

# FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS

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*The Winemaking Issue*

Fall 2021





At Frank Family Vineyards, our work in wine has always been a labor of love, and its rewards feel especially profound as we head into our 28th harvest season, and my personal 19th with the company.

Our vineyards and craft of wine continue to be a source of inspiration to us every day. Drawing motivation from our deep connection to the land and our home in Napa Valley, we constantly strive to improve our methods and way of doing things, infusing old-world winemaking traditions with new innovative technologies.

In this Winemaking issue, we explore some of the exciting changes taking shape at the winery and in the vineyard while on our constant quest to improve wine quality every vintage. On page 22, we unveil our newest technological investment, a new state-of-the-art automated bottling line given the moniker, “Superbloc.” On page 24, we dive into the ten-year replanting journey at our Benjamin Vineyard and examine its positive impact on vine health and on our future wines.

On page 26, I sit down with Frank Family’s Zinfandel grower of the past 15 years, Phil Sunseri, to discuss the historical importance of his family’s property in Chiles Valley and what makes the area so favorable for grape growing.

We truly appreciate our partnership with Phil and his daily dedication to preserving unique varieties like Zinfandel and Petite Sirah in Napa Valley.

Above all, we are grateful for our tight-knit winemaking “dream team”, whom without, nothing we do could be possible. Learn the names and faces of each team member who has a hand in crafting Frank Family wine, starting on page 16.

We hope you enjoy this special Winemaking issue, and join us in raising a glass in gratitude for the hardworking people behind every bottle.

*Todd Graff*

Todd Graff

General Manager & Winemaker

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# Reserve Chardonnays

## 2019 Lewis Vineyard Chardonnay

**Tasting Notes** Sophisticated and bright, this Chardonnay bursts with notes of tangerine, Fuji apples, and melon. The palate is rich and complex in texture, upheld by notes of vanilla pot de crème, macadamia nuts, and pineapple that provide balancing acidity throughout. Splashes of Meyer lemon dances on the palate for a refreshing finish.

**Blend Composition** 100% Chardonnay

**Vineyard Sourcing** Named after Rich and Leslie Frank's eldest grandson, Lewis Vineyard consistently produces Frank Family's best fruit year after year. Almost at sea level and directly facing the San Pablo Bay, Lewis Vineyard receives constant caress of cool ocean air and fog that tumble over its rolling hills. The effect on the grapes is magic. The grapes, while receiving plenty of sunshine, rarely overbake, creating perfect conditions to ripen each berry while retaining its natural acidity.

**Winemaker Notes** Everything starts with great grapes in the vineyard. Chardonnay from Lewis Vineyard displays pronounced aromatics and unmatched freshness, as well as remarkable varietal character and harmony. Our winemaking team makes minimal adjustments in the winery, allowing the natural flavors from the land to show through.

**Aging** Barrel fermented in 100% new French oak barrels for 10 months

## Late Harvest Chardonnay

**Tasting Notes** Hand-picked berry by berry at just the right ripeness and aged for two years in 100% French oak, this Late Harvest Chardonnay exudes flavors of dried apricots, silky pear, and golden honey. Exotic notes of candied mango mingle with hints of orange blossom and wet stone minerality, classic of botrytized wines.

**Blend Composition** 100% Chardonnay

**Vineyard Sourcing** This wine is sourced exclusively from Frank Family's Lewis Vineyard in Carneros. This cool-climate site has been a part of our family since 2000 and has become the cornerstone of Frank Family's Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and sparkling wine programs. Fog tumbles over the softly sloping vineyard in the morning. As the fog burns off in the early afternoon, the windswept hills are kissed by the sun, creating the perfect conditions to ripen each berry while retaining its natural acidity.

**Winemaker Notes** This non-vintage Late Harvest Chardonnay was crafted in the traditional European method where botrytized grapes are left on the vine until the perfect concentration of flavors and aromas is achieved.

**Aging** 2 years in 100% French oak barrels



# Reserve Cabernets

## 2018 Calistoga Cabernet Sauvignon

**Tasting Notes** Features lush and refined flavors of blackberry, black cherry, ripe plum, and subtle licorice. Dusty minerality lingers on the finish along with oak-aged notes of cedar and tobacco. This is a well-balanced wine and will develop attractively over time.

**Blend Composition** 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

**Vineyard Sourcing** This 100% Cabernet Sauvignon is sourced from Sam Brannan Vineyard along the Silverado Trail in the Calistoga AVA. Lying between the Mayacamas Range on the west and Vaca Range on the east, Calistoga lies at the northernmost end of the Napa Valley. Summer daytime temperatures frequently reach 100° but can drop by as much as 50° at night. These temperature swings, along with well-drained volcanic soils, produce grapes with both ripeness and balancing acidity.

**Aging** 20 months in 50% new French oak barrels, 50% once and twice-filled French oak barrels

## 2018 RHF Cabernet Sauvignon

**Tasting Notes** Named in honor of Richard Harvey Frank, this Cabernet sees small additions of Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc. It is soft and supple, with currant and blackberries at its core. A mix of cinnamon and dark chocolate play well against its savory components of dried herb and dusty earth.

**Blend Composition** 95% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petit Verdot, 2% Merlot, 1% Cabernet Franc

**Vineyard Sourcing** The RHF pays homage to our estate Rutherford hillside and floor vineyards from which the wine is sourced: Frank Family's own Benjamin Vineyard on the valley floor, and our "crown jewel" Rutherford hillside vineyard, Winston Hill.

Our Benjamin Vineyard is directly across the Silverado Trail from Winston Hill and spans 87 acres with 70 acres planted with vines. The Cabernet Sauvignon grapes from Benjamin Vineyard add depth and classic "Rutherford dust" character to the RHF.

**Aging** 20 months in 50% new French oak barrels, 50% once and twice-filled French oak barrels

## 2018 Mt. Veeder Cabernet Sauvignon

**Tasting Notes** With dark fruit flavors of blueberry, ripe red cherry, and wild berry, our Mt. Veeder Cabernet Sauvignon features renowned mountain characteristics of earthiness and heightened minerality as well as beautifully textured tannins. Aged in both new and neutral French oak barrels, this 100% varietal wine is well-balanced and ready to drink.

**Blend Composition** 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

**Vineyard Sourcing** This hillside appellation produces grapes of extraordinary quality. The vineyards benefit from one of the longest growing seasons and the lowest yields in Napa Valley. The rugged slopes extend above the fog line providing ample sunlight. The mountain terrain renders shallow topsoil and minimal water retention, resulting in tiny berries, with intense flavor concentration yet soft tannins.

**Aging** 20 months in 50% new French oak barrels, 50% once and twice-filled French oak barrels



# Reserve Reds

## 2019 Chiles Valley Zinfandel

**Tasting Notes** From the eastern climes of the Napa Valley, this Chiles Valley vineyard site provides a plum and fig filled entry of cocoa powder and cracked pepper. Rounded and rich in blackberry and vanilla, our Zinfandel has deep concentration, an impressive ripeness that's balanced by a backbone of bright acidity.

**Blend Composition** 89% Zinfandel, 11% Petite Sirah

**Vineyard Sourcing** This narrow appellation nestled in the Vaca Mountains along the northeast side of the Napa Valley, is often described as a "valley within a valley". Its terroir is unique, as it lies approximately 1,000 feet above the Napa Valley floor and experiences a special microclimate. The higher elevation results in daytime breezes and cooler nights that creates a long and even growing season. Bud break and harvest occur later which, in part, lends distinctive flavor and quality to this wine.

**Aging** 16 months in 50% new French oak barrels and 50% neutral barrels

## 2018 The Riley Red Blend

**Tasting Notes** Brawny, substantial and complex, this wine offers dusty dried herb, sage, and smooth tannin. Cedar, red currant, and plum enhance the palate, finding balance and a bright lift of acidity. The oak is well integrated and nuanced in nutmeg and clove with a luscious and lengthy finish.

**Blend Composition** 66% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Cabernet Franc

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced from our family's Benjamin Vineyard in Rutherford as well as fruit from grower-partners throughout Napa Valley, this wine showcases some of the finest Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc vineyards in the region.

**Aging** 21 months in 50% new French oak barrels and 50% once-filled barrels

## 2018 Winston Hill

**Tasting Notes** Only 500 cases were produced of this immensely elegant wine. Incredibly bold yet refined, the palate marvelously features black currant and espresso flavors, and the 75% new French oak provides perfect additions of cedar and caramel. This finely crafted wine is soft and generous to drink now and will develop gracefully over time.

**Blend Composition** 89% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, 3% Merlot, 3% Petit Verdot

**Vineyard Sourcing** Winston Hill is a wine truly shaped by our land. Tucked into the eastern edge of Rutherford at an elevation of 500 feet above the valley floor, Winston Hill is our family's original estate vineyard. The land is an assemblage of a variety of soils, grape varieties, and microclimates that come together in harmony in the bottle.

**Aging** 20 months in 75% new French oak barrels and 25% once-filled barrels

## 2018 S&J Vineyard Petite Sirah

**Tasting Notes** With its gorgeous velvety purple color, the 2018 S&J Vineyard Petite Sirah is an extraordinarily full-bodied wine. Aromas of baking spices, rich red fruits, and earth greet you at the glass. The palate features cedar, blackberry, and nutmeg. As the Petite Sirah is aged predominantly in neutral French oak barrels, the wine is fruit forward, but equally balanced with strong tannins.

**Blend Composition** 100% Petite Sirah

**Vineyard Sourcing** Set east of the Vaca Mountain range in Napa's Capell Valley, our family's S&J Vineyard is named after Rich and Leslie Frank's grandchildren, Stella and Jeremy. Its soils are fertile, well-drained and clay loam-based reminiscent of the Rutherford Bench.

**Aging** 20 months in 33% new French oak barrels, 67% once and twice-filled French oak barrels



# Sparkling Wines



## 2015 Blanc de Blancs

**Tasting Notes** Coming entirely from Frank Family's estate vineyard in Carneros, our signature sparkling wine shows great finesse and quality. It is poised between crisp minerality and delightful toastiness. Creamy texture supports a palate of lemon zest and green apple with lasting notes of hazelnut and brioche.

**Blend Composition** 100% Chardonnay

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced exclusively from Frank Family's Lewis Vineyard in Carneros.

**Winemaker Notes** The acidity that develops in Carneros fruit surprisingly compares to Champagne, France. We put our sparkling wines through partial malolactic fermentation to soften the high natural acidity and to achieve the richness we're looking for. Our Blanc de Blancs showcases that perfect balance between bright acid and smooth creaminess.

**Aging** Rested on the spent yeast cells for almost 5 years before disgorgement in December 2020

## 2012 Lady Edythe Reserve Brut

**Tasting Notes** Named in honor of Rich Frank's mother, Edythe, the Lady Edythe is a late disgorged sparkling wine with 8 years on its lees. Its intensity and concentration derive from its predominately Chardonnay base that provides classic Champenoise minerality as well as elegant citrus fruit flavors. Its acidity has been softened and beautifully integrated by the wine's maturity, yet it still is remarkably full of life.

**Blend Composition** 61% Chardonnay, 39% Pinot Noir

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced exclusively from Frank Family's Lewis Vineyard in Carneros.

**Winemaker Notes** This 10-year-old sparkling wine is Frank Family's version of a tête de cuvée, essentially the best of our best. The 61% Chardonnay in this blend provides the wine's framework and structure, while the Pinot Noir added in gives the Lady Edythe muscle, body, and flesh. It's a delicate process to get right.

**Aging** Rested 8 years on spent lees before disgorgement in February 2021

## 2016 Brut Rosé

**Tasting Notes** An elegantly poised, coral pink wine with tantalizing aromas of toast, raspberry, and sliced green apple. Beautifully textured with fine beads, the palate offers touches of red berries laced with citrus fruit and a refreshing minerality that lingers.

**Blend Composition** 59% Pinot Noir, 41% Chardonnay

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced exclusively from Frank Family's Lewis Vineyard in Carneros.

**Winemaker Notes** In creating our sparkling Brut Rosé, we blended a Pinot Noir base with Chardonnay. The Pinot Noir enhances the color, body, and flavor of our sparkling rosé while the Chardonnay adds structure and white fruit and fresh floral notes. In the cellar, the traditional methodé champenoise is employed to create the tiny bubbles in the bottle.

**Aging** Rested on the spent yeast cells for about 5 years before disgorgement in February 2021

## 2016 Rouge

**Tasting Notes** A striking crimson red, the 2016 Rouge is a unique showstopper with lively aromas of bing cherry and rose petal. Bright flavors of ripe cranberry greet the palate, rounded out by hints of nutmeg and a creamy vanilla sensation for a lingering finish.

**Blend Composition** 73% Pinot Noir, 27% Chardonnay

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced exclusively from Frank Family's Lewis Vineyard in Carneros.

**Winemaker Notes** Like all Frank Family sparkling wines, our Rouge is created using the méthode champenoise whereby the secondary fermentation occurs in the bottle. The beautiful ruby hue of this wine comes from leaving the Pinot Noir juice in contact with the grape skins for a brief period of time.

**Aging** Rested on spent yeast cells for 3 years and was riddled before disgorgement in April 2020

# Napa Wines

## 2019 Carneros Pinot Noir

**Tasting Notes** A beautiful expression of the Carneros appellation, this Pinot Noir opens with lively aromas of strawberry, ripe red cherry, and a touch of baking spice. The palate is greeted with a juicy, full-bodied mouthfeel and refreshing, well-balanced acidity that lingers on the finish.

**Blend Composition** 100% Pinot Noir

**Vineyard Sourcing** The Sangiacomos in Sonoma Carneros and the Beckstoffers in Napa Carneros farm two of the vineyards of which this wine is made. In the winery, we are able to ‘marry’ these two vineyards with our beautiful estate-grown Lewis Vineyard fruit in a way that highlights and praises all that Carneros has to offer.

**Winemaker Notes** We’re not trying to make a Burgundian Pinot Noir. We are blessed with California sunshine and we have to farm with that in mind. We’ve learned a lot from the French and we respect the French, but we’re trying to do what California does best. We have an abundance of this great fruit, so we’re not going to hide it at all.

**Aging** 10 months in 33% new French oak barrels, 67% once and twice-filled French oak barrels

## 2018 Napa Valley Merlot

**Tasting Notes** Frank Family’s first vintage of this wine in nearly two decades opens with fresh plums that intertwine with coffee and cedar. An effortless mix of blackberries and baking spice, the Merlot is complex and elegant, offering smooth layers of pomegranate and a depth of dark chocolate that carries through the persistent finish.

**Blend Composition** 85% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Cabernet Franc

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced from our family-owned Benjamin Vineyard in Rutherford as well as several

of our closest neighbors and long-term grape growers including Delouise, Round Pond Estate, and Sunseri Vineyards located in Oak Knoll, Rutherford, and Chiles Valley respectively.

**Winemaker Notes** Frank Family grows several acres of Merlot on our Rutherford properties, which we often blend with our Cabernet Sauvignons to add softness and a more rounded mouthfeel. But Merlot is worthy to stand on its own. This wine has so much elegant and structured potential that it can go head-to-head with many Napa Valley Cabernets.

**Aging** 18 months in 33% new and 67% once and twice-filled French oak barrels

## 2018 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

**Tasting Notes** A beautiful wine from a near-perfect vintage, this robust Cabernet Sauvignon shows balance and complexity - a blend of dark berry, generous oak notes, clove, and nutmeg. This is a supple and complex wine, full-bodied in style, with a punch of power, ripeness, and elegance from start to finish.

**Blend Composition** 96% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Petite Verdot, 2% Merlot

**Vineyard Sourcing** Sourced primarily from our family-owned S&J Vineyard in Napa’s Capell Valley and our Benjamin Vineyard located on the valley floor in the heart of Rutherford. Additional vineyard sources include neighboring Quarry Vineyard and Round Pond Estate both in Rutherford as well as Delouise and Shooting Star Vineyard located in Napa Valley.

**Winemaker Notes** Our goal is to make a complete, balanced wine. Cabernet Sauvignon is a great grape, it’s the king of Napa Valley after-all. But it can benefit from the addition of other grapes, like Merlot which adds some softness. Together you get the whole package.

**Aging** 20 months in 33% new and 67% once and twice-filled French oak barrels

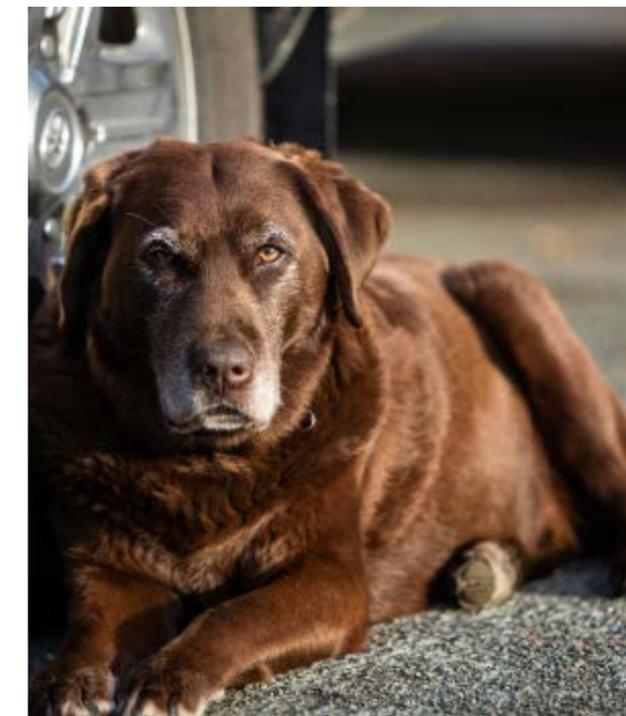


# What's New



## In-Person Events Make a Comeback

Winery-hosted events have made a rebound in wine country. In July, Frank Family welcomed guests to our first dinner party in nearly two years for Festival Napa Valley, which raises funds for local arts programs. The intimate affair was held al fresco in the estate courtyard and everyone was eager to celebrate. Most recently, the winery hosted the 2nd Annual Songwriters in Paradise (SIP) Napa event which brought together talented musicians and wine and music enthusiasts for a spectacular night under the stars. New events are added throughout the year. For more information, visit [frankfamilyvineyards.com/events](http://frankfamilyvineyards.com/events).



## "Frank for a Paws" Campaign Soon Launches to Honor Winery Dog, Bristol

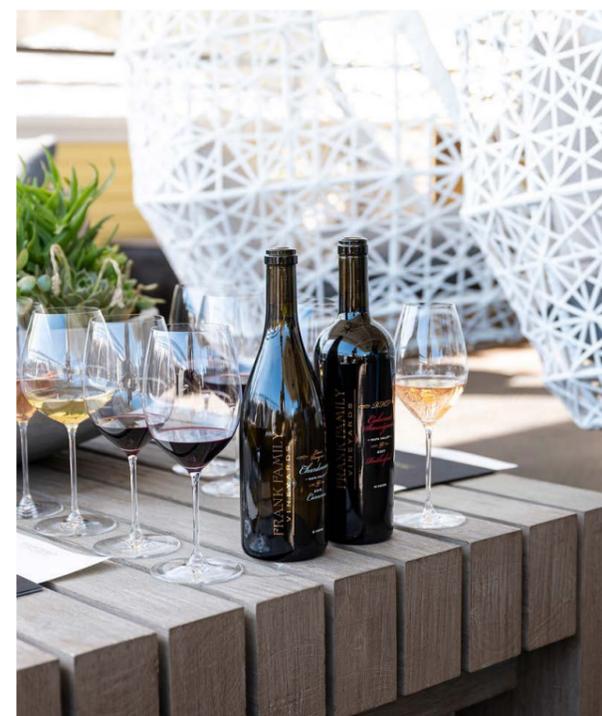
The Frank Family community collectively bid farewell to our beloved winery dog, Bristol in June. Bristol was our official winery greeter, harvest helper, and Todd's "right-paw" for 15 years. From tasting grapes straight off the vine to swimming in the reservoir at Benjamin Vineyard, Bristol certainly lived the quintessential Napa Valley pup lifestyle. He was adored by our team and winery guests alike and will be dearly missed.

In Bristol's honor, Frank Family plans to launch our "Frank for a Paws" campaign this November in which 25% of proceeds from our Napa Valley Merlot will go directly to the Humane Society of the United States to support rescue animals nationwide.

## Tasting Reservation System Receives a Major Upgrade

Frank Family is proud to announce our new reservation system, Tock. Since August, Tock has given us the ability to continue to share our world-class hospitality with the utmost preparation and ease. Booking tasting reservations is easier than ever with their modern and user-friendly interphase. Simply book at [frankfamilyvineyards.com/visit](http://frankfamilyvineyards.com/visit) or on the Tock app (iOS and Android).

We invite you to explore our array of experiences from private seated tastings on our back patio and on the front lawn, to an elevated single vineyard tasting of some of our most coveted wines deriving from Winston Hill. Advance reservations are required due to the intimacy of our wine tasting experiences. As a friendly reminder, club members receive four complimentary estate tastings per visit plus savings on elevated experiences.



# Winemaking *Dream* Team



From left to right: Daniel Parada, Emily Parisi, Armando Padilla, Javier Ramirez, Alonso Gonzalez, Todd Graff, Jesus Gonzalez-Cittoni, Mercedes Guzman, Katie Sears, Ramon Gallegos Jr., Corey Garner, Juan Quintana, Ignacio Blancas Jr. (Not pictured: Vicente Llamas, Ramon Gallegos Sr.)"

**I. Vicente Llamas**  
*Bottling Line Supervisor*  
 Years at Frank Family: 1

"In the beginning, the wine industry was just a way to pay the bills. But bottling production called to me so I followed the path here and haven't looked back."



I

**II. Alonso Gonzalez**  
*Cellar Worker*  
 Years at Frank Family: 32

"I've worked here the longest of the staff. Even before it was Frank Family. I have loved seeing the changes over the years and continue to love what I do everyday."



II

**III. Emiy Parisi**  
*Enologist*  
 Years at Frank Family: 2

"When I'm not making wine you can find me somewhere drinking it - normally at home, cooking and listening to music with my husband."



III

**IV. Mercedes Guzman**  
*Cellar Worker*  
 Years at Frank Family: 5

"My favorite time of year at the winery is harvest because it's such an exciting time and full of activity."



IV

**V. Juan Quintana**  
*Cellar Worker*  
 Years at Frank Family: 14

"I love the process of making wine, which is what led me to Frank Family 14 years ago."



V



VI

**VI. Ramon Gallegos Jr.**  
*Cellar Worker*  
 Years at Frank Family: 5

"Frank Family Vineyards is my home-away-from-home with good company and great co-workers, including my dad who I love working with."



VII

**VII. Javier Ramirez**  
*Cellar Worker*  
 Years at Frank Family: 15

"I got bored easily with previous jobs which prompted me to join the wine industry. Now I love going to work each day."

# New & Familiar Faces



I



III



V



VI



IV



II

**I. Corey Garner**  
*Assistant Winemaker*  
Years at Frank Family: 5

"I love my job and especially love that it is with such a great company. We have a great team and that really helps make it fun even on the most trying days."

**II. Ramon Gallegos Sr.**  
*Cellar Worker*  
Years at Frank Family: 2

"I joined the Frank Family cellar crew after learning part of the agriculture side of the wine business which sparked a lifelong interest."

**III. Daniel Parada**  
*Cellar Worker*  
Years at Frank Family: 2

"Frank Family is the first winery I've ever worked for. I'm so grateful they offered me a job even with no cellar experience because I'm learning so much."

**IV. Ignacio Blancas Jr.**  
*Cellar Worker*  
Years at Frank Family: 2

"While I'm not 21 yet, my favorite Frank Family wine is the Lewis Vineyard Chardonnay solely based on aroma."

**V. Armando Padilla**  
*Cellar Master*  
Years at Frank Family: 23

"My first time walking into the Frank Family cellar, I fell in love with the smell. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was the smell of French oak barrels that I loved."

**VI. Jesus Gonzalez-Cittoni**  
*Cellar Worker*  
Years at Frank Family: 2

"I love when people open a bottle of Frank Family whether it's for a holiday or family gathering. It makes me happy knowing I helped make that occasion even better."



VII

**VII. Katie Sears**  
*Cellar Worker/Lab Assistant*  
Years at Frank Family: 1

"My parents would bring my sister and me along with them to go tasting in Napa when we were kids, and I guess the fascination with wine stuck! I was lucky enough to get hired on at Frank Family as my first winery job."

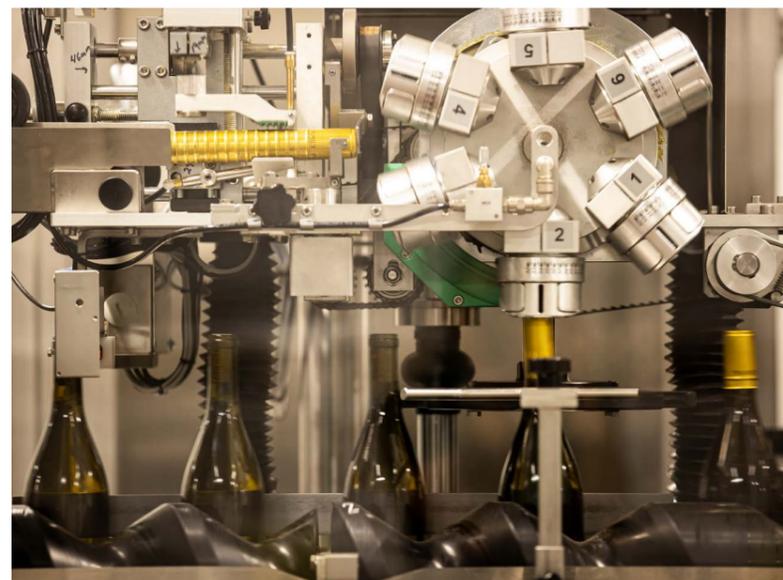
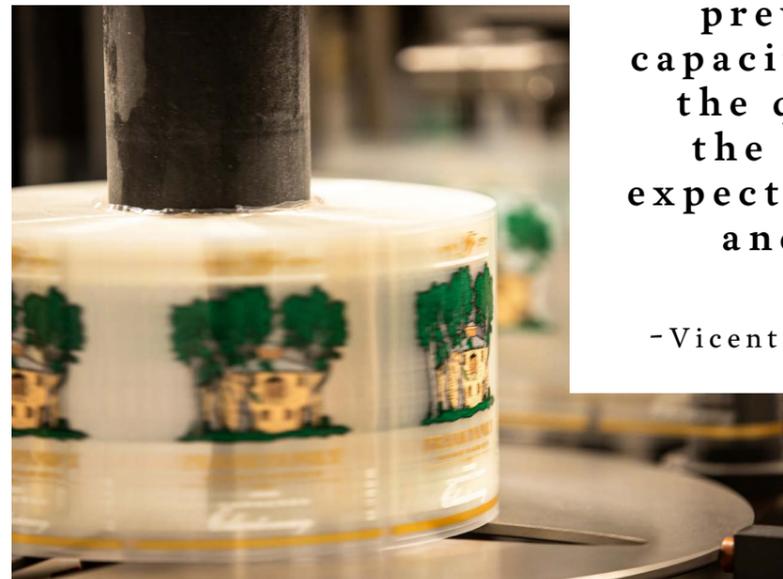
# New Line Equals Better Wine



Since Frank Family's earliest vintages, our family's interest in wine has grown from a passion into a business. We produced just 200 cases in our first year and now produce nearly 150,000 cases a year. While our production has increased, our ongoing winemaking vision to improve quality and consistency year after year has remained unchanged. Our team is always looking for new winemaking technologies and methods to see this vision through, most recently making a sizable investment in a new state-of-the-art automated bottling line.

Installed at the winery in February 2021, before our bottling season began, the new line is a result of a collaboration with Maspac Packaging and MBF North America. Both companies are based in Italy and are leading the way for wine and spirits technological solutions. Working hand-in-hand with the manufacturers, Frank Family's new bottling line is custom-designed to suit our exact winemaking needs. This one-of-a-kind line, known as the, "Superbloc", truly surpasses the performance of any other modern-day winemaking equipment.

It is an integrated line that passes the bottles seamlessly from one system to the next with precision only automation can offer. Bottling, capping, corking, labeling, and packaging can be done robotically, minimizing human error. The Superbloc is equipped with cameras and sensors to detect any bottle that doesn't meet our standards for fill level or is corked, waxed, and labeled less than perfectly and will reject it from the line.

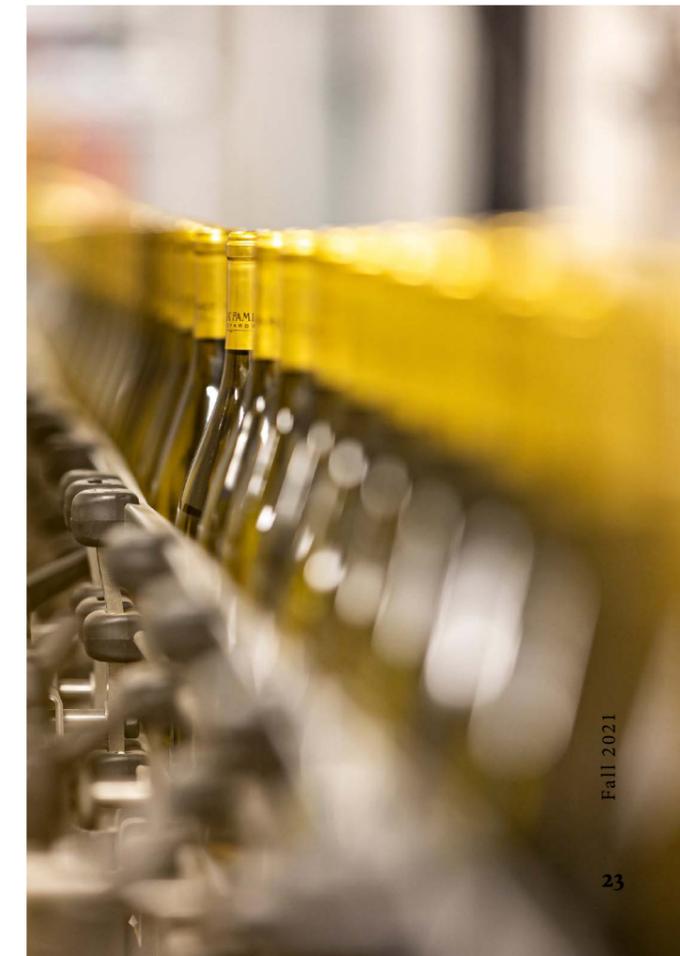


The most amazing part is this quality control does not come at a cost for time. We can now bottle with greater speed while increasing accuracy, employee safety, and overall wine quality.

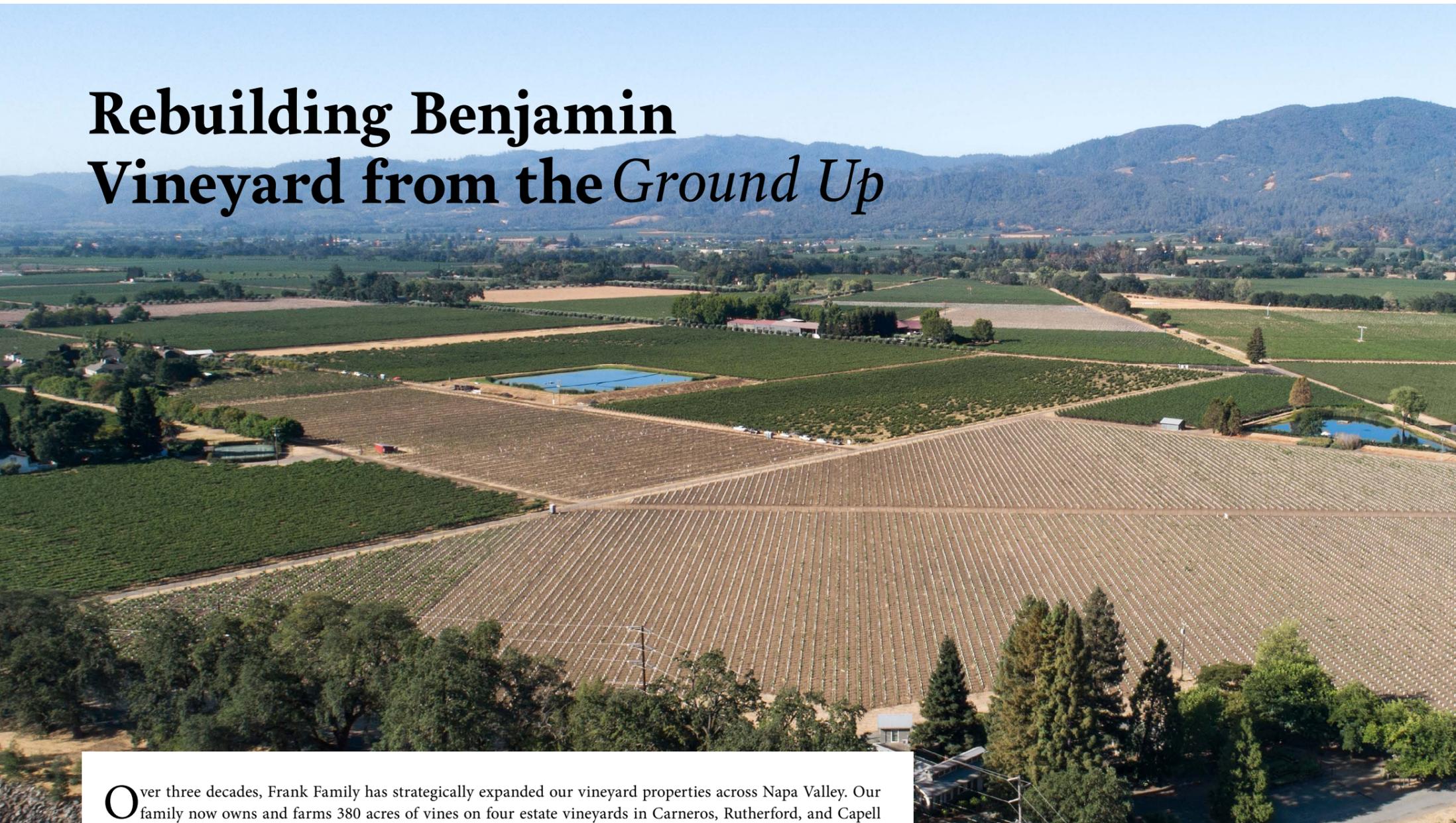
While the first year with our bottling line involved a steep learning curve with adjustments that required patience and training, our winemaking team continues to amaze us by transcending their own capabilities with every vintage. We are excited for the possibilities our new bottling line brings and for the remarkable wines it will continue to handle with care before sending them out into the world.

**"The Superbloc offers us the ability to safely surpass our previous line's production capacity, without compromising the quality of our wines. As the next vintages come, we expect to be even more efficient and increase our quality accordingly."**

**-Vicente Llamas, Bottling Line Supervisor**



# Rebuilding Benjamin Vineyard from the *Ground Up*



Over three decades, Frank Family has strategically expanded our vineyard properties across Napa Valley. Our family now owns and farms 380 acres of vines on four estate vineyards in Carneros, Rutherford, and Capell Valley to give our winemaking team exceptional quality and unparalleled depth when it comes to crafting our diverse collection of wines.

In 2012, Rich and Leslie Frank acquired our Benjamin Vineyard, an 87-acre property directly across from their original Winston Hill estate in Rutherford, to complete their portfolio. This property was formerly known as the Wood Ranch and was owned by the Wood Family for three generations. This coveted piece of land had been providing fruit for many high-profile neighboring wineries such as Quintessa and Caymus before the Franks purchased the land for its ideal location.

Well-positioned in the heart of Rutherford, the historic ranch was a mosaic of vineyard blocks planted to 80 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Petite Sirah, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Zinfandel, with the remaining 20 percent planted to Chardonnay. Following the acquisition, we called upon a soil scientist to perform soil analyses of Benjamin Vineyard to assess its nutrient and mineral content. Soil-mapping revealed a patchwork of varying soil types in varying levels of health. It became evident that many vines were not receiving the critical nutrients needed to maintain their vigor, and as a result were underperforming.

The average lifespan of a grapevine is 20-25 years, and as the vines at Benjamin Vineyard approached that mark, together with our vineyard management team at Piña Vineyard Management, we made the arduous but necessary decision to replant and start anew. The process of replanting is laborious and time consuming, but we knew the benefits far outweighed the costs in the long-term quality of our vineyard, and ultimately of our wine.

Based on the 2012 soil study that was conducted, Todd Graff and Davie Piña, owner of Piña Vineyard Management, implemented a ten-year plan to redevelop the Benjamin Vineyard from the ground up. This plan involved matching clonal selections with specific rootstocks, reorienting vine rows to aid ripening, and amending the soils through the use of cover crops to build back its health. Replanting also gave us the opportunity to replace some of the existing varieties that hadn't thrived there in the past, like Chardonnay and Petite Sirah, with varieties better suited for the clay loam soils and warm daytime temperatures of the Rutherford valley floor.

"We wanted to plant smarter and use grapes that made better sense for our vineyard location. Being in Rutherford, we put a focus on Bordeaux varieties, planting predominately Cabernet Sauvignon with a little bit of Petite Verdot," said Todd.

Since 2015, the vineyard blocks have been removed gradually and in phases to lessen the impact on wine production. The first half of the replant, which included blocks 10-17, are now in full production, which gave us the green light to replant the second half earlier this spring. In many cases, not only did we change what grape variety was planted, but we also changed how it was planted, reorienting the vine rows whenever possible.

"We changed the direction of the vine rows to follow the pattern of the sun, allowing the vines to receive uniform sun exposure all day. With the sun now directly above the vines all day, the canopy can also better protect it from overexposure in the afternoon," said Todd.

We eagerly await the ten-year replanting process to culminate next year after we install a new trellis system to our young vines. The next few years are crucial as the new vines begin to deepen their root system and grow their canopy. It's not until 2024 that we expect them to yield enough fruit to harvest. While the replanting journey has been long, its rewards are tremendous, and we look forward to sharing the new fruit of our labors with you in the years to come!



# Know Your Grower

## Todd Talks Zinfandel with *Phil Sunseri*



**Earlier this summer, Winemaker Todd Graff trekked up to the remote Chiles Valley, a slender sub-appellation of Napa Valley within the Vaca Mountains, to meet with Phil Sunseri, fourth generation of the Nichelini Family, one of the oldest grape growing families in Napa Valley. Over glasses of Frank Family Zinfandel, the two discussed Phil's ancestral past as well as the future of grape growing in Napa Valley. Their full interview will be available to view on our YouTube channel this fall.**

In an increasingly corporate world, Frank Family is honored to be owned and operated by Proprietors Rich and Leslie Frank who place great value in working with fellow family-run companies. One such company is Frank Family's grower partner of more than 15 years, Phil Sunseri, a descendant of the well-known Nichelini family of growers in Napa Valley. Since the early 2000s, Frank Family has sourced high-quality Zinfandel grapes from Sunseri Vineyards, whose land has some of the oldest history in the region. As Napa Valley continues to evolve and become more Cabernet-centric, we feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work with Phil and to work with this rare and beautiful fruit connected to such an iconic Napa Valley legacy.

**T: Can you tell us some history about the Nichelini family? Start from day one and get us up to speed.**

P: It all started in 1884 with my great grandfather, Anton Nichelini. During the 1880s, homestead properties were offered for very little to no expense for anyone willing to come out here and develop the land. At the time, he was farming and winemaking over in Sonoma with the family but in 1884 he was entitled to 160 acres and took the opportunity to move his entire family out here.

Throughout his lifetime he acquired more property from other homesteaders who weren't as successful in farming. When those families moved, Anton would either be gifted or would purchase their property. At the end of his life, he owned almost 640 acres of land.

As his home country of Switzerland was mostly hills, he thought Chiles Valley was the greatest farming land ever and he started planting Zinfandel grapes. He planted a Zinfandel clone, called the Nichelini clone, in 1928 that we still grow today and it's part of the grapes that Frank Family purchases.

**T: Family is clearly very important to you. What's one way you have paid homage to your family history as the guardian of this property?**

P: We decided to dedicate the vineyard to the A. Nichelini family and their twelve children. Coincidentally, we had 13 distinguished vineyard blocks, so we named each of them after the 12 children and the 13th block was named after Anton and Caterina, which happens to be the block at the highest point on the hill, overlooking the property.

Frank Family has the distinction of purchasing block 1 which is named after the first born, William and block 8, named after Catherine. We're currently growing another 7 acres of Zinfandel in the Mary block and Frank Family will be getting those grapes starting in 2023.

**T: When I drove out this morning, it was great to see this fog coming through the hills. It's burnt off now, but there's still this nice cool breeze. What sets the climate of Chiles Valley apart from the rest of Napa?**

P: Chiles Valley is about 800 feet above sea level and the high peaks are about 1,200 feet which makes it very cold, much colder than the Napa Valley floor. It's a unique place because Chiles Valley is not really a valley. It is a drainage of two creeks, Sage and Chiles, that both go into the Napa River. So, we have this area that has no hills to block off the winds giving us this natural

circulation every afternoon, especially in this portion of Chiles Valley. It really makes it unique for growing grapes because you also get the coastal influence. We get a cooling effect with fog in the morning and in the afternoon, it warms up.

**T: One of the things I enjoy most about working with this ranch, is that it's planted to several different clones. Can you talk a bit about the clones you've selected to plant here?**

P: Currently we're growing and have grown four mature clones. We have the Nichelini clone, the Sonoma clone, the Seghesio family clone, Primitivo, which is the exact DNA match of the European Italian clone, and we also grow the Deaver clone, which is famous in the Shenandoah Valley, east of us in Plymouth, California. In addition to those four clones, we have made a major investment in planting around 15 acres of new Zinfandel grapes from the Heritage 9 Clone. We want to be in the game for Zinfandel and we are really excited about this new project. Our first harvest of Clone 9 will be in 2023.





1091 LARKMEAD LANE - CALISTOGA, CA 94515  
707-942-0859  
[WWW.FRANKFAMILYVINEYARDS.COM](http://WWW.FRANKFAMILYVINEYARDS.COM)