

**Napa Valley bon vivant Mike Grgich and Caliwine's Judy Chan Hunt during a tasting and al fresco lunch at the winery's newly-renovated Ranch House.**



PHOTO: DEBORAH PARKER WONG

# Journey to the West

story and photos by Deborah Parker Wong



**Stellenbosch Winemaker Adam Mason expands the Mulderbosch portfolio with a trio of single-vineyard Chenin Blancs.**



**Grgich Hills 2004 Cabernet. 2004 marked the turning point for Grgich Hills Winemaker Ivo Jeramaz's revitalization of the Yountville Estate vineyard.**

San Francisco has long been a destination for travelers. Some, like **Miljenko "Mike" Grgich**, arrive and spend a lifetime realizing their dreams, while others cross the globe for the purpose of sharing their dreams.

Croatian-born Mike Grgich made his way west in 1958 and set the wheels of his destiny in motion when he began making wine at Souverain Cellars. Mike's legacy is a familiar one, and now, at age 91, the man whose hands made the Chardonnay that helped put California on the map when it won the Paris Tasting in 1976, is a bona fide and well-deserved bon vivant. At a recent retrospective tasting hosted in the newly-renovated Ranch House at his Napa estate, Mike, his nephew and winemaker for **Grgich Hills Ivo Jeramaz** and daughter **Violet** seemed as much a part of the terroir as the wines themselves. Together they presented a vertical of Grgich Hills Yountville Selection Cabernet Sauvignon 1991, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2007 and the just-released 2010 for almost 20 years of perspective on the vineyard.

Grgich Hills Yountville Selection hails from a vineyard that is second only to Scarecrow, Napa's oldest vineyard, in age. Planted in 1959 to the Inglenook clone on St. George rootstock, Jeramaz resuscitated the virused 25-acre site which has been head-trained and farmed organically since 2000. The umami-laden 1991 was a fully-developed deep garnet with graphite, tea leaves, baking spice, tobacco and lean pomegranate. By 2003, Jeramaz saw significant changes in the vineyard, which were apparent in the rich, lush and lengthy 2004 with ripe blackberry, dark spice, vanilla and sweeter tannins. The site, which yields just 1,000 cases, has come to be something of a bon vivant itself and Jeramaz characterized 2014 as a benchmark year for the vineyard.

2012 was **Mulderbosch** Winemaker **Adam Mason's** first vintage for the Stellenbosch estate after it was purchased by vintner **Charles Banks** in 2011. Mason came west to lead an eye-opening tasting of three newly-released single-vineyard Chenin Blancs (SRP \$100 3-pack) and several well-known wines from the portfolio. "We're working with some rare genetic material," said Mason of the 35-year-old bush-trained Montpellier clone vines planted to three distinct soil types: The sandy decomposed granite of Block A, the earliest to ripen, produces lean, citrus and stone fruit Albariño-like wines. A rare deposit of Malmsbury shale in Block S2 results in pure, aromatic pineapple and vanilla flavors. Wines from the colder, heavier clay soils of Block W show baked apple, ginger, citrus, pineapple and stony minerality. Lees aging adds heft to the mid-palate of the wines, and Mason works to preserve "a notion of freshness" in the 100-case lots. "Six hundred million years ago these sites were sea beds, so we're essentially farming an ancient crust composed of sandstone, shale and clay."

Mason's long journey and his ancient-soil wines brought to mind the 16th-century Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. This allegorical tale of like-minded companions who journey west and home again seems a fitting analogy for the community of winemakers who pilgrimage to San Francisco. ■■