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THREE TO WATCH

You may not know these winemakers—but maybe you should.

BY LINDA MURPHY



Who are all these winemakers? That's the reaction of many wine drinkers when they scan retail shelves and restaurant wine lists, and see dozens of unfamiliar labels. Some of them are small brands, numbering in the hundreds, not thousands, of cases. The wines are sold by word of mouth, and the good ones are quickly snapped up by keen listeners. Here are three winemakers who are getting good buzz.

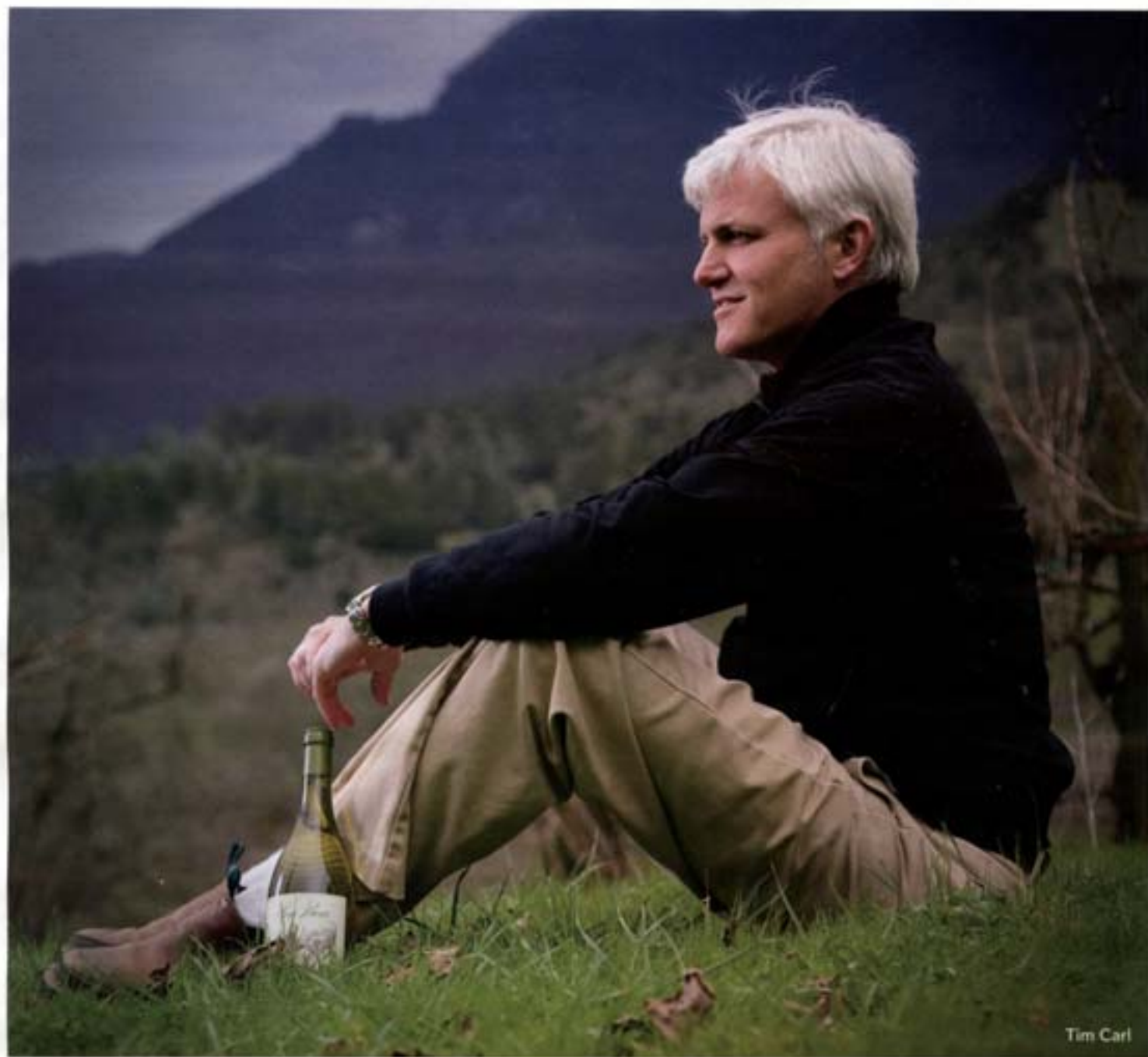
YIN AND YANG

No two red varietals could be more dissimilar than supple, nuanced Pinot Noir and muscular, tannic Cabernet Sauvignon. In a seeming contradiction,

Sojourn Cellars partners Erich Bradley and Craig Haserot produce only Pinot and Cabernet, mixing apples and oranges, and coming up with fine examples of each.

Bradley is the viticulturist and winemaker (he's also the winemaker at Audelssa Estate Winery); Haserot (haz-er-OH, rhymes with escargot) is the sales and marketing guru. They met on a tennis court in Sonoma and founded Sojourn in 2001.

When asked how they settled on Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, Haserot shrugs and says simply, "We make what we like to drink." He has a Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard in his Sonoma backyard,



Tim Carl

although Sojourn purchases the rest of the grapes used to produce its six Pinot Noirs and three Cabernets.

The Pinot Noirs, four from the Sonoma Coast appellation and most of them vineyard-designated, are elegant and refined, with pure fruit expression and remarkably silky tannins. Best bottle: the 2007 Sangiacomo Vineyard Sonoma Coast. Try it at Sojourn's tasting salon in Sonoma (complimentary, by appointment only).

SMARTER THAN THE AVERAGE BEAR

There are dozens of wines and vineyards with bear icons, yet when Tim Carl pored over newspapers in search of a historical context for his then-unnamed brand, one headline grabbed him: "Huge Bear Attacks Knights Valley."

The hungry grizzly apparently raided homes in eastern Sonoma County and was the icon that members of the 1846 Bear Flag Revolt (which

included Knights Valley namesake Thomas Knight) used on their flag. The bear remains the centerpiece of the California state flag.

Carl couldn't resist using the marauding bear for his Huge Bear Wines brand, which includes Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon, all made from Knights Valley grapes.

Carl grew up in St. Helena; worked on a farm in Italy; did a stint with the Navy; cooked at Auberge du Soleil, John Ash & Co., and Chateau Sovereign; played drums in a band; earned a Ph.D. in genetics; and was a management consultant. Today, he lives in Calistoga and is one of the owners of Huge Bear, cofounder and managing partner of Knights Bridge Winery & Vineyards in Knights Valley, and a private chef.

"Huge Bear is not a 'critter label'; it's about Sonoma County history," says Carl. "The Knights Valley appellation has definite *terroir*, and Sonoma County wines have a definite personality, which Huge Bear captures."



Jack Bittner

The 2006 Huge Bear Chardonnay indeed makes a bold statement. It's superrich and creamy, with intense pear, apple, and butterscotch flavors—big yet balanced. Barely 100 cases were made.

MORE THAN ONE

Three to Watch offers a bit of a bonus this time because Jack Bittner has two brands: Franz Hill Vineyard and Caliban Cellars.

Bittner, also the general manager at Cliff Lesde Vineyards in Napa, is a sucker for old vines. He makes the brambly, spicy Franz Hill Napa Valley Zinfandel from his vineyard overlooking Calistoga, planted in 1870 and restored in 1969. His partner in Caliban, Dave Phinney, makes Caliban's Noble Savage Napa Valley Petite Sirah from vines that are 100-plus years old.

"When it goes into the bottle, the Petite is an unbridled monster [it's named after Caliban, the monster in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*], though

aging gets it through the all-knees-and-elbows phase," Bittner says. "It's not all tannin; it has great fruit, too."

Bittner got his wine-making start as a teenager in Massachusetts, helping his father make apple wine. "It was awful," he says, "but it made me popular at parties."

Where to Find Them

Caliban Cellars, (707) 963-0230.

Franz Hill Vineyard, (707) 963-0230,
franzhillvineyard.com.

Huge Bear Wines, (707) 738-5711,
hugebearwines.com.

Sojourn Cellars, (707) 938-7212, sojourncellars.com.