking philosophy that shapes that wine.

Robert Mondavi was a consultant for the fifth generation of the Mirassou family back in the mid-1960s. He continually emphasized the idea that the quality of the wine in the bottle told only a small part of the story of any given bottle. The way the wine contributed to everyday enjoyment, the way the wine added richness and joy to a wine lover’s life, is a lesson that the sixth and seventh-generation of the family is taking to heart. With the opening of the Lineage Tasting Salon in Fall 2019, members will have the opportunity to taste older vintages of Lineage, contribute to new blends of the wine, and join in on members-only wine, food, and travel experiences unlike any seen in the Livermore Valley.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** 925-243-6445 // [www.lineagewine.com](http://www.lineagewine.com) // [nancy@lineagewine.com](mailto:nancy@lineagewine.com) // 5443 Tesla Road, Livermore, California, 94550



*Photo by Nancy Castro*