

# Beckstoffer

Grower Andy Beckstoffer is largely responsible for kick-starting the vineyard-designated wine movement in California. We tasted 20 wines from five wineries across 11 vintages to see how his grapes have fared.

BY STEVE HEIMOFF

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dherents to the theory of single-vineyard superiority argue that all through history, the world's greatest wines have come from a single plot of dirt: *grand cru* Burgundies, classified-growth Bordeaux, the finest Rieslings. Others say that a vintner

is lucky to have a range of vineyards from which to make wines, and some of the most exciting wines made today—Super Tuscans made of Sangiovese and Bordeaux varieties, Rhône blends of Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache, complex claret-style wines that blend Cabernet Sauvignon with Merlot, Petit Verdot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc—usually have to be blends because seldom are multiple varietals grown cheek-by-jowl in a single vineyard.

It's a debate that may never be settled, but that hasn't stopped Andy Beckstoffer from trying. Beckstoffer is a Napa Valley-based grapegrower whose 2,600 acres of vineyard holdings in Napa, Lake, and Mendocino counties make him the largest private grower in the North Coast. In fact, only two wineries, Gallo and Kendall-Jackson, own more acres in the area than Beckstoffer.

More than just a grower, Beckstoffer has been one of the leading forces behind the movement to vineyard-designated wines. In fact, he forces wineries who want to buy his grapes to sign contracts requiring them, under certain circumstances, to craft only single-vineyard wines, with a "Beckstoffer Vineyard" citation, or something similar, on the label. Prohibiting winemakers from blending his grapes under a more general name sometimes makes vintners chafe, but so prized are his grapes that they go along with these restrictions.

Beckstoffer argues that he can get around the traditional criticism of single-vineyard wines—that they tend to be one-dimensional—by using multiple clones, rootstocks, and trellising systems in his vineyards. This concept was put to the test at a tasting Beckstoffer organized in San Francisco in September that showcased a range of wines made from grapes grown in his vineyards.

All the wines were excellent, and in those flights that featured multiple vintages of the same wine it was possible to discern consistent

aromas and flavors that must have come from the terroir. But to be fair, they did not jump out of the glass and scream, "I'm the product of my soil, not my winemaker" either. Here are my notes on the 20 wines from five wineries and eleven vintages tasted.

