



Tim Mondavi's Continuum winery in Napa Valley will soon bottle its 20th vintage. (Courtesy of Continuum)

By [James Molesworth](#)

Jul 31, 2025

I've been checking in on [Napa's Continuum since 2014](#), tasting a [mini vertical at the Pritchard Hill property in 2019](#). But wine is the ultimate long game, and it takes time to observe changes and shifts in vineyards and cellars.

Add in my axiom that it take 10 years to learn a vineyard and, well, this past week seemed high time to return to Continuum. The estate's 2022, its 11th vintage since production shifted solely to their home vineyard on Pritchard Hill, is now on the market. There are other anniversaries of note here as well, with 2023 marking Tim Mondavi's 50th vintage as a winemaker, and the 2024 vintage is Continuum's 20th.

Continuum is part of the continuation of [the Mondavi family's inextricable path through Napa Valley wine](#). Tim Mondavi spent decades working for his father, [Robert Mondavi](#), before [co-founding Continuum with his sister](#)

[Marcia Mondavi Borger](#); Tim's daughter [Carissa Mondavi](#) serves as sales and hospitality director.

When Tim co-founded Continuum in 2005, they got the label up and running with fruit sourced from [Oakville's legendary To Kalon vineyard](#), where the Mondavi legacy all began. The 173-acre estate vineyard on Pritchard Hill was added in 2008.

To Kalon, of course, sits on the valley floor, 1,300 feet below the Pritchard Hill property that Tim now calls Sage Mountain Vineyard (wild sage grows along the edges of the vineyard, and its distinct aroma fills the air). Those two vineyards couldn't be any more different, and though Mondavi was more than experienced when he relocated up to the mountain, his hindsight now allows him to see the learning curve that was required to wrestle Sage Mountain Vineyard into his wine.

The rolling hilltop property rises from 1,300 to 1,600 feet of elevation, offering a dramatic view. The 70-acre vineyard's boundaries are dotted with the weathered, oxidized boulders that were pulled out to make room for vine rows; 61.53 of those 70 acres are currently in production—the Mondavis are nothing if not exacting in detail. The volcanic soils are shallow, rocky and poor in nutrients, making for a low vigor site. It's taken time to get the mix of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Merlot vines to settle in.

Following the purchase on Pritchard Hill (which is not a formal AVA, as the name is trademarked by the [Chappellet](#) family), Tim began to wean the brand off the To Kalon fruit, toward a goal of making Continuum more and more mountain on its way to being a true estate.

Thus began the learning curve, with the 2008 through 2011 vintages featuring a mix of estate and purchased fruit from Pritchard Hill sites. The 2012 vintage was the first to be sourced entirely from his Sage Mountain Vineyard and the 2013 was the first to be vinified onsite in the winery. All those logistics would be a lot to juggle on their own, but Tim was learning the vineyard at the same time.



Continuum's Sage Mountain Vineyard has presented new challenges—and rewards—for Tim Mondavi. (Courtesy of Continuum)

Continuum Estate's Sage Mountain Vineyard Cabernet

“Obviously soil composition is the biggest difference to the eye,” Tim says. “But also being above the fog line, the site has cooler daytime temperatures than the valley floor, but warmer nighttime temperatures. Those warmer temps at night lead to more hydric stress over time. And more stress means more tannins. The site also has a shorter vegetative cycle, but longer, slower ripening period. And with the exposition we have, we have to avoid sunburn on the morning side.”

All of which is to say the site is about as opposite as you can get from down on the valley floor, where deep, fertile soils, warmer daytime temperatures and a need to keep the grapes from seeing too much afternoon sun is the norm.

It was the low-vigor nature of Sage Mountain Vineyard that Tim wrestled with most.

“When we came up here, I knew the soils were shy. I just didn’t realize how shy,” he says. “On the valley floor, we always fought against vigor, and we had that mentality when we came up here.”

The eureka moment came in 2015, when the vineyard yielded just 1 ton per acre. “And that just doesn’t pencil out, no matter how you slice it,” says Tim with a lightly rueful and self-deprecating tone.

So a shift was made in viticultural approach aimed at getting the vines into better balance, with a greater emphasis on composting. Yields began to track up, and today the estate is typically in the 2.5 tons per acre range, more than acceptable for a mountain site. The grape blend shifted too: Cabernet Franc plantings have been increased in the vineyard, and the more current vintages are nearly equal parts Cabernet Sauvignon and Franc, with the remaining 10 to 20 percent Merlot and Petit Verdot.

“Cabernet Franc’s tannins are much finer than Sauvignons, and so it plays nicely on this site, while of course the two blend beautifully together,” notes Tim.

The winemaking had to shift a bit as well. As a touchstone, the 2013 Continuum has always been an authoritative wine. Authoritative and also stridently tannic.

“I love the wine. Just not that aspect,” admits Tim.

Learning to ease off on both extraction and élevage has been part of the learning curve. More new oak might be needed on valley floor fruit, as barrel aging helps provide structure. But mountain fruit needs little help in the structure department, so new oak isn’t as critical.

Instead of using stainless steel, Continuum employs only concrete and open-top wood fermenting vessels, to give the fruit a chance to ease its structure into place. The 2013 Continuum now seems an obvious outlier when tasting it alongside newer vintages. Both the 2021 and 2023 grands vins here have vivid fruit and sparkling aromatics of, yes, wild sage, along

with iris and violet. But most of all they have an inner succulence that allows them to ripple with energy as opposed to the stolid, brick house 2013. They are still very mountain in feel, but they've added in a sense of seduction, making for a potent combination.

Continuum is forging ahead with more than just the wine. A new hospitality facility is under construction, along with new caves for barrel aging. There's a new sprinkler system in the vineyard too, one that has been shown to drop the temperature by 20° and keep the vines active when a heat spike such as the one in 2022 rolls through. All of this is a notable capital-intensive outlay at a time when the wine industry is facing headwinds.

"I could see people questioning the timing. But I'm optimistic about the future," he says determinedly as he gazes out across his vines.

And Tim is not alone. At Continuum he's flanked by his daughters Carissa and Chiara. His sons Dante and Carlo are forging ahead with [RAEN, their coastal Pinot Noir project](#), but they're ;a constant presence as well—the family is tight. Tim also brought on viticulturist Ashton Leutner, 35, and winemaker Steven Nelson, 43, in 2018. The property is a fount of youthful energy and passion that seems to be both helping and inspiring Tim to more than handle the learning curve of the mountain.

One has to understand where they've come from, while also appreciating the present, to know where they're going. Now 50 vintages into the ultimate long game, Tim Mondavi knows exactly where he's going.