

Wine Spectator

A portrait of Tim Mondavi, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit and a light-colored shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed in front of a stone wall.

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**CALIFORNIA
CABERNET
2008
A GREAT VINTAGE**

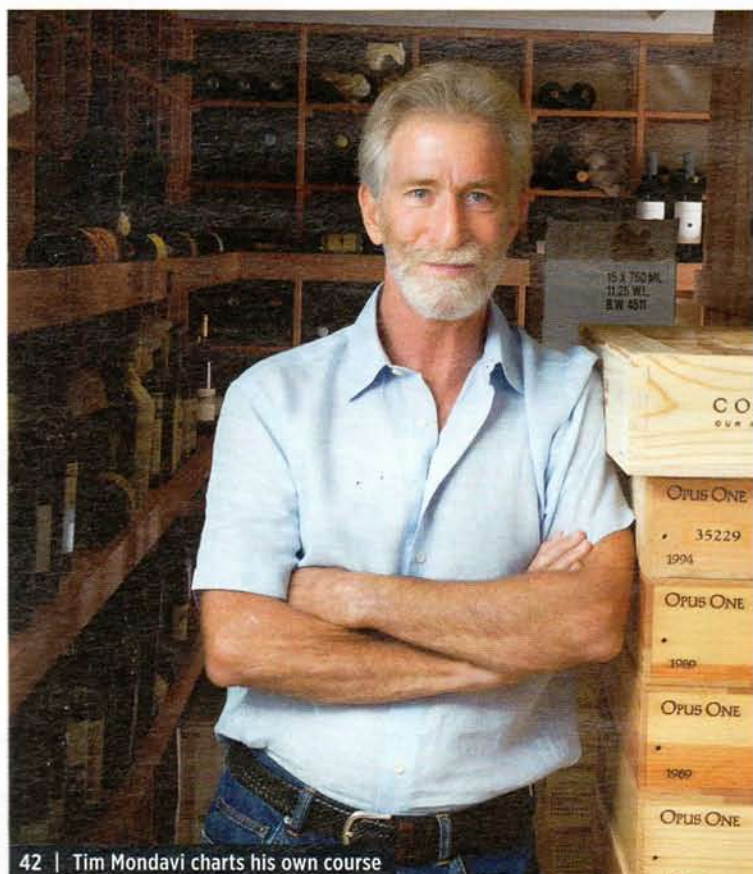
**CHRISTIAN MOUIEX:
BORDEAUX'S
QUIET LEADER**

**A WINE LOVER'S
GUIDE TO PARK CITY**

**THE PURE WHITES
OF ALSACE**

**TIM
MONDAVI
ONE WINE
ONE PURPOSE**

With Continuum—the vineyard and the \$150 wine—taking shape, Tim Mondavi has come full circle to the terroir-based winemaking he aspires to. “This is who we are,” he says. “One wine, a single purpose and a clarity of focus.”—COVER STORY



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COVER STORY

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Mondavi = Cabernet

Having the name "Mondavi" is a great benefit, and a great burden. Just ask Tim.

Tim Mondavi, as most wine lovers know, comes from arguably the most important dynasty in California wine. His grandfather made Charles Krug one of the leaders in Napa Valley in the 1940s. His father, Robert, revolutionized American wine with his eponymous winery, founded in 1966. Tim was his father's winemaker for more than 20 years, as Robert Mondavi Winery became the engine that drove California, and Napa Valley in particular, to world-class levels, especially with Cabernet Sauvignon.

Then came trouble. The saga of the Robert Mondavi Winery's expansion, its public offering and the family's final loss of the company has been told in detail in our pages. It was a black time for Tim. Sure, he took home a big payday. But he lost what he most cared for: the chance to make the wines he loved.

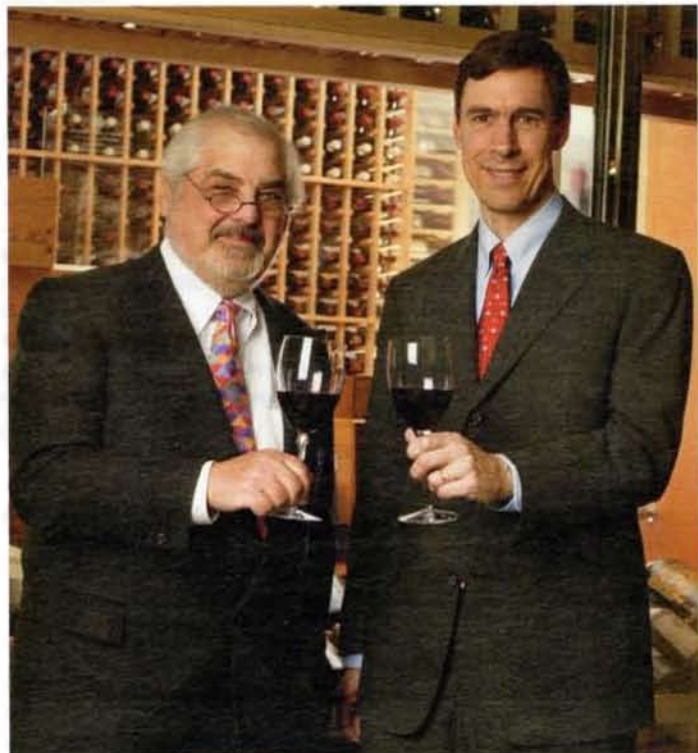
But Mondavis are known for comebacks, and Tim is no exception. Identifying key vineyards, rallying his own family, he has now returned to center stage with his own winery, Continuum. And once again, Tim Mondavi is making some of the best Cabernets in California.

James Laube, our Napa-based senior editor and lead taster for the wines of California, has been following Tim's story for 30 years. He knows the man, and he knows his wines. In this issue, Laube tells the tale of Tim's rise, fall and resurgence. It's a dramatic and inspiring story. We hope you'll enjoy getting to know the real man behind the famous name.

Tim Mondavi's 2008 Continuum is one of the best Cabernets in an extraordinary vintage. This issue also contains our annual California Cabernet report, an authoritative analysis based on Laube's reviews of more than 525 wines. Most are from 2008, but there are exceptional late-releases from the 2007 vintage as well, offering you the chance to compare two of the best Cabernet years in California history.

Another star in Napa Cabernet is Christian Moueix, a French vintner perhaps best known for his classic Merlot-based wines from Pomerol and St.-Emilion, in Bordeaux. Like Mondavi, Moueix comes from a powerful family, and has also made his own mark on the world of wine, most notably with his leadership of the iconic Château Pétrus. For his expert stewardship of legendary *terroirs*, his integrity and his philanthropy, Moueix earns our Distinguished Service Award for 2011. Associate editor Mitch Frank delivers a nuanced portrait of this exceptional man.

Our other tasting report this issue focuses on the unique whites of Alsace. Senior tasting coordinator Alison Napjus has reviewed more than 350 wines, and reports that both 2008 and



2009 deliver excellent examples of this region's aromatic varietals, especially Riesling, Gewürztraminer and Pinot Gris. Whether steely dry or lusciously sweet, these wines are distinctive and delicious. And, Napjus notes, an increasing number of them are made from organic grapes or according to biodynamic principals, only deepening their purity and unique sense of place.

There's plenty more to enjoy in this issue as well. A travel guide to Utah hot spot Park City; an homage to old-vine Zinfandel; a look at the revival of an ancient wine region in Spain. The world of wine is vast and fascinating. Our goal is to bring you the best of it.

Marvin R. Shanken
Editor and Publisher

Thomas Matthews
Executive Editor



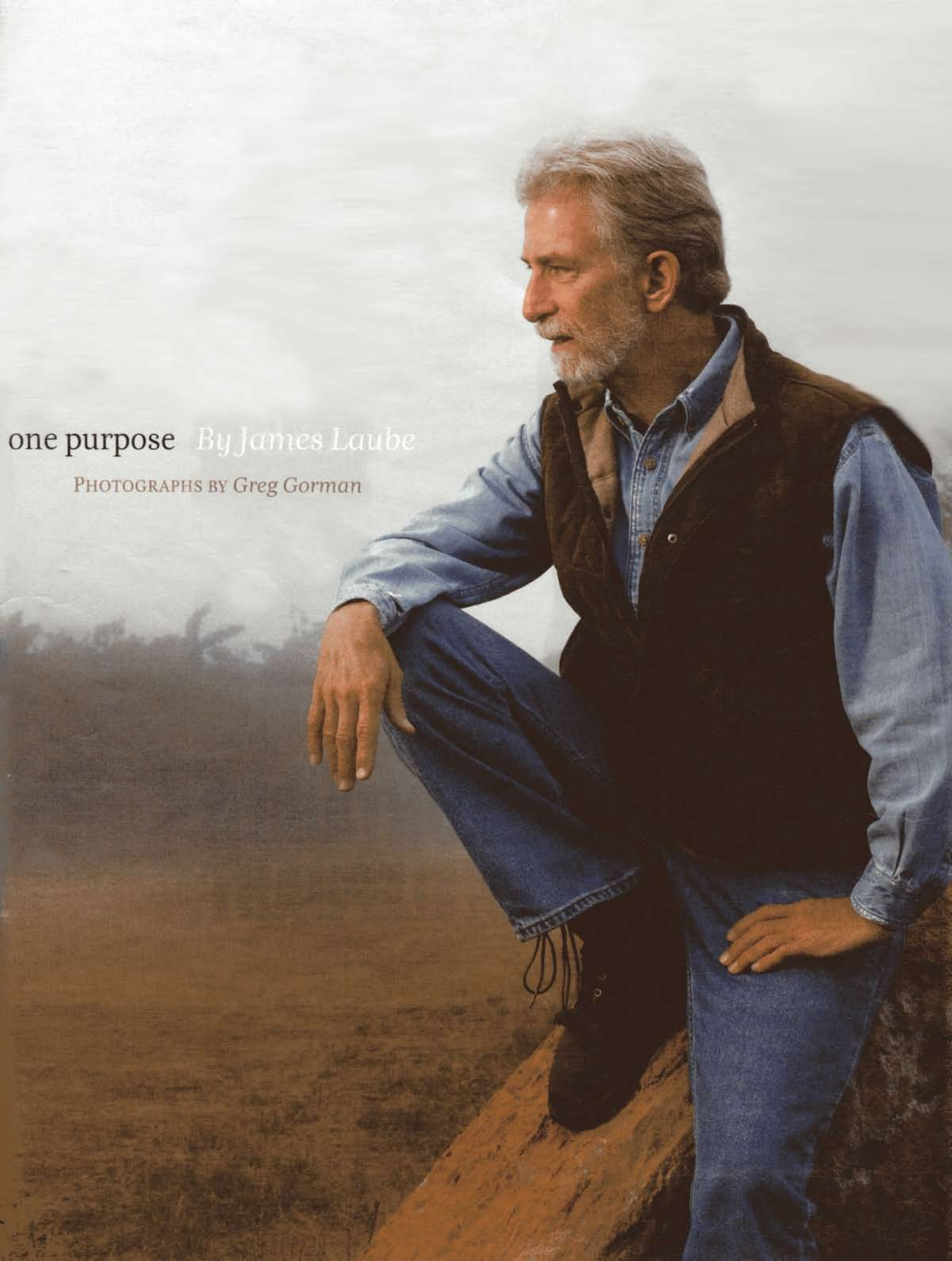
NEW YORK TIM MONDAVI

Tim Mondavi: *His Story*

Starting over, on his own, with one wine

one purpose *By James Laube*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY Greg Gorman





Tim Mondavi has been down rocky roads before.

But this one, unlike the last one, is of his own choosing. On a warm, cloudless day in July, Mondavi sets out in a small all-terrain vehicle to tour his family's vineyard, Continuum. It's 42 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc carved out of the jagged, crumbling hills that form the eastern boundary of Napa Valley.

The site is high above the valley floor, remote and isolated, yet not that far from places the Mondavi family once called home. From this vantage point on Pritchard Hill you can draw a line due east from Oakville and Robert Mondavi Winery through Opus One to Continuum, as if all were connected. Farther north lie St. Helena and Charles Krug Winery, where Tim's father, Robert Mondavi, once worked and where Tim, now 60, and his siblings Michael, 68, and Marcia, 64, grew up.

For 32 vintages, Tim Mondavi was the winemaker at Robert Mondavi Winery, once Napa's most famous estate. Much of that renown was due to the accomplishments of his legendary late father. But it was Tim who oversaw winemaking and was the primary reason Mondavi's finest wines achieved exalted status, despite occasional blips in quality.

But the company he and his family built into a global power-

house fell out of their hands in 2004. Robert Mondavi Corp's \$1.3 billion sale that year to the winemaking conglomerate Constellation capped decades of family turmoil and left the powerful Mondavi clan without a winery to call home for the first time in more than 40 years. They were emotionally wounded and humbled, though much, much wealthier. Tim Mondavi's take from the sale was estimated at \$59 million; his father's at \$70 million (much of Robert's estate has already been given away to charities); Michael Mondavi's at \$100 million and Marcia Mondavi Borger's at \$107 million, according to filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

The Mondavis' dreams of bequeathing their empire to the next generation had collapsed in a drama of Shakespearean proportions. It all happened very fast, with an outcome no one expected. "When everything came to a screeching halt, when [the

Mondavis] were given the ultimatum to leave, [Tim] didn't take it lightly," says Napa vintner Delia Viader, a friend. "He didn't like being told to pack his things and leave. He was depressed. It was a natural reaction."

"I have never seen my father or grandfather as sad, depressed or gut wrenched as when the company sold," says Carlo, 30, one of Tim's three sons. "It was as if he was in the middle of the ocean with a sailboat and no wind."

In 2005, a year after the sale to Constellation, the Mondavi clan chose separate paths. Michael, the eldest sibling, started his own wine company, while Tim and father Robert, then 91, made the first Continuum, with grapes purchased from To Kalon Vineyard in Oakville. It's a prestigious property they once owned that went into Constellation with the sale.

Soon thereafter, the family's spirits began to lift. "For one, my grandfather was there to help my father start Continuum," recalls Carlo. "I watched them plan the first vintage together, like boys dreaming about their dream wine." Tim was confident he would eventually be able to buy a portion of To Kalon, including Marjorie's Vineyard, named after his mother. Yet that deal never materialized, forcing a different strategy.

Tim was restless and began looking for other grape sources as well as a different direction. "I was focusing on where I should take my family," he says, meaning not only his father and sister, but also his five children. He began exploring options, including Sonoma, and hillside sites high above the Napa Valley floor. "I never valued elevation," says Tim of hillside grapes, "but I knew intellectually that the hillsides produced distinctive wines." One wine in particular had long intrigued him—the Maya bottling from Dalla Valle winery. It had what he liked and wanted: character, density, depth and concentration, harmonizing his two favored grapes, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. All he needed was a vineyard.

In 2007, Tim got a break. He found two adjoining vineyards on Pritchard Hill, Cloud View and Versant, a half-mile up the hill

"My father saw our property only once. ... It was an important time for us both. We were again confident that we could reattach ourselves to our ongoing dream of realizing great wine in Napa Valley. We both were quietly emotional." —TIM MONDAVI

from Dalla Valle, an almost too-good-to-be-true discovery. He was able to buy grapes from both vineyards for the Continuum 2007, representing about 20 percent of the wine. A year later, when both vineyards came up for sale, he bought them, within a 14-month period, paying \$14 million for Cloud View and \$12 million for Versant.

"My father saw our property only once," Tim tells me on the day we toured the property. The visit in late March of 2008 remains etched in his memory. It was a clear, cool, breezy spring day. "We had [Robert] in his wheelchair at the edge of the vineyard, near where [we] parked, by the barn," Tim recalls, his familiar full beard and mane now streaked with gray. "We saw through the rows of dormant vines down to the valley below and Mount St. Helena beyond. He wasn't able to talk at the time, but it was an important time for us both. We were again confident that we could reattach ourselves to our ongoing dream of realizing great wine in Napa Valley. We both were quietly emotional. I could see his approval and confidence in our direction. And his eyes glistened. Mine, too." Robert died six weeks later.

Tim Mondavi always felt a special bond with his father. They connected on many levels. "He inherited his father's curiosity for all things," says Carissa, 34, Tim's eldest daughter, who works at the winery along with three of her siblings. "As such, my father does not have a simple answer for anything. He will take you out to the nether sphere before he reels it back down to earth and the original question. But he always does bring it back to the point."

Timothy John Mondavi was the youngest of Robert and first wife Marjorie Mondavi's three children. A St. Helena native, he grew up at Krug, where he played in grape pomace and wine tanks and worked his first jobs, starting as a gardener. Tim was groomed by his father at an early age to be the winemaker; he started at Robert Mondavi Winery in 1966, at age 15, putting valves on fermentation tanks. "Heady stuff," he laughs.

It was the beginning of an era, for the family, and for California wine as a whole. The Robert Mondavi Winery was born of



Tim and Robert Mondavi with Baron Philippe de Rothschild (right) in 1979 at the Robert Mondavi Winery. The two families partnered to produce Opus One, a Bordeaux blend made from Napa Valley grapes.

family strife. Robert founded it in 1966, after being forced out of Charles Krug winery. His father, Cesare, had purchased Krug in 1943, at Robert's urging, leaving the Central Valley, where he had begun by selling grapes to home winemakers in 1919. Robert and brother Peter had clashed over the direction of Krug, and their mother, Rosa, eventually sided with Peter. The more ambitious of the two, Robert pushed for innovation and spent lavishly. Peter was more conservative, preferring to move cautiously.

Robert had big dreams, based on elevating Napa Valley wine to a level rivaling the great estates of Europe. He was the critical spark that helped transform California in the post-war era and he

THE FRANCOPHILE IN CONTINUUM

Tim Mondavi has placed a big bet on Cabernet Franc. It's a grape the Mondavi family has long favored. Forty years ago, Cabernet Franc saved the Mondavi Reserve: In 1971, one of the worst vintages of the era, the Mondavis bottled a Mondavi Reserve relying on 40 percent Franc.

"The wines that had the highest percentage of Cabernet Franc were the wines I loved the most," says Tim. "When I would be looking at the wines in barrel, I found there was a higher perfume [in Franc] that was very different from Cabernet Sauvignon. It also adds viscosity and suppleness you can't find with Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot." Franc does need to be ripe; otherwise it can be herbal, stalky and coarse.

When I recently tasted (non-blind) a vertical of Continuum, the wines, vintages 2005 through 2008, were as good or better than when I originally reviewed them. Both 2005 and 2006 carry an Oakville appellation, coming from the famed To Kalon vineyard. One noticeable aspect of the Pritchard Hill juice, evident in barrel samples of 2009 and 2010, is a Château Latour-like richness, posture, depth and personality.

The 2005 (93 points; *all scores given here are from my official blind tastings*; \$130) offers a juicy red currant core and a vibrancy common in Tim's wines; supple and open knit. The 2006 (95, \$140) is richer and denser, with blackberry, mocha and brown spice notes. The 2007 (97, \$140), the first to include Pritchard Hill grapes (about 20 percent), offers an engaging blackberry, cherry and currant spiciness, with a touch more backbone.

The just-released 2008 (96, \$150) seems a mix of the prior two vintages, sharing berry pie touches with hints of black licorice, mineral and a Latour-ish structure. It is a blend of 71 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, with 17 percent Franc, 7 percent Petit Verdot and 5 percent Merlot; 70 percent of the fruit came from the Pritchard Hill property.



remained a strong and influential voice well into his 80s. It's a story well-documented in Julia Flynn Siler's 2007 book, *The House of Mondavi: The Rise and Fall of an American Wine Dynasty*, which recounts times of success offset by family strife, and the conflicts of brother against brother, first Robert and Peter, then Tim and Michael, with Robert always in the center.

Tim stepped into the winemaking role in the 1970s after studying at the University of California, Davis, officially becoming winemaker in 1976, as Cabernet became California's signature red. Tim's credentials were further enhanced when the Mondavis joined forces in the late 1970s with the Rothschilds of Château Mouton-Rothschild to create Opus One. That high-profile Cabernet blend, like Mondavi Reserve, came from the same Oakville area around To Kalon that the Mondavis had mined for years. Over time, Tim helped fine-tune the Mondavi lineup, especially the Reserve Cabernet, which came to be known for its graceful complexities.

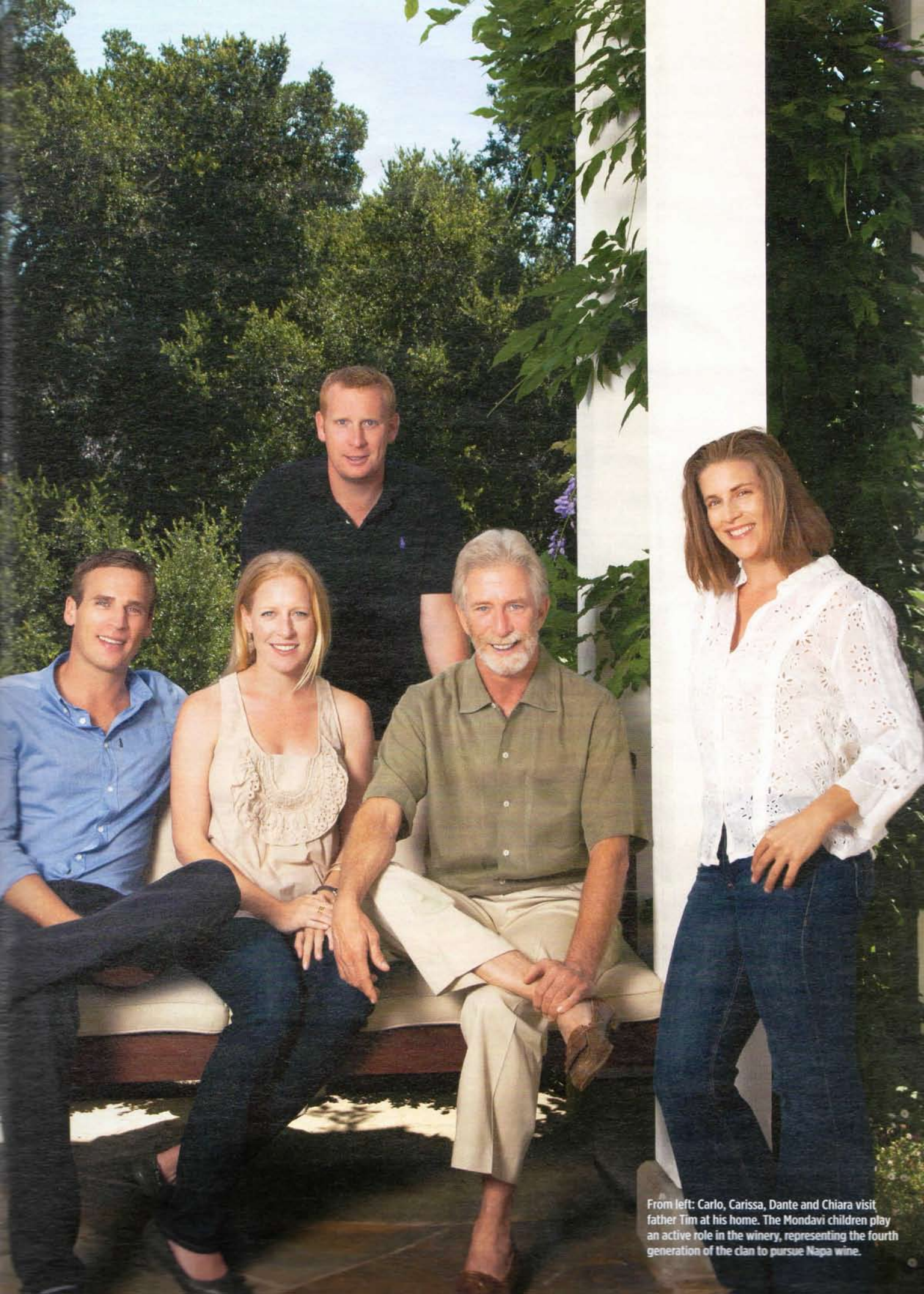
For years, the Mondavi family struggled with growth, how much and how fast. "The tension we felt was overwhelming," recalls Tim. "We always had to grow our way out of debt." Once the company went public, in 1993, Wall Street demanded profits; the quickest way to them was through increased volume and acquisitions.

Tim Mondavi always felt a special bond with his father. They connected on many levels. "He has inherited [my grandfather's] curiosity for all things. As such, my father does not have a simple answer for anything." —CARISSA MONDAVI

"There were a lot of times when we couldn't keep up with the bottling. There was a natural tension we all felt, the function of the time, a baby operation growing incredibly rapidly. Our passion for wine would spill over to familial dealings. We would always run faster than I would have preferred to run, and I think dad and Mike were much more aligned to that [faster pace]." Tim felt "boxed in."

At the end, Robert Mondavi Corp. was spread wide and thin. It was involved in scores of business deals with dozens of wineries. But the lines of inexpensive Robert Mondavi Coastal, Private Selection and Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi eventually did the most damage. They were big sellers, cash cows, but also slowly eroded the Napa winery's image. The company couldn't survive without the revenue stream, setting the final battle stage among family and corporate minds. Tim wanted to pull back and focus on just Napa Valley; others wanted to split the company in two and sell off the low-end wines. Ultimately, in a highly controversial decision, the board sold the entire company. "We sowed our own seeds for destruction," Tim says. "We overused our good family name."

The sale to Constellation left the Mondavis, once the first family of California wine, "0 for 2," by Tim's count. The first strike had come when Robert had been forced out of Krug; the second in



From left: Carlo, Carissa, Dante and Chiara visit father Tim at his home. The Mondavi children play an active role in the winery, representing the fourth generation of the clan to pursue Napa wine.

2004, when Robert, Michael, Marcia and Tim were forced to leave the Oakville winery, an even more public—and painful—separation.

The Mondavis put on a united front publicly, yet often quarreled behind the scenes. Tim allows, “It’s painful to read about any of [what happened].” The stories, he says, sensationalize or overdramatize the family’s troubles and his relationship with Michael. “What people don’t understand is how much my brother and I love each other,” he says. They are different from one another, yet united by a wine heritage both want to preserve and strengthen.

“We are better brothers than business partners,” says Michael. “We were successful as business partners [at Mondavi winery], but that got in the way of being good brothers.”

Within a year or so of the Constellation deal, Michael formed his own wine company, with his wife, son and daughter. Folio Fine Wine Partners has its own winery and several labels, the flagship being the \$200 “M by Michael Mondavi,” a Napa Valley Cabernet.

Folio is also an importing, sales, marketing and distribution company. Among the nearly two dozen wines that it distributes or imports are bottles with ties to the Mondavi Corp days, including Italians Frescobaldi, Luce della Vita and Ornellaia. Michael’s thinking: Small, family-owned wineries make the greatest wines yet size works against them. Most “don’t have enough volume to get the attention of most major market wholesalers and distributors,” says Michael. “It’s harder for the small guy to get proper attention.”

Meanwhile, Tim, Robert, and Marcia, who lives in New York, launched Continuum as a solo wine act that would extend the other half of the family legacy. “We are excited, thrilled, what else can I say,” says Marcia of the venture. “It’s a natural continuation of our lives. We were just so devastated after the sale. The idea that we didn’t own a vine. We sat back, reflected: ‘Is this good, is this bad, do you want to get back into the thick of it?’ There was, for us, no contest. We definitely wanted to be back.”

Tim has no longing for the past. “I was glad to get out of the shadow of Robert Mondavi Winery and Opus,” he says today. “If [RMW] were available tomorrow, if I had the kind of financial wherewithal [to buy it], I wouldn’t.”

With Continuum—the vineyard and the \$150 wine—taking shape, Tim has come full circle to the *terroir*-based winemaking he aspires to. “This is who we are,” he says. “One wine, a single purpose and a clarity of focus.” It’s a mantra he often repeats. It is as if, if he keeps saying it, people will believe it. “That lack of clarity of focus,” he reiterates, “is what killed us at Robert Mondavi Winery.”

Compared to RMW, where he oversaw the production of more than 100,000 cases of Napa Valley wine, along with millions of gallons of other Mondavi-named wines, Continuum’s production is minuscule, at present a mere 2,200 cases annually. “[Tim’s] never spent so much time on so little wine and had it be so rewarding,” says Marcia. With Continuum, “we pick block by block, row by row. He’s always loved that and he’s really able to do that now.”

Leaving the confines of the valley floor has been a learning experience;



Continuum’s production team includes vineyard manager Ryan Gerhardt and cellar master Carrie Findleton.



The Continuum vineyard encompasses 42 acres of grapevines on the eastern flank of Napa Valley in a district known as Pritchard Hill.

hillside grapes are still a relatively new endeavor for Tim and his young staff (which includes winemaker Kurt Niznik, 42, vineyard manager Ryan Gerhardt, 37, and cellar master Carrie Findleton, 32). Yet he is convinced the Continuum blend will achieve a style that will win recognition as well as give him room to grow, both stylistically and in volume. The final goal of 5,000-case annual production is several years away; he knows too well the perils of rapid growth.

It’s clear that Tim views Continuum as part redemption, part salvation. The first four vintages show the distinctive traits that have long defined Mondavi Reserve now recast with the addition of hillside grapes. The wines in barrel—2009 and 2010—are on the same quality trajectory. “Continuum is the single most important endeavor of my career,” says Tim. The source of grapes has evolved from 100 percent To Kalon in 2005 and 2006, to introducing Pritchard Hill grapes in 2007 and 2008. Soon the wine will be entirely from the family’s hillside vineyard.

The contrast in *terroir* from the valley floor to the hillsides is as formidable as the giant boulders that gird the vineyard. Valley floor soils are deep, rich and loamy, and can produce not only extraordinary wines but also large crops. On Pritchard Hill the soils are shallow, more expensive to farm and give lower yields. In the estate



Tim looks over plans for the new winery at Pritchard Hill with Carissa and Dante. The family hopes to break ground next year on a Howard Backen-designed facility at the property.

vineyard's reddish-brown soils, Cabernet Franc excels on a par with Cabernet Sauvignon, offering the kind of *terroir* that plays to the strengths of each grape. Fertile ground for Tim to realize his dream.

Pritchard Hill also offers stunningly beautiful terrain, surrounded by slopes covered with scrub oak and thick cordons of chaparral. It's an area some refer to as the Rodeo Drive of Napa Valley. Near Continuum is Ann Colgin's striking vineyard, home and winery, overlooking the calming blue waters of Lake Hennessey at the base of the hill. Other neighbors include the Chappellets, who settled here in the 1960s. Next door to Chappellet is Bryant Family Vineyard. Ovid and David Arthur are also close by. Farther down the hill is Dalla Valle, the vineyard that first caught Tim's attention.

For now, Continuum is made in St. Helena, at a custom-crush facility called The Ranch. The winery uses a home in the vineyard as its hospitality center. By next year, they hope to break ground on a Howard Backen-designed winery on the property. Tim figures he and his family—he, his father and Marcia each committed \$15 million to the startup—can make it pan out financially. One question looms: "Is there room for us?" asks Carissa, which is what they all wonder. Can a winery of this size support Tim's four employee-children and meet whatever financial expectations exist from other family members? Or will there be a need for perhaps another wine, or vineyard, or source of growth and revenue?

"Well, that's a good question, one that my husband [who heads a Wall Street firm] asks me all the time," says Marcia. "According to our 10-, 20-year estimates, sooner or later, if our wines are great, if we're able to increase production, if we're able to do that and raise the prices, we will ultimately be successful, hopefully. We started out with a wonderful nest egg, but it rapidly goes into the

land, into the [wine and winery] investment, so we can do it at the highest level. We're not skimping—if we watch our Ps and Qs." Then she laughs, "We're not masochistic."

It's a fair question, Tim agrees. Maybe it isn't possible to placate everyone. Four of his children are involved with Continuum; in addition to Carlo, who works in sales, and Carissa, in hospitality, there's Chiara, 32, an artist who designed the Continuum label and is studying viticulture, and Dante, 27, who is moving from production to sales. (Son Dominic, 30, works at a design firm.) Marcia's children, both partners, are shareholders; daughter Caitlin, 27, works for Groupon; son Brian, 23, is part of an Internet startup, but is more interested in wine at this point.

"We are currently on target to break even with the release of the 2011 vintage at a production of 3,000 cases," Tim says. Those wines will be released in 2014, year 10 of the project. In this sense, Tim faces the same challenge his father did: being fair to his children while being fiscally responsible.

At one point, as Tim steers his vehicle through the vineyard, we pass a section planted to Syrah. Tim thinks the grapes are great, but insists Continuum is one wine and one wine only; no Syrah, or Syrah-Cabernet wine is planned. Would he consider the possibility of a second wine from the property, or even another vineyard elsewhere? He gives it some thought and won't rule it out, but then adds, "I'd love [Continuum] to go peacefully ahead to the next generation." One senses that he'll do whatever it takes. He shares his father's never-say-never attitude. Robert Mondavi's younger son knows what demons lurk in wine. He walked away from one big train wreck a decade ago. It's up to him to make sure it doesn't happen again. □

NEARING

2008 Napa Cabernet Sauvignons approach



THE SUMMIT

2007's stellar quality // BY JAMES LAUBE

