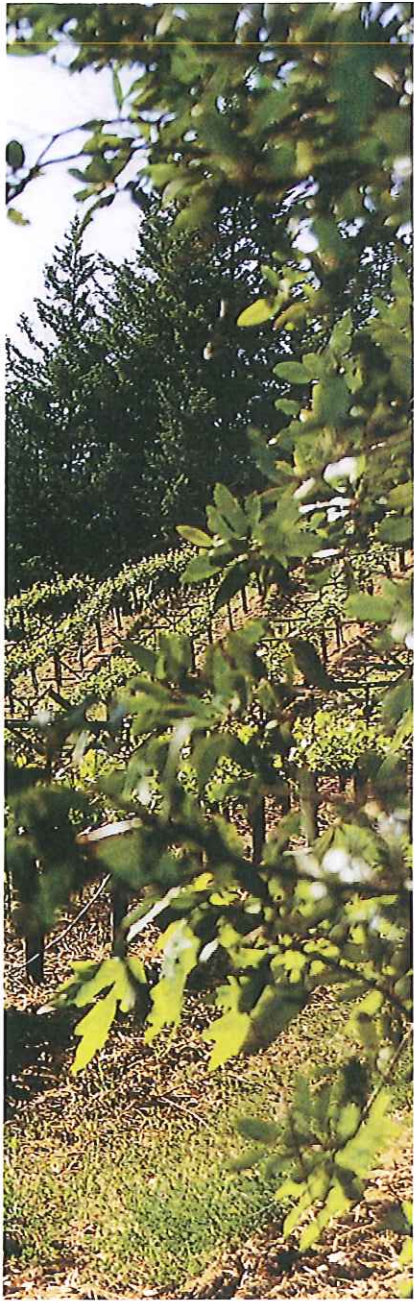




The flowering of Spring Mountain

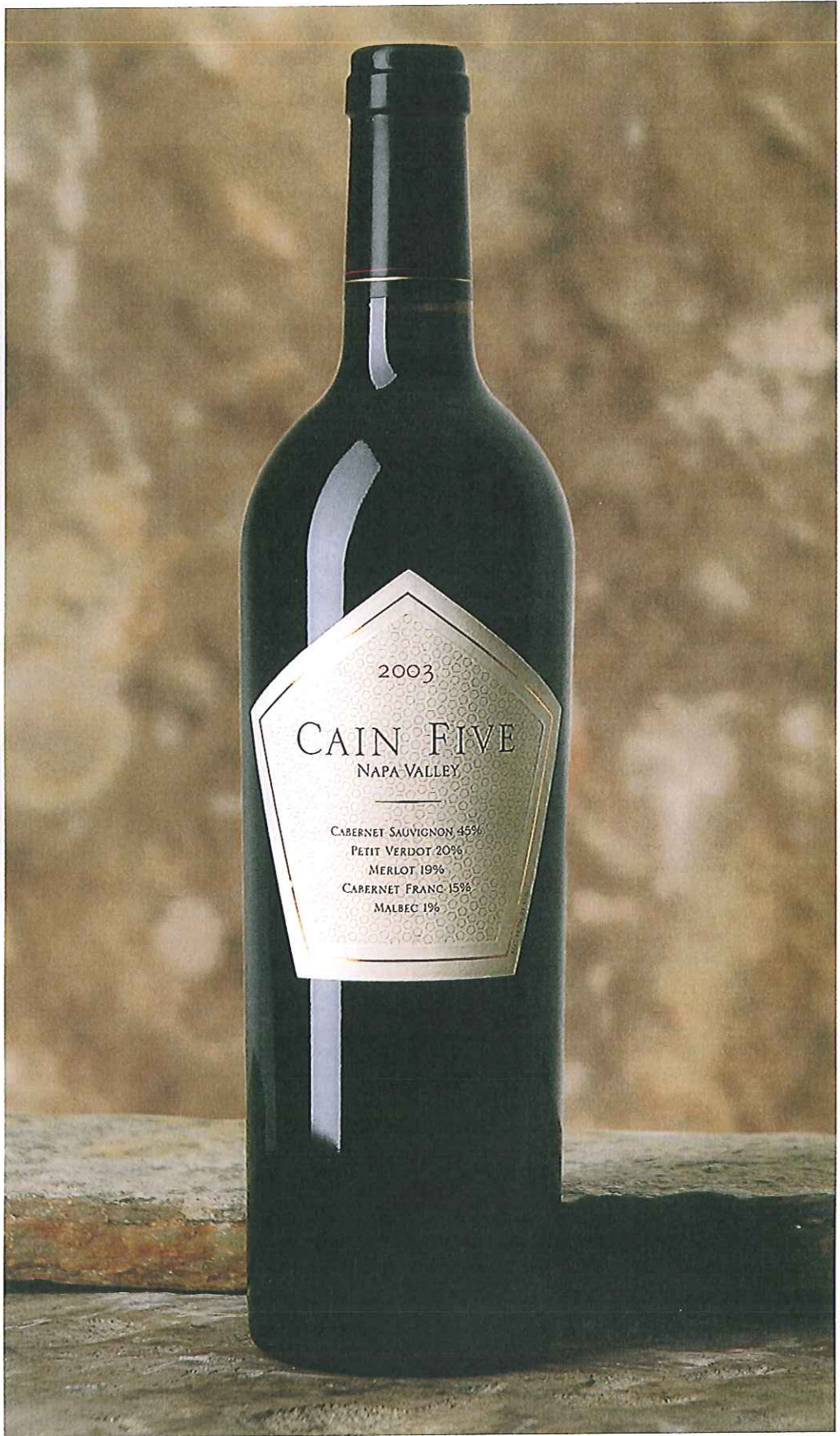


By JEFF COX



LISA TOGNI

Above: Despite its perfectly pastoral setting near the apex of Spring Mountain, "it was the only place up here that was for sale" when Philip Togni was shopping for vineyard land. *Right:* The 1990 version of Cain Five was the Meritage that sparked the author's interest in Spring Mountain. In the 14 years since it was released, the number of Spring Mountain practitioners has multiplied several times; there are now some three dozen.



It's a glorious April morning high on Spring Mountain and the sun has a new, welcome warmth to it.

A pileated woodpecker calls from the oak forest that surrounds Cain Vineyard & Winery. Perched in the Mayacamas Mountain range that rises to the west of the flat Napa Valley floor, the cobblestone winery commands a view 25 miles westward, clear across Sonoma County to the edge of the Pacific. The cool maritime fog that gathers over its cold waters each night rolls inland before dawn and laps over Spring Mountain's foothills.

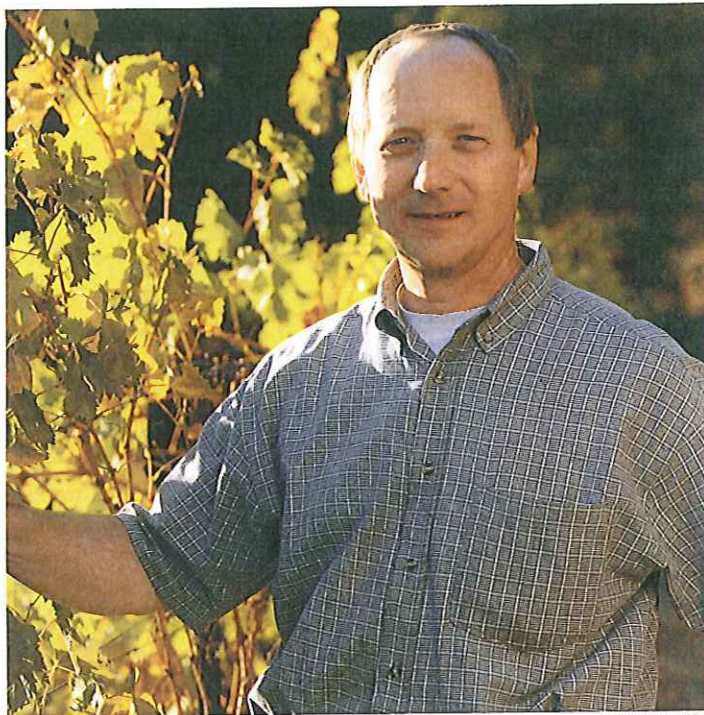
But it never reaches the higher elevations, which become islands in the sea of fog. This daily ebb and flow has profound effects on the mountain fruit grown here, especially the Cabernet Sauvignons and Meritage blends that show graceful, rather than gritty, tannins, pure and silky fruit flavors, lip-smacking acidity and, rare in California reds, a distinct core of welcome minerality.

I have made a pilgrimage here because a bottle of 1990 Cain Five made from Spring Mountain fruit remains the single-most delicious California Meritage I've ever tasted. In the 14 years since I acquired that bottle, the number of wineries on Spring Mountain has blossomed from a handful to nearly three dozen. At a tasting in February 2006 that featured most of them, I found the overall quality of the wines to be extraordinary. I couldn't help but wonder what it was about Spring Mountain, named for the many springs that feed small streams in this upland area, that produces such gorgeous fruit.

The answer, like the wines, is complex. Cain winemaker and general manager Chris Howell explains, "Spring Mountain isn't a single coherent thing. It starts at 400 feet above sea level down near the valley floor and rises to 2,600 feet and above. The uppermost of our vineyards here at Cain are at 2,100 feet and the lowest are at 1,400." He shares a satellite photo of the whole appellation that depicts vineyards as scattered patches that form a rough "V" pointing from east to west. Below the "V" to the south are Cain's vineyards, apart from the rest.

Although Howell notes that "there's no uniform altitude, exposure or soil type," he does identify some unifying elements: "We're all on the lee side of the Napa Valley, up in the Mayacamas range. Most of the slopes face east, so we get morning sun. And we get Pacific weather — storms drop more rain here than across the valley in the Vaca Mountains."

Spring Mountain rises at mid-valley west of St. Helena between Mount Veeder to the south and Diamond Mountain to the north; each of the three has earned AVA status (Spring Mountain in 1993)



CHARMAINE GRIEGER

and each is lush, greener and more heavily forested than the dry, hard-scrabble Vaca Mountains that define the eastern side of the valley. As storms move over the Mayacamas range, they drop a lot of their rain, leaving less water for the Vaca range.

As Howell notes, soils differ on Spring Mountain (the AVA encompasses about 8,600 acres with 1,000 planted in red grapes and 100 in white), depending on location. "The underlying material here at Cain is what's called Franciscan shale," he says, referring to the austere, infertile mountain soils formed from sedimentary rock — once ocean bottom — that's exposed up in the mountains.

Other areas of Spring Mountain (and nearby Diamond Mountain, too) have primarily volcanic soils formed from the volcanoes that erupted here five million years ago. (Even today, molten lava roils beneath the surface as evidenced by the geyser and hot springs that have made the town of Calistoga, capping the north end of the valley, rather famous.)

"I'm starting to get a sense of this place after 16 years here," Howell allows. "I see that great wine regions are an outgrowth of interactions between cultures and sites. Our vineyards are idiosyncratic:

The soil is poor and the vines hard to grow. But the personality of the site — and something of the winemaker, too — comes through no matter what."

In 1996, Howell was forced to replant due to the phylloxera outbreak that swept through northern California vineyards and weakened the vines. "I was worried that I would mess things up, that changing the rootstocks and the budwood would reduce the quality of the wines. But ... the site ultimately tied it all together."

Cain Five, like the bottling that drew me here, is composed of the five Bordeaux varieties — cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot. But the amounts shift, Howell notes, "depending on what nature gives us. And I'm picking the fruit riper now. The wines used to be about 13.5 percent alcohol, and now they're 14 to 14.5. I'm doing shorter maceration times — just 10 to 14 days. The wines undergo full

malolactic in the barrel. And because this is mountain fruit, I have to carefully manage the tannins."

Tannins are not an issue, of course, for Spring Mountain's premier Chardonnay, made by Stony Hill winemaker Mike Chelini from estate fruit. For 54 years, the winery turned out flinty, green apple-flavored, estate-bottled Chardonnays with little oak or malolactic fermentation. These wines were known for their ability to age — a rarity among the more prevalent full-blown California Chardonnays. But at the beginning of this new century, the property's owners, the McCrea family, decided that the original vines, planted in 1947 and 1948, were showing their age and had to be pulled out.

The vineyards were replanted in 1989 with fresh rootstock grafted with the same Wente clone that had made Stony Hill's Chardonnays so famous in the first place.

"Now we're getting more consistent berry size," Chelini reports. "The flavors of flinty earth, muscat and green apple are still there, and we're beginning to get that longevity returning. The berry size and clusters are small because we dry-farm the vines." Because Stony Hill is sited between 400 and 800 feet,



Pride Family Vineyards's lofty perch on Spring Mountain straddles the Napa-Sonoma county line and two appellations, necessitating different labels for its estate-grown Cabs and blends.

Opposite page: When speaking of Spring Mountain, Cain winemaker and general manager Chris Howell notes that "there's no uniform altitude, exposure or soil type."

there's more moisture in the soil here compared to the higher elevations and the vine roots can reach enough water to avoid irrigation. This keeps berry size small and concentrates flavors. "It's the perfect amount of stress," Chelini adds. "And because our vineyards face northeast, we don't get that blasting afternoon sun."

There are plenty of sites near the top of Spring Mountain, however, that do hoist their vines toward the intense, summer sun. One such place is Pride Mountain Vineyards, which straddles the Napa-Sonoma county line. Because a wine must be wholly grown in a particular appellation to carry that place name, Steve Pride and his sister Suzanne Pride Bryan have created two separate label designations that share the physical winery: one for their reserve Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, with all the fruit from the eastern Napa County side of the property; the other label encompasses single varietal blends of Napa and Sonoma fruit, with each county's percentage contribution detailed on the bottle. There is also a Bordeaux-style blend of Napa and Sonoma fruit.

Pride crowns the top of the Spring Mountain appellation and is the site of the old Summit Ranch and Winery. When Prohibition was instituted, federal agents smashed barrels and burned down the winery. Only the stone walls remain standing. About a quarter of a mile from the ruins, near the highest point on the property, the Prides built a new

winery, tasting room and 1,200 feet of caves. Construction began in the 1990s, with some building continuing into the 2000s.

Steve, a renowned geophysicist, teaches at UC-Berkeley and works at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory on topics such as seismic waves and how rocks break; it is Suzanne who interacts with the winery on a day-to-day basis. Together they own 230 prime Spring Mountain acres, 83 of which are under vine and produce enough fruit to make about 20,000 cases of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and a little Viognier and Chardonnay annually. The soil is volcanic, underlain with old basalt flows that are its bedrock.

"We're at the very top of the mountain [2,200 feet and higher] with about 80 percent southwest exposures," Steve notes. "The principal difference between us and the wineries farther down on the Napa side of the mountain is the climate rather than the soils. Typically, we're cooler up here, so the vines break dormancy later. But this year [2007], we're leafing out earlier — it's an odd year." He explains that during the growing season when it's 50 degrees in the valley at night, Pride's acres will be at 65 or 70; then, during the day, they will be 10 to 15 degrees cooler than the valley floor. "So there's less of a swing in temperature up here," he continues. "Things grow more uniformly. The wide temperature swings in the valley speed up ripening."

These cool days and warm nights are the result of a temperature inversion wherein cold air sinks and warm air rises. "This causes slow, steady ripening," Steve explains. "Ripening here takes longer, so we get longer hangtimes." The longer the hangtime, the greater the maturity of fruit flavors and the smoother the tannins. Pride's is the ideal situation. Because of the less extreme temperature swings, the higher sugars and elevated alcohol levels that can also be associated with longer hangtime are avoided. (A more typical scenario forces winemakers into a trade-off: Wait for maturity and make an overly alcoholic wine; pick before maturity and get unripe flavors and harsh tannins.)

As grapes mature and sugars rise, acids typically go down, so winemakers have to keep an eye on acid levels, too, or they'll either be left with flabby, insipid wines or be forced to add an acid blend — a mix of naturally-occurring citric, tartaric and malic acids — to the fermenting must. Not so at Pride. "As our sugars rise and the flavors in the grapes go from red fruits toward black fruits, our acids don't go down," Steve notes. "That really is the difference. Our wines have the fruit, but if they didn't have good acid levels, they'd just be big fruit bombs. So, because we have mature flavors, soft tannins and crisp acids, our wines are good to drink soon after their release — although they age well, too." Suzanne sums up: "We're really blessed with the



Above left: For 50-plus years, Stony Hill has garnered a well-deserved reputation for producing one of the New World's most age-worthy Chardonnays from Spring Mountain-grown fruit. According to winemaker Mike Chelini, "The berry size and clusters are small because we dry farm," resulting in added flavor concentration. *Above right:* Spring Mountain Vineyard winemaker Jac Cole (*left*), who works closely with vineyard manager Ron Rosenbrand (*right*), observes, "If Ron does his job, mine is easy." Based on the author's assessments, both are doing their jobs quite well. *Opposite page:* Philip Togni co-ferments different varieties believing that the entire vineyard is the best representation of his family's efforts from vintage to vintage.

fruit that grows up here," she says. "It's a very unique situation."

The old Summit winery isn't the only "ghost" winery on Spring Mountain. There are other pre-Prohibition artifacts of winemaking from the 19th century. One of the prettiest is La Perla Winery, established in 1873, and defunct for many years, yet still standing and owned by Spring Mountain Vineyard. A slow crawl up narrow dirt roads concludes at the La Perla vineyard site where the old winery still looks imposing. The wines from La Perla could have been among those that inspired Robert Louis Stevenson to wax poetic about the quality of the Napa Valley's wines when he lived in the valley for a spell in 1880.

Spring Mountain Vineyard is the amalgam of four separate vineyard properties totaling 845 acres of land, 225 acres of vines and 135 different vineyard blocks at elevations that scale the mountain from 400 feet to 1,600 feet, all owned by Jacob E. Safra. The old La Perla property is at 1,600 feet and is above the fog line. Vineyard manager Ron Rosenbrand notes that,

like at Pride, the many east-facing slopes on the property gently ripen the fruit and preserve the acids. In addition to enjoying cooler days and warmer nights than the valley floor, these vineyards receive early shade when the late afternoon sun and heat are at their fiercest.

Pinot noir benefits greatly from such shelter. It's planted at 1,550 feet, "the coolest spot on the property," Rosenbrand notes. As we pass the site, vineyard workers are busy suckering vines (snipping errant shoots) in the morning sunshine. A stretch of digger pines come into view next. "We don't plant vines where there are digger pines," Rosenbrand explains. "They indicate serpentine soils which contain high levels of magnesium." Soils containing serpentine — so named because the rocks are the faded greenish color mindful of certain reptiles — are toxic to many plants because of high levels of metals like nickel, chromium and cobalt. Although slow-growing pines are typical colonizers of such soils, vines in particular don't do well on such sites.

A distinguishing feature of many of Spring Mountain Vineyard's cabernet sauvignon blocks is the goblet trellising system used for meter-by-meter spacing. There is no trellis, just a stake to which the vine's current-year shoots are tied. When mature, the vines will have the familiar shape of old head-trained vines seen throughout the wine country. "This system allows for an extra measure of canopy manipulation," Rosenbrand says. "It's unique to Spring Mountain Vineyard. We have 72 acres in vertical goblet and 23 acres in meter-by-meter planting that give 4,050 vines per acre." Cabernet has the biggest foothold here — 72 percent — with the balance in cabernet franc, merlot, petite verdot, syrah, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc, the sole white. About 10,000 cases per year are produced under the Spring Mountain Vineyard label, plus a similar quantity of mostly Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc under Chateau Chevalier, a second label named for another ghost winery that's been subsumed into the current operation.

No matter the label, Rosenbrand looks for balance in the vineyard; that is, the right amount of fruit for each vine to carry to achieve that magic moment of ripeness when harvest begins. It varies from vine to vine depending on variety, vigor, exposure, climate and soil. He works hand in glove with winemaker Jac Cole. "If Ron [Rosenbrand] does his job, mine is easy. I used to go for perfection, but now I go for beauty," Cole says, alluding to the more subjective and artistic aspect of his craft. "Winemaking is more like sailing than powerboating," he continues. "There isn't a straight line to get to where you're going. You have to tack — make an adjustment here, change course a little there."

Farther up the mountain's curving road — called Spring Mountain Road in Napa County and St. Helena Road on its Sonoma County portion — is the relatively new Terra Valentine winery, founded in 1999. Its castle-like dressed stone architecture and massive wood doors, however, convey an impression of antiquity, yet its wines have a short history in the market.

Inside, I meet Sam Baxter, whose hats include winemaker and general manager, as well as current president of the Spring Mountain District Association, a group that includes most of the appellation's wineries. Designed and created by a rather reclusive inventor, Fred Aves, in the 1960s, the edifice is as imposing inside as out (see "Terra Valentine — A Feast for the Senses," June/July 2003, page 50). He made his own cement, dressed and set all the stones for the 30-inch-thick walls, created beautiful stained glass windows and fashioned the gargoyles that top the tower, to name just a few of his projects. He also made white wine under the Yverdon label. In 1986, he abruptly closed the winery; he died in 1997, leaving the property to an orphanage. In turn, the orphanage sold the property to Angus Wurtele in 1999. He renamed it after his father, Valentine Wurtele, and in 2002 planted grapes — mostly cabernet sauvignon and other Bordeaux varieties — on the winery's two estate vineyards. The 30 acres of vines around the castle make up the Yverdon Vineyard, which lies at 1,800 to 1,900 feet. The Wurtele Vineyard, with 35 acres of vines, is sited at about 1,000 feet.

Baxter makes three wines at Terra Valentine: a Wurtele Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, a Yverdon Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon and a Spring Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon, a blend of fruit from Wurtele and Yverdon.

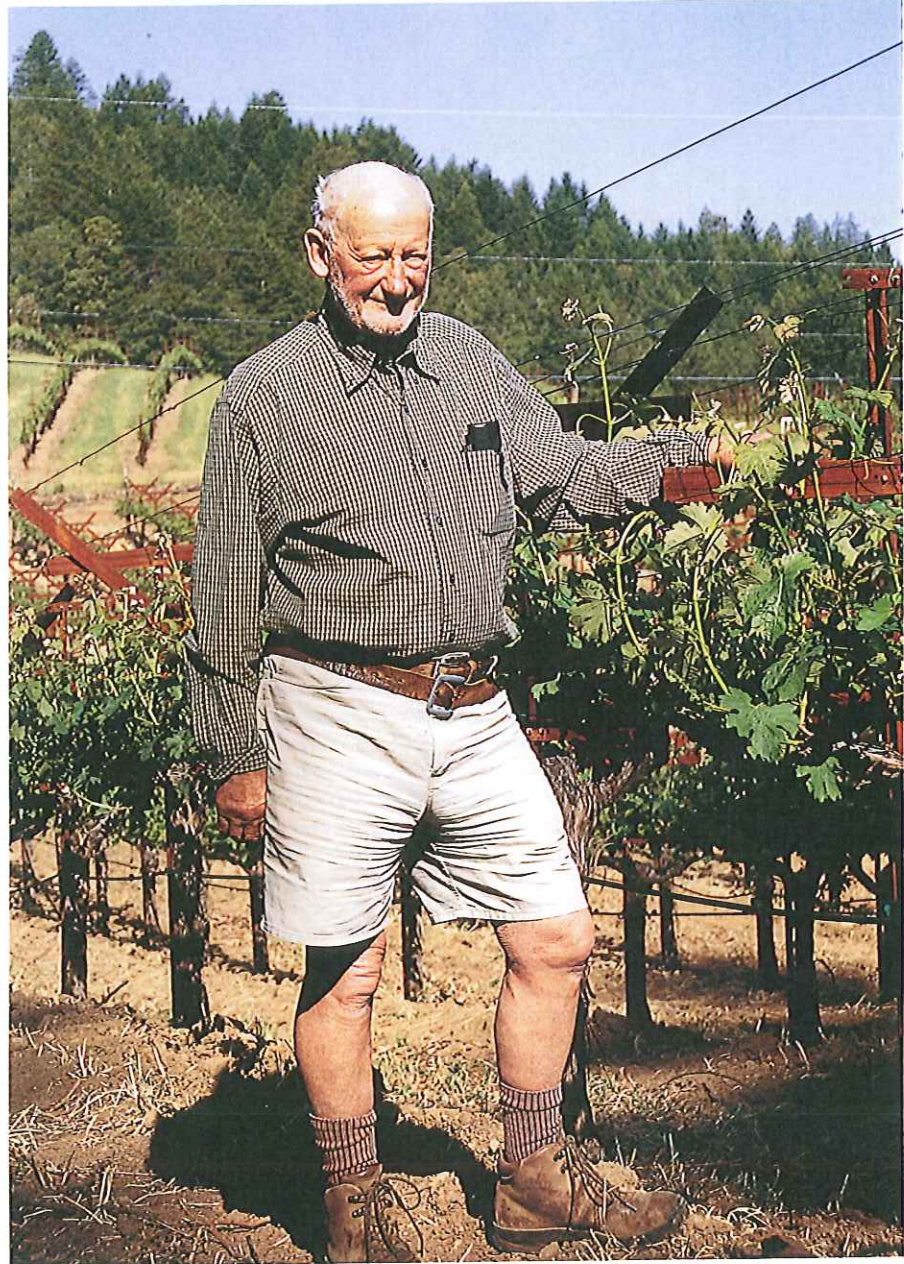
"Spring Mountain has more soil types than any other subappellation in the Napa Valley," Baxter says. "Mount Veeder has soils derived mostly from sedimentary rocks. Diamond Mountain is almost pure volcanic soils. Spring Mountain is a mix of both kinds, plus others." Echoing other winemakers on this mountain, he points out that the northeast-

facing slopes produce grapes with refined tannins and "wines with more elegance, spice and floral notes than from other mountain sites." Another reason for the floral quality may be that he does 60 percent whole berry fermentations that allow for some carbonic maceration within the berries, a regimen that can also produce floral, fruity aromas and flavors.

While Terra Valentine is the most exotic physical structure on Spring Mountain, the appellation's most renowned and exotic winemaker, Philip Togni (pronounced TOHN-yee), was born in England of Italian-Swiss heritage, studied geology at the University of London, served in the British Army

and eventually got a degree in enology at the University of Bordeaux, where he studied under Emile Peynaud. In the 1960s, he worked at Château Lascombes in Margaux and later at Chappellet and Cuvaion, respectively, in Napa Valley. In 1975, he bought 25 acres near the top of Spring Mountain. He chose the location because when buying grapes for the cuvées he assembled during his tenure at Cuvaion, "I found that the best fruit came from Spring Mountain," and more pragmatically, "because it was the only place I could find up here that was for sale." He planted vines soon thereafter, but had to replant his 10.5 acres in the 1990s because of phylloxera. Turning this costly episode to his

LISA TOGNI



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MJ WICKHAM

advantage, he replanted with “a Margaux-style blend of 82 percent cabernet sauvignon, two percent cabernet franc, 15 percent merlot and one percent petite verdot — no malbec,” he says, all on phylloxera-resistant rootstock.

Whether it was luck or destiny that brought him to these Spring Mountain acres, it is here that he has most fully capitalized on the education he received from Emile Peynaud, on his innate talent as a winemaker, and on the *terroir* itself. Philip Togni makes some of the greatest wines in the world, hands down.

He has a gentle dignity and he shows quiet enthusiasm for his work. Every facet of the winemaking process is done on his property: He and his wife, Birgitta, grow the grapes and he makes the wine; his daughter, Lisa, helps run the business.

Togni co-ferments all the varieties together, ensuring that the entire vineyard will be represented in the vintage, rather than just selected pieces of it. After crush, he ferments the free-run juice and press juice separately; they age in 40 percent new French oak for 22 months. All three of the Tognis taste through the wines for the final blend, although Philip makes the ultimate decision

Tasting BAR

Some of the wines that follow were tasted at the wineries; others were not. None were tasted blind. Scores are based on the BuyLine rating system.

Barnett Vineyards, 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$65: Aromas of blackberry, chocolate and toasty new French oak. The palate delivers a fruit-forward attack of black cherry and black currant with mocha and tar in the lush middle. Typical of Barnett’s big, bold Spring Mountain Cabs, the finish is marked by gritty, hard tannins that will relax with cellar time. *Score: 91*

Barnett Vineyards, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon, Rattlesnake Hill, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$120: Deep, dark color. Complex aromas of coffee and cocoa along with black cherry and cassis so typical of the AVA. The palate offers black currant, other sweet black fruit and licorice. Chewy and rich in texture; big in structure but not angular. Finishes long and luscious. This Cab takes the drinker on a literal journey around Spring Mountain’s high, rocky elevations. *Score: 93*

Cain Vineyard & Winery, 2003 Cain Five, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$110: A classic Bordeaux blend crafted from cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cab franc, malbec and petite verdot. Pretty nose of subtle cassis. Concentrated palate coated with rich mountain fruit, including black cherry and bramble berry, pure cassis, tobacco and firm tannins. Cellaring will pay dividends; this tightly wound beauty will open up in 10 to 15 years; it would be a shame to drink it before then. *Score: 95*

Fife Vineyards, 2003 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley (76% cabernet sauvignon, 21% merlot, 3% cabernet franc) — \$50: The nose is all raspberry and blackberry with delicate violets and a subtle perfume you might notice in the hair of your dream prom date. It opens grandly on the palate with blackberry, ripe black plum, cocoa, cassis and toasted brioche. A beautifully balanced and delicious wine whose tannins are still resolving. *Score: 91*

Frias Family Vineyard, 2005 Red Wine, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley (60% cabernet sauvignon, 30% merlot, 5% each of cab franc and syrah) — \$30: A shy nose with light aromas of raspberry and chocolate. Not shy on the palate, however, with a burst of sweet black and red fruit, a generous, even opulent middle brimming with spice, candied cherry, blackberry and dried apricot. Tannins are hardly noticeable. Finishes long and sweet. An approachable, fruit-driven wine that drinks well now. *Score: 90*

Juslyn Vineyards, 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley (85% cabernet sauvignon with the balance undisclosed percentages of cabernet franc, merlot and petite verdot) — \$95: Forward, toasty-oaky nose. The palate opens to sweet cassis and bright flavors of pie cherry and red fruit in the middle. Succulent, balanced and pure. A fine food wine due to its crisp acidity. *Score: 90*

Marston Family Vineyard, 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$90: Its vineyards face southeast on the lower slopes of Spring Mountain, producing big wines with aromas of berries, wildflowers and forest floor. The palate brims with dark berry fruit and flavors of black currant, violet, acacia and blueberry. Complex, well-structured tannins and a long finish. This wine will age well for many years. *Score: 91*

Paloma, 2004 Merlot, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley (blended with 15% cabernet sauvignon) — \$54: Gorgeous nose of wild strawberry, oak and mocha. The palate is packed full of chocolate and cherry with crème brûlée and blackberry nuances. Rich, balanced and full bodied with silky tannins. Pleasurable now with a unique character, it will become even more so with time in the cellar. An amazing wine that shows what merlot can do when it’s grown in the right place. *Score: 94*

Philip Togni, 2004 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$90: Elegant nose of violets and *pain grillé*. A beautiful mouthful of black currant, licorice, blackberry and more black fruits. Muscular without being hard, the tannins silky. Extremely long finish. Very much like a great Margaux from a great year; drinkable now, but in a dozen years it will be far more exquisite. *Score: 96*

Ca Togni, 2001 Sweet Red Wine, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$55 / 375 ml: An esoteric nectar made from Togni’s quarter-acre of black Hamburg grapes — the only such planting in the Napa Valley. The plot yields a fabulously aromatic, dark black wine with aromas and flavors of fig, spice, raisin and damask roses. Its 23.5% residual sugar is balanced by strong acidity and modest alcohol. A perfect after-dinner wine, not to be served with dessert, but as dessert. *Score: 95*

Pride Mountain Vineyards, 2002 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$115: A 100 percent Cab from the very summit of Spring Mountain that sees a little petite verdot in some years. Classic, pure cabernet scents of blackberry, cherry and cassis. In the mouth, it’s a huge, bold basketful of black fruits with robust structure, solid acids, plenty of alcohol and lush flavors of black plum, currant, chocolate, anise and a sturdy core of minerality underpinning it all. *Score: 94*

Robert Keenan Winery, 2003 Reserve Mernet, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$84: This 50-50 blend of estate merlot and cabernet sauvignon emits aromas of anise, herbs, wild cherry and high-quality salumi. The alcoholic heat is noticeable, along with firm tannins. A rich core of minerals is overlain with flavors of elderberry and Italian prune plum. The very definition of mountain-grown wine. Needs cellar time to soften. *Score: 91*

Robert Keenan Winery, 2003 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$95: A quick whiff reveals dried herbs and flowers with a meaty undertone. The lean middle offers flavors of licorice, black fruits and black cherry. Tame, smooth tannins, yet an intriguing wild streak runs through the core. *Score: 89*

St. Helena Road Vineyards & Winery, 2004 Roy J. Maier Meritage, Sonoma County — \$49: Cabernet sauvignon dominates this traditional Bordeaux blend. Full nose of spices, spring flowers and dusty oak. Succulent in the mouth with flavors of raspberry, blackberry and red currant. The richness of the flavors persists through a long, chewy finish. *Score: 90*

Schweiger Vineyards, 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$48: One hundred percent estate Cabernet Sauvignon. Its aroma contains a soft touch of vanillin oak and the gentle floral scent of German irises, along with just a hint of volatile acidity. On the palate, it's a seductive wine, soft and sweet; its modest fruit is pushed forward, yet it's elegant. Well balanced, pleasant to drink now, and in the style of French claret. *Score: 90*

Spring Mountain Vineyard, 2002 Elivette, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$90: With 81 percent cabernet sauvignon, one could call this stunner a Cab, but it's a quintessential Bordeaux blend with 12 percent merlot and 7 percent cab franc. Delicious, uplifting aromas of raspberry, blackberry, chocolate and exotic spices

waft from the glass. A big wine with opulent jammy fruit, yet nonetheless elegant. Will be best after 2012. *Score: 93*

Spring Mountain Vineyard, 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$50: One hundred percent mountain-grown Cab from multiple vineyards that scale the heights of Spring Mountain. As such, it exudes big, bold mountain fruit. A splash of petit verdot gives a floral lift to the nose, but the flavors are all deep, dark and rich black cherry, black fruits, chocolate, licorice and a hint of tobacco. Pleasurable while young, it will take some time to reveal its true and mighty character. *Score: 92*

Terra Valentine, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$38: Sweet cassis on the nose. A pleasant, dusty, unsweetened cocoa character overlays a concentrated middle of dense black fruits like Bing cherry, plum and blueberry. Has grip, but the tannins are well managed. A blend of the estate's two vineyards. *Score: 91*

Terra Valentine, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon, Wurtele Vineyard, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$58: This 100 percent Cab was fermented with 60 percent whole berries, yielding some bright, fruity aromas and juicy flavors from carbonic maceration. Densely packed plum, dried cherry and solid cabernet fruit; big bodied with an undeniable impression of richness. something to lay down until its youthful exuberance calms down. *Score: 90*

Terra Valentine, 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon, Yverdon Vineyard, Spring Mountain, Napa Valley — \$70: The estate vines' third leaf gives a lovely impression of violets and spices on the nose, and soft, sweet flavors of ripe plum, crème de cassis and a suggestion of chocolate in the mouth followed by a moderate finish. A Cab that shows the young vines' promise. *Score: 89* — JC



From their southeast-facing vineyards, Michael Marston and daughter Elizabeth, of Marston Family Vineyard, obtain ample ammunition to turn out wines that are, in the author's words, "big" and capable of aging "well for many years."

Opposite page: Terra Valentine's formidable lineup of 2004s prove the promise of this relatively new label.

as to its makeup. Wine that doesn't make the final blend is sold as Tanbark Hill, Togni's second label. Anywhere from 10 to 100 percent of the wine from a given vintage may end up in that label. In 2002, for example, it was all Tanbark Hill because he didn't believe the vintage or resulting wine measured up to his exacting standards. Generally, though, he makes about 2,000 cases of Togni estate Cabernet annually.

"My greatest pleasure," he says, "is that my daughter Lisa is getting ready to take over this business." That continuity is life affirming.

There is continuity in the bottle, too. Togni's wines consistently score in the high 90s in the wine press. And they are built to age. "When I sell wine, I tell customers, 'Don't drink it. It will improve,'" he says. And to prove that, each year he sells ten-year-old wine that he has cellared. As we talk and taste barrel samples, he shares some winery literature that recounts a Belgian tasting of a dozen French and American 1990 Cabernets and Bordeaux. Held in 1996, his wine ranked No. 1, ahead of Latour, Margaux, Haut-Brion and eight other stalwarts. And not only did the Togni Cab ranked highest, each of the six experts who tasted the wines blind thought that it was French.

As we taste Togni's new wines, they strike me as French in sensibility, too: So young, yet they possess firm, yet elegant tannins. The fruit is closed in, but it's there, waiting for a few years in bottle to unshackle it, whereupon it will no doubt unfold into pure pleasure. How does he achieve this balancing act so consistently and splendidly? He could be speaking for his peers when he modestly replies, "Spring Mountain makes great red wine." ☞