

# NAPA

WINE, FOOD AND CONVERSATION FROM NAPA VALLEY VINTNERS

## ECO-FRIENDLY FARMING

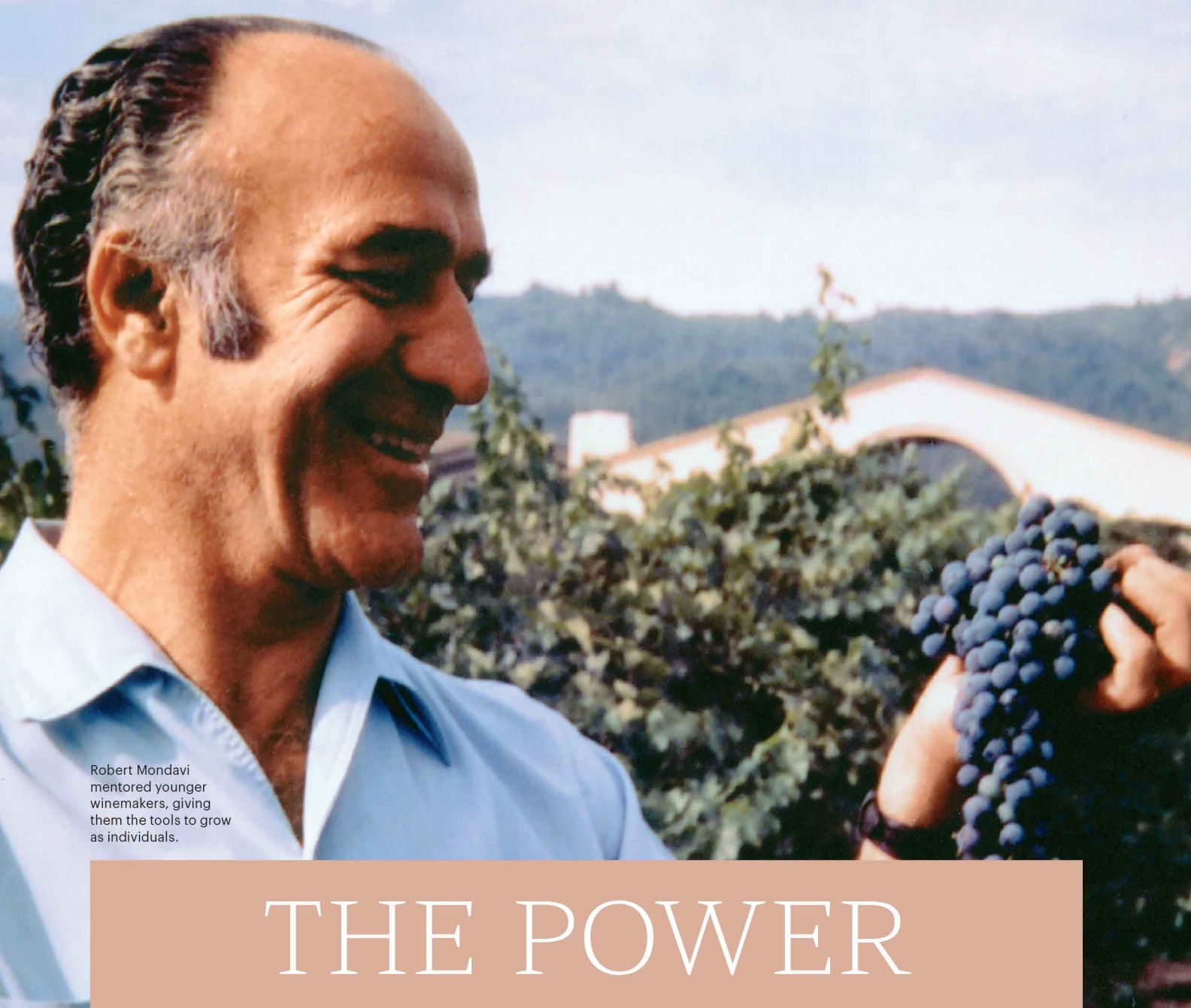
Napa Valley wineries raise the bar on sustainable viticulture



The Many Styles  
of Chardonnay  
THE EVOLUTION OF THIS  
MULTIFACETED VARIETY

White Wine Wonders  
UNUSUAL WHITE WINES AND THE  
TRAILBLAZING WOMEN WHO  
MAKE THEM

Mentoring the  
Next Generation  
ESTABLISHED VINTNERS' SHARE  
EXPERTISE AND INSIGHTS



Robert Mondavi mentored younger winemakers, giving them the tools to grow as individuals.

# THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP

NAPA VALLEY WINEMAKERS PAY IT FORWARD

—  
BY MARYAM AHMED

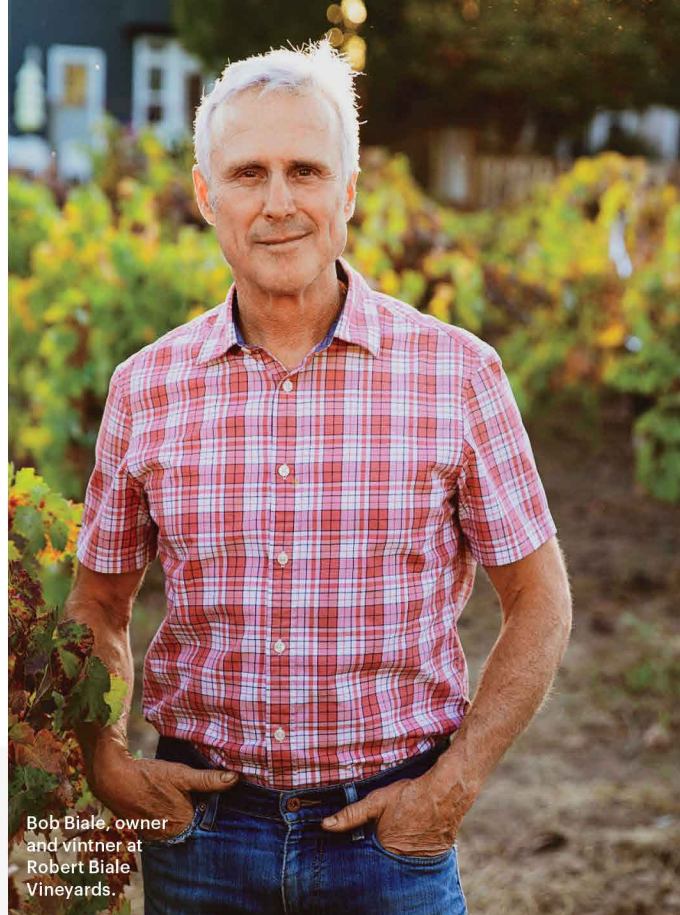
*It's no secret that Napa Valley has set the bar for premium wine regions the world over. Much of the history of this celebrated place has been built by those who seek to elevate people and forward the quality of winemaking here.*

Like the vines that need tending, knowledge grows with each vintage. That knowledge—passed on within families, between teachers and students, among winemakers and harvest interns—continues to build a lasting legacy. Those that recognize potential and want to nurture it can change the course of an individual and a region.

One such example is famed post-Prohibition winemaker André Tchelistcheff, who spent his career defining an unforgettable style of California Cabernet Sauvignon. During his more than 30 years at Beaulieu Vineyards and as a consultant and mentor to acclaimed winemakers such as Joseph Heitz, Mike Grgich, Warren Winiarski and Robert Mondavi, Tchelistcheff ushered in an entire generation of Napa Valley winemakers, which in turn laid a foundation for the valley today.

Tchelistcheff's mentorship of the late Robert Mondavi lives on today through Director of Winemaking Genevieve Janssens. Born to a French winemaking family in Morocco, Janssens studied under the best wine minds in France before finding her way to work with Mondavi in 1978. Now, she is mentor to Kurtis Ogasawara, senior winemaker at Robert Mondavi Winery.

In addition to those that Tchelistcheff mentored, many others have taken part in the ever-growing



Bob Biale, owner and vintner at Robert Biale Vineyards.

collective of wineries and winemakers.

“My family is not unlike many other families that arrived during the expansion period of immigration to the United States. For immigrants who came from farm country, Napa was a dream come true,” explains Bob Biale, owner and vintner at Robert Biale Vineyards. “We stuck to what we knew, and we knew how to farm.” The Biale family patriarch began making wine in 1942 as a pocket-lining hobby. The family founded its commercial winery in 1991, choosing Zinfandel as its flagship wine.

Over 90 percent of the valley's wineries are family owned, passing knowledge from generation to generation. “I learned 95 percent of what I know about the vineyard and winemaking from my father,” says Biale. “But it's that last 5 percent that I've learned from my colleagues because of the collaboration that we have in the Napa Valley.”

The farming community and their collective knowledge is vital to Napa. “Napa has always been an agricultural paradise. Through vision and hard work, it remains that way,” says Biale.

“When I arrived in Napa, I felt like I had been here before. It is a spiritual place. To be a farmer is my life and working in the vineyard is like being in my hometown,” says Nabor Camarena, vineyard manager at Larkmead Vineyards. Camarena, who arrived in Napa in 1984, was born in Jalisco, Mexico. During his more than three-decades-long career, Camarena has received and provided



Above: Genevieve Janssens, director of winemaking at Robert Mondavi Winery. Inset: Kurtis Ogasawara, senior winemaker at Mondavi.



mentorship at some of the most prestigious vineyards in Northern California, such as Hyde Vineyards, Donum Estate and now Larkmead Vineyards.

Camarena holds fast to the words made famous by poet Maya Angelou: “When you learn, teach. When you have, give.”

### WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?

Beyond forming a deep connection, mentors are a source of access, connection, experience and knowledge that can shape a mentee’s career.

“Mentorship is an investment in someone’s future, welfare and development,” says Matt Brain, winemaker at Alpha Omega. Brain spent several years as a faculty member, lecturer and winemaker at Cal Poly and Fresno State before assuming his current position. His assistant winemaker, Melissa Paris, and lab supervisor, Eli Byron, are both former students of his.

Mentees have something to teach as well, which is a reward to even the most experienced mentors. “The mentorship relation is about exchange: of ideas, of experiences and perhaps most foundationally, of trust and respect,” says Janssens. “We become friends and our lives intertwine, and these exchanges enrich both of us.”

“Mentors have helped me negotiate challenges I’ve run into or foresee challenges I may not have seen,” says Brain. “I got into winemaking a little later than some. I was lucky my mentors and I were very close.”

At its most effective, mentorship provides growth and return. “Those that I mentor today will mentor others in the future and continue the cycle,” says Tony Biagi, winemaker at Amici Cellars. “It is great to see that tradition continue in Napa Valley today.”

Biagi was mentored by industry pioneers Dan Duckhorn, Tom Rinaldi and Craig Williams. “I remember Dan saying: ‘God gave you two ears and one mouth. You should listen twice as much as you talk.’ Tom empowered me to make decisions on my own and build confidence,” says Biagi.

Like the wines being made, mentorship takes patience and time. “To be honest, this is a job in progress,” says Camarena. “Sometimes you don’t feel heard in the moment, but they’ll remember something you tell them for the rest of their life.”

### MENTORSHIP IN ACTION

For a winery with a deep sense of heritage, building a legacy takes many years, and developing those that will carry on the future is worth the investment.

“Robert Mondavi’s approach to mentorship was to give his people the tools to reach goals and the freedom to think and act their way to those goals, allowing for individual personalities to grow,” explains Janssens.

“We were looking for an enologist and hired Kurtis Ogasawara in that role,” Janssens adds. “In working with Kurtis, I came to know his love of wine and his abilities, in other words, his potential. We included Kurtis in every meeting of the team. This is an important part of the mentoring relationship: inclusion in the hive of the winemaking process and providing opportunities for mentees to grow, to develop their own voice and style.”



Above: Nabor Camarena, vineyard manager at Larkmead Vineyards. Below: Matt Brain, winemaker at Alpha Omega. Inset left: Melissa Paris, assistant winemaker at Alpha Omega. Inset right: Eli Byron, lab supervisor at Alpha Omega.



“WE ARE ONLY AS GOOD AS THE PEOPLE THAT WORK FOR US. WE NEED TO MAKE SURE EVERY DAY THAT WE ARE HELPING TO MAKE THEM BETTER, AND THAT MAKES US BETTER WINEMAKERS.” —TONY BIAGI, WINEMAKER, AMICI CELLARS

“I feel fortunate to be mentioned in the same sentence with those people,” says Ogasawara, who has grown into the senior winemaker position at Robert Mondavi Winery under the tutelage of Janssens. And he intends to carry it forward. “Working with Genevieve has inspired me to give people a similar experience to mine.”

Lately, there has been an evolution of formal professional mentorship opportunities in Napa Valley. Since creating access is a pillar of mentorship, communities who have historically had less access to the wine industry are a major priority for organizations like Silver Oak and the nonprofit Veraison Project, which have come together to provide a yearlong paid apprenticeship for a diverse candidate.

“Since first jobs in our field are often found through networking, it can be difficult for underrepresented candidates to land their first roles in the industry,” says Charmaine Lall, a wine brand management professional and the Veraison Project’s board director. “We are hoping to break this cycle by providing an opportunity to gain initial work experience, which gives candidates a chance to grow their skills and move up the ladder.”

In addition to growth, there is a clear link to the quality of wines at businesses with an established mentorship mindset. “There is no doubt that the energy and passion a team brings to their wine translates to the flavors, aromas and precision of a wine,” says Brain.

Biagi agrees. “We are only as good as the people that work for us. We need to make sure every day that we are helping to make them better, and that makes us better winemakers,” he says.

### BEST PRACTICES IN MENTORSHIP

Whether formal or personal, there isn’t a prescribed way to build these relationships, but there are best practices.

“Mentors should bear in mind that since they won’t always be around to guide their mentees, they can best help them by using the ‘teach them to fish’ principle—guiding them on the how, not just giving a solution, so that their impact lasts long after the relationship is no longer active,” says Lall.

While providing know-how is important, so is recognizing individual differences. “When you’re a mentor, thinking someone else is like you can be a real pitfall,” says Brain.

### GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

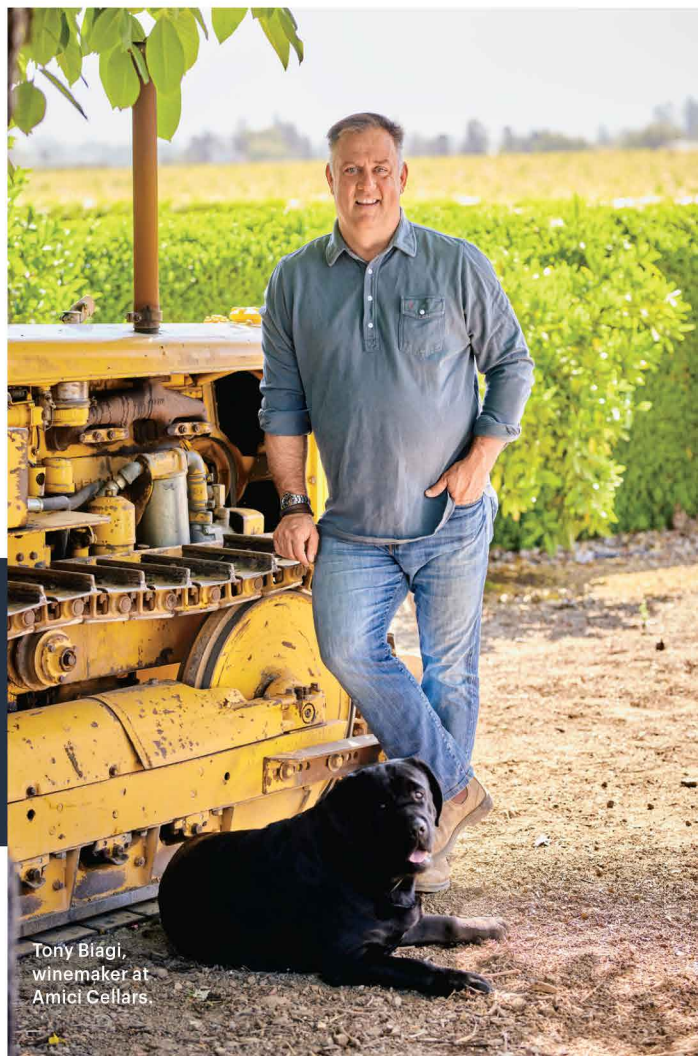
In addition to the Veraison Project’s apprenticeship program with Silver Oak, other formal opportunities in Napa Valley include Bâtonnage Forum, Fields of Opportunity, the Puente Project and the Two Eighty Project, each of which offers access to wine industry conversations and hands-on experiences.

This is a sentiment echoed by Biagi. “This is a creative business and you don’t want to stifle anyone’s creativity. You have to let them do what they think is best and be the net that catches them if they fall and be there to coach them,” he says.

Allowing individual freedom in turn helps mentees grow and mature in their careers. “Encouraging vision is very important,” says Camarena. “My idea is to expose them to a real work environment so that they have a good base and they have an understanding of a real job in a career of their choice.”

The benefits of mentorship are not experienced by just one winery. “The collaboration that enables us to come together and share common knowledge and problem-solving for the common good of our region and industry is very evident,” says Biale.

Today’s winemakers are eager to pass on the legacy of camaraderie and commitment that they have learned from their mentors. “Napa Valley was founded on mentorship and collaboration,” Brain reflects, “and that spirit is still in existence today.”



Tony Biagi,  
winemaker at  
Amici Cellars.