



ROCCO CESELIN

Technical Spotlight: Anaba Wines

Custom-built winery aids Anaba Wines' production, sales and succession planning

Stacy Briscoe

A Dream Deferred

LOCALS AND REGULAR TRAVELERS through wine country know it as the busy (and often frustrating) intersection where Highway 121 meets Highway 116. Some know the crossroad for the deli, others for the gas station. So does that make it the best or worst place to own a winery and tasting room? "Both," said Anaba Wines founder and proprietor John Sweazey, who's owned this 16-acre parcel off Bonneau Road since 2006.

In fact, the hustle and bustle of passersby is one factor that attracted Sweazey to the property in the first place. That, and the anabatic winds (also the inspiration for the winery's name) that roll through the Petaluma Gap and down the coastal mountain range that create the backdrop for his Carneros AVA vineyard.

Sweazey's wine story begins in the early 1970s, after he left a three-year job stint as a computer hardware salesman for IBM. Unhappy with a corporate career, he quit, dipped into his savings and spent nearly a year abroad in Europe. Sweazey had already developed an appreciation for wine in college, so he found himself drawn to Old World wine regions during his travels. His appreciation grew into infatuation. Upon his return to the United States, Sweazey began what would become a long-term career in real estate financing, though he never lost the wine bug.

Every summer for the next three years, following his return, Sweazey made it his mission to spend a month in France, where he connected with estate owners who would host him and his soon-to-be-wife. They taught him what



Stacy Briscoe is the assistant editor of *Wine Business Monthly*. She has been writing about wine professionally since 2015, freelancing for multiple publications including *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Edible Communities* and *Napa Sonoma Magazine*, among others. Outside of wine writing, she also contributes as a freelance editor for the independent publisher She Writes Press. Stacy has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English-language literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz.



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OWNERS/PRINCIPALS

John T. Sweazey, Proprietor
John M. Sweazey, Estate Director

WINEMAKERS

Ross Cobb, Winemaker
Katy Wilson, Winemaker
Ian McClellan, Assistant Winemaker

VINEYARD MANAGEMENT COMPANY

Carneros Vineyard Management

WINERY INFORMATION

Year Bonded 2006

Winery Case Production (under own label) 7,800

Average Bottle Price \$40

Direct-to-Consumer Sales 80%

Custom Crush Case Production 7,500

Winery Total Case Production 15,800

VINEYARD INFORMATION

Appellation Los Carneros

Vineyard Acreage 4, J McK Estate Vineyard

Varieties Grown Chardonnay

Additional Varieties Purchased Pinot Noir and numerous Rhone varieties

Vineyard Sourcing

1. Dutton Ranch, Green Valley sub-AVA, Russian River AVA
2. Sangiacomo Family Vineyards, Roberts Road Vineyard, Petaluma Gap AVA
3. Wildcat Mountain Vineyard, Sonoma Coast AVA
4. Las Brisas Vineyard, Los Carneros AVA,
5. Soberanes Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands AVA
6. Bismark Vineyard, Moon Mountain District AVA
7. Teldeschi Vineyard Home Ranch, Dry Creek Valley AVA
8. Landa Vineyard, Sonoma Valley AVA
9. Snow Vineyard, Sonoma Valley AVA

Tons Used vs. Tons Sold 100% used

Sustainability Certification In progress

Soil Type Haire clay loam

Climate Sonoma Coast/Carneros

Sustainability Practices Wind and solar power, wastewater treatment, water recycling

BUILDING THE WINERY

Year Built 2019

Size 25,000 square feet

Architect & Contractor Steve Martin and Associates, smassociates.net

Interior Design Cadence CXC, cadencecxc.com

Landscape Architect MacNair Landscape Architecture, macnairlandscapes.com

Cave No

Cellar Humidity Control Yes

WINEMAKING

Wines Made Petite Sirah, Syrah, Picpoul Blanc, Grenache Blanc, Grenache Rosé, Viognier, Grenache, Pinot, Chardonnay, Red Rhône blend, White Rhône Blend, late harvest Viognier, red and white "port style" wines

Vibrating Sorting Table Carlsen & Associates, carlsenassociates.com

Destemmer Single roller sorter, ROTOVIB, rotovib.de

Tanks 2- to 4-ton stainless steel open-top

Tank Heating/Chilling Systems Glycol

Punch-down Devices A plethora of differently shaped steel objects

Pump-over Devices LOTUS pump-over device

Pumps Positive displacement pumps with Waukesha pump heads; Air diaphragm pumps, Husky and Yamada

Racking Wands Rack-it-teer, rackitteer.com

Presses Proprietary basket press, 6-ton Willmes bladder press, willmes.de

Forklift Toyota, toyotaforklift.com

Barrels

François Frères Tonnellerie, francoisfreres.com;
Tonnellerie Rousseau, tonnellerie-rousseau.com

Barrel Washing System Pressure washer and steamer, Aquateools, aquateools.com

Ozone Yes

Winemaking Management System InnoVint, innovint.us

Winemaking Software InnoVint, innovint.us

Analytical Equipment DMA 35 digital density measure, Anton Paar, anton-paar.com

PACKAGING

Bottling Line Ultima Mobile Bottling Inc., ultimamobilebottling.com;
Ryan Mobile Bottling, ryanmobilebottling.com

Glass Saverglass, saverglass.com

Corks M.A. Silva, masilva.com,
Scott Laboratories, scottlab.com

Capsules Scott Laboratories, scottlab.com

Label Design Ana Field Creative
anafield.tumblr.com

Case Goods Storage Outside warehouse

POS Software WineDirect, winedirect.com

Compliance Software ShipCompliant, shipcompliant.com

Website Design Wine Works, wineworks.co

Lender/Financial Agency F&M Bank, fmbonline.com

PR Agency Studio 707, studio-707.com





ROBERT WILCOX

LEFT TO RIGHT: John M. Sweazey, estate director; Katy Wilson, winemaker; Ross Cobb, winemaker; John T. Sweazey, proprietor

it meant to be a “vintner” and ultimately solidified for Sweazey that this was the lifestyle he wanted to live.

“This was in 1972 and 1973—Napa Valley was coming into its own, becoming a hot topic,” Sweazey said. He began taking wine appreciation and winemaking classes through UC Davis, later to make his own wines at home. “When I told my wife I wanted to be a vintner, she gave me that look. You know, that look that wives give their husbands that kind of say ‘You’re crazy,’” he recalled. But her answer wasn’t a hard “no,” it was a “let’s wait,” he said. “She wanted to wait and not have to struggle during the early days. She wanted to wait until the kids’ college was paid for... We didn’t have any kids at the time. We weren’t even married yet,” Sweazey said.

But the Sweazeys did marry and have kids. Those kids did go to college. And, as promised, in 2002 when that education was secure, John Sweazey, with the support of his wife, sold his San Francisco-based real estate financing business and began looking for vineyard property in Sonoma, Calif.

“I knew I didn’t want to make big Cabs. I always knew I’d make Pinot Noir and Chardonnay,” said Sweazey explaining his preference for Sonoma County. Sonoma, long-famed for its cool-climate Chardonnay and Pinot Noir was one point of preference, but so was the familial culture. Sweazey recalled that it was the humble estate owners he met in Burgundy and the Rhône regions that drew him to the winemaking lifestyle. “I would go to these estates and they were all family businesses run by multiple generations. I wanted to paint that picture,” he said.

In 2006, when Sweazey finally found his piece of Sonoma property, he knew he located a place he could call home and craft his Burgundian-inspired varieties. It was those anabatic winds, reminiscent of the mistral that defines France’s Rhône region, that confirmed his vineyard-purchasing choice. It gave him the confidence that he too could produce elegant Rhône varieties. “My travels inspired this dream. The Sonoma County climate supports such a diversity,” Sweazey said.

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LEFT TO RIGHT: John M. Sweazey, Katy Wilson, John T. Sweazey, Ross Cobb

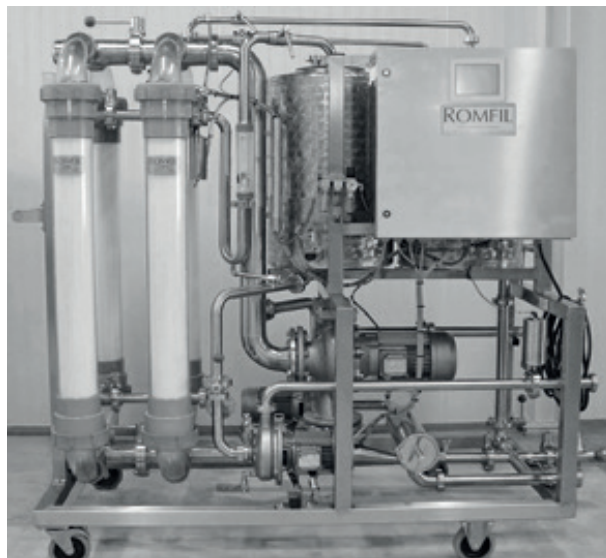
ROBERT WILCOX

Playing the Vintner Part

Sweazey bought the land from former owner and winemaker of Castle Vineyards & Winery, Vic Williams, who stayed on as winemaker for the first three vintages. At the time of purchase, the parcel included 4.5 acres planted to Pinot Noir. The business acquisition also included the downtown tasting room, located just off the Sonoma Plaza, where the Roche Winery & Vineyards tasting room is now located.

“We had that tasting room for the first three years, operating as Castle Wines while we were developing the Anaba brand. I hated it. It wasn’t our demographic, not our customer base,” said Sweazey, who reiterated that it was the atmosphere of the more intimate, family-style wineries he experienced back in France he wanted to create.

Due to the economic downturn of 2008, Sweazey wasn’t able to immediately build the estate of his dreams, but that didn’t stop him from taking baby steps. The Bonneau Road property also came with a 120-year-old farmhouse that Sweazey decided to transform into the Anaba offices and a modest tasting room. This is where guests have been sipping on Sweazey’s wine for the past 10 years, until the 2019 opening of the all-new production and hospitality buildings, designed and built by Steve Martin and Associates.



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Sweazey also made changes to the vineyard. In 2010, he decided, with the help of La Prenda Vineyards Management, to replant the original Pinot Noir vineyard with Wente Clone Chardonnay, which he was convinced would be a better fit. Today, the estate is completely planted to Chardonnay. The rest of Anaba's winegrapes are sourced from vineyards throughout the broader Sonoma Coast AVA. "I never wanted to be a farmer. I was always more interested in the 'vintner' part," Sweazey said, who defines the word as a "creator or producer, not just of wine, but the whole wine experience, including the selling."

Sweazey secured some prime fruit sources right away, including from Dutton Ranch's Mills Station Vineyard and Sangiacomo Family Vineyards' Roberts Road Vineyard. "It wasn't too hard back then in 2008," Sweazey said. "We were convinced people would want to work with us. We formed some great relationships and work with the same people every year."

Prior to the new build, winemaking took place in a small, 7,200-square-foot warehouse space on 8th Street East in Sonoma. Sweazey continued to work alongside McWilliams and then hired Jennifer Marion, formerly on the winemaking team at MacRostie Winery & Vineyards, as assistant winemaker and then director of winemaking for Anaba until 2014.

Katy Wilson and Ross Cobb took over winemaking operations after Marion. Sweazey credits much of the expansion of vineyard sourcing to Cobb, whose Sonoma Coast experience spans more than 20 years.

According to Cobb, what drew him to the winemaking vision at Anaba was the opportunity to work with Sonoma Coast Rhône varieties. "We've always known that this area is an outstanding place for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay," he said. "But I've always thought that it's also an outstanding cool Northern Rhône climate here. That's why I wanted to get involved with Anaba. There are so many Pinot and Chard-focused wineries I could have devoted my time on, but I love Rhône varieties—it's what makes us and keeps us more interesting."

Production: Modular, Customizable, Configurable

With the expansion of vineyard sourcing comes the inevitable expansion of case production. Today, Anaba Wines produces 7,800 cases annually with 15 different SKUs under its own label. Additionally, when Cobb and Wilson came on board, they brought their custom crush clients with them, as well as their own labels. Now, Anaba is responsible for 7,500 cases of custom crush wines from six different clients—bringing the winery's total case production to 15,800.

It's no surprise, then, that Anaba outgrew its little 8th Street East warehouse space. In 2018, Sweazey and his team finally broke estate ground for the winery and hospitality center—his ultimate goal.

The new 25,000-square-foot production facility, permitted for a 60,000-case production, was built with movement in mind. "The first thing to look at when designing a winemaking facility is that we need a lot of space so we can move around and lay out barrels and other equipment," Cobb said.

"Everything is very modular, customizable, configurable—that's the theme," added Ian McClellan, assistant winemaker.

The winemaking facility is, in fact, quite spacious in its layout design; the building is split up into five different zones. One of the most important things implemented in each of these zones is the ability to heat or cool down the space, depending on the specific needs of the winemaking production process taking place.

The main tank room is the largest space at 8,500 square feet and certainly the most utilized throughout the year. "If we need to lay out hundreds of barrels for tasting or racking, we can keep that room at a safe temperature for the wine while they exist in that space," McClellan explained. "We're also able



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to bring bottling trucks all the way into that room and can set the temperature to about 60° F for bottling in either winter or summer.”

The small barrel room (900 square feet) is used for both malolactic fermentation (MLF) as well as aging post-MLF; the middle tank room (2,800 square feet) also serves as a secondary barrel room and provides additional case storage for bottled wines waiting to be shipped; and the main barrel room, used specifically for aging wines, maintains a consistent 55° F and 75 percent humidity, according to McClellan.

But the modular design isn’t confined to the architecture of the building, it also translates to the production equipment. The winery is home to 31 2-ton tanks that are easily forklifted and moved under the destemmer, lifted and tilted to transfer fruit into presses, and moved and stacked with pallet jacks. The 25 portable, closed-top tanks, which range from 250 to 750 gallons in size, can also be forklifted and moved around as needed.

“We also have a glycol quick connect station on wheels that can supply up to six portable tanks with hot or cold glycol anywhere we want to place them, without having to run 12 hoses across the floor to the walls,” McClellan added.

Winemaking

Grapes are delivered to the 8,700 square-foot loading area, where roll-up doors leading into the production facility are large enough to accommodate trucks filled with fruit. The outdoor area also acts as an exterior storage space for leftover stems and pomace bins. Once inside the production facility, fruit is weighed and grapes that require it are destemmed. “It really depends on the variety, vineyard and vintage as to how much whole cluster

we add to the ferment. Our Syrah typically has a whole cluster component every year,” Cobb said.

All fruit undergoes primary fermentation in one of the eight 4-ton open-top tanks or smaller 3-ton tanks, depending on the size of the lot. All tanks are outfitted with glycol jackets for heating and cooling.

According to Cobb, winemaking for all red wines is very similar. The grapes are cold soaked between 45° F to 50° F for four to six days, then allowed to come to room temperature naturally. Once the yeast becomes active, the winemaking team begins their pump-over and punch-down routine. Primary fermentation takes about one to two weeks, with combination punch-down and pump-overs taking place one to two times daily, depending on the needs of the specific variety.

Once fermented to dryness, the free-run juices are drained into one of the portable tanks and the remaining is transferred into one of the two 2-ton basket presses. The brands and styles of the basket presses are proprietary, according to Cobb.

Cobb said he prefers to blend the free run and pressed juices immediately, as he finds this helps incorporate body and structure into the wine more effectively. “In my 20 years as a winemaker, I’ve never kept the press wine separate from free run—and that’s for all varieties,” he said. “Plus with this basket press, sometimes those press juices are even higher quality than the free run.”

Those combined juices settle in tank together for two to three days before moving to barrel. Anaba’s wines age in François Ferrer Cooperage and Tonnellerie Rousseau barrels; Cobb said he prefers to use barrels with medium to medium-long toast levels. “I prefer a lighter touch, less caramelized sweetness,” he said.

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STACY BRISCOE

Anaba uses 2- to 4-ton stainless steel open-top tanks for its program.

Red wine ages between 15 to 18 months in barrel; white wine ages 15 to 16 months in barrel. “The only varieties that are under vintage are the Riesling, Grenache Blanc, Picpoul and Rosé. Those varieties, sometimes they’ll stay in all stainless steel. Some may see just a portion of neutral,” Cobb explained.

Wines are racked “maybe once or twice” during aging.

Grapes for the white wine program are left whole cluster and fed into the 6-ton Willmes bladder press. Cobb noted that about 90 percent of the white grapes are hand-sorted.

Chardonnay is allowed to go through malolactic fermentation (MLF), but Cobb and his team constantly test the aromas and flavors during the process in order to decide just how much MLF should take place. “We may halt a batch at a certain point with temperature or sulfite,” Cobb said. “Then we can always blend it with another lot that went through 100 percent MLF. As long as they’re halted, you can blend them at different stages of malolactic.”

When it comes to the blending process, Cobb said that he and his team start the discussion in December, as Chardonnays from the previous vintage are typically ready to bottle in February or March, and Pinot Noirs between May and July.

“We like to blend the barrels, get them as close to perfect as we can and rack them off the heavy lees about nine or 10 months before bottling. This allows us to get them closer to the final blend. Then they can settle and sit,” Cobb

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explained. “We’ll still adjust any final tweaks closer to bottling, especially for something like the Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir, which has several components.”

Bottling takes place on-site at Anaba Wines using mobile bottling companies Ultima Bottling and Ryan Mobile Bottling. According to Cobb, the winery does not utilize any fining agents.

A Dream Realized

Vineyard property, an estate production facility, a full portfolio of his favorite wines—these things only portray a portion of the picture Sweazey painted for himself back in the 1970s. The last piece of the puzzle: his son, John Michael Sweazey, who decided to join the family business in 2017.

Like his father, John Michael entered the tech business after college, working for the Silicon Valley-based LinkedIn as a software salesman. It was a career, though lucrative, that he couldn’t see himself spending the next 20 years of his life in. “I woke up one morning to learn that Microsoft purchased LinkedIn,” John Michael said. That was the turning point and John Michael, along with his soon-to-be-wife, quit their jobs and decided to travel.

His tour of Europe was not intended to be wine-centric, but a few chance encounters changed the trajectory of John Michael’s trip, and his life.

So, he decided that instead of visiting major cities and ports of call, he would seek out wine regions—specifically smaller wine regions not inundated with American tourists. John Michael called his father, Cobb, a few former interns and other acquaintances he knew had wine industry connections in Europe and mapped out a tour of Old World wine regions. Like his father, he was most inspired by the small estates of the Rhône region.

“We kept meeting multiple generations at once. I’d see the grandfather, the sons or daughters who were now running the estate, little kids running around the property—and this would happen everywhere we’d go,” John Michael said. “And I realized that I have an opportunity a lot of other people don’t have. I can step in, work with my dad and build something new. I can have input, take a vision and combine it with his.”

Today, John Michael is the Anaba Wines estate director, working with Sweazey to realize the vintner vision they each share. Though they say they agree 100 percent on the wines and wine styles, leaving day-to-day operations in the hands of the winemaking team, where they differ is in how to present those wines to the modern market.

“He (Sweazey) had a vision 45 years ago. Times have changed,” John Michael said. But, he added, part of his job is figuring out how to mix those two visions together—retain the essence of the Old World family estate, while simultaneously providing the experiences today’s consumers are looking for.

“We always want to be wine-centric. But we want to be one of the rare places where it’s a super fun place to be and the wines are really good,” John Michael said.

The new hospitality center is home to different spaces that cater to different occasions—from a tasting bar, to intimately-sized tables and a dedicated room for larger parties. The space incorporates an indoor-outdoor design with large, floor-to-ceiling windows and doors that look out onto their scenic vineyard view and lead to the outdoor lounge area, complete with a bocce ball court. The father-son-team admitted that bocce was a point of design disagreement, as Sweazey thought it would attract the wrong crowd and detract from the wine education experience. But he has to admit that John Michael was right when he sees the delight of his clientele as they enjoy both the wine and the atmosphere he and his son have created.

There’s more to come. New developments in the works at Anaba Wines include new plantings of Picpoul Blanc and, potentially (if John Michael can convince his dad), a paddle tennis court. **WBM**