

# Angeleno

MODERN LUXURY™

## THE RESTAURANT ISSUE 2008



**THE DISH!**  
BRAD A. JOHNSON'S  
**50 BEST  
RESTAURANTS**  
CHEF OF THE YEAR  
TOP WINE LIST  
& MORE!

**+ PLUS**  
CHOW DOWN IN SHANGHAI  
CULT WINES!  
THE PARIS EAT SHEET  
FOODIE MAYORS:  
VILLARAIGOSA VS. RIORDAN  
GUILT-FREE MEATS? SWEET!

ANGELENO 5485 WILSHIRE SUITE 1412 LOS ANGELES CA 90036



ANGELINO 2008 \$5.95

THE CRUDO TREND IS CULINARY HIGH ART AT VANGUARD WINNER IL GRANO

# THE OENO FILES

IN THE INSULAR WORLD OF CALIFORNIA CULT WINES,  
STATUS IS THE POINT AND PRICE IS NO OBJECT

BY JORDAN MACKAY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID WALDORF

It is difficult to keep my eyes from dwelling on the massive, diamond-studded ring on Carmen Policy's finger. Sitting in the living room of his Tuscan-style villa in Napa Valley's Yountville, we chat in the light reflected off a sea of bright-green vines outside. In a few months, Policy and his wife, Gail, will debut a wine called Casa Piena. The Super Bowl ring may have been a hard-won trophy for this former president of the San Francisco 49ers, but he understands that Napa's playing field is just as daunting if your hope is to produce that rare figure of success: the next cult wine. "We have high hopes for our first release," Policy says. "But after you've put the pieces together, you can only pray that things line up in your favor."

When things do line up, though, the success can be utterly overwhelming. The world of these often rich, hedonistic cult wines is one where demand completely engulfs supply. When a new discovery is coronated—always heralded by a stratospheric score from wine critic Robert Parker—it can arouse the kind of fervor typically reserved for a Google IPO or a Rolling Stones concert.

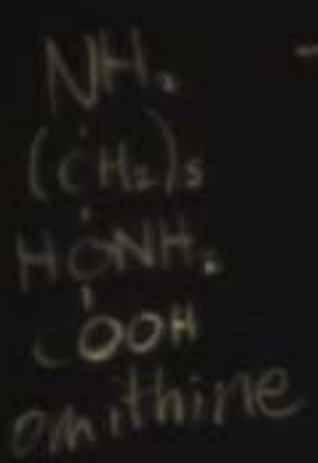
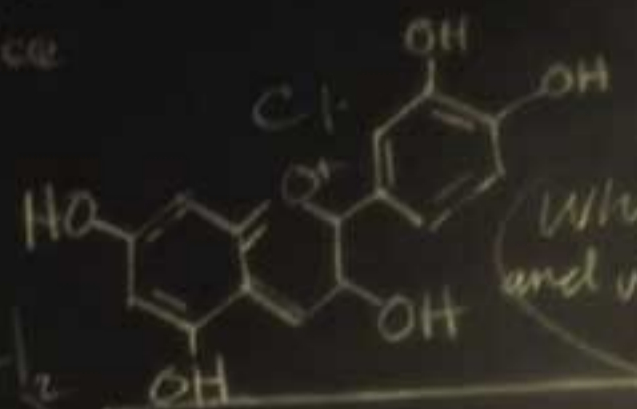


**THE PROPHETS:** A photo illustration combines the winemaking team at Ovid in Napa Valley's Pritchard Hill (peering into a cement wine tank), and the writing on the wall at their winery.

CO<sub>2</sub>  
ACETATE



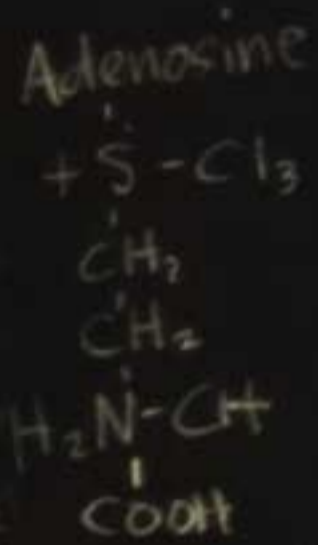
= 56.0 L CO<sub>2</sub> per L of juice  
at 20°C



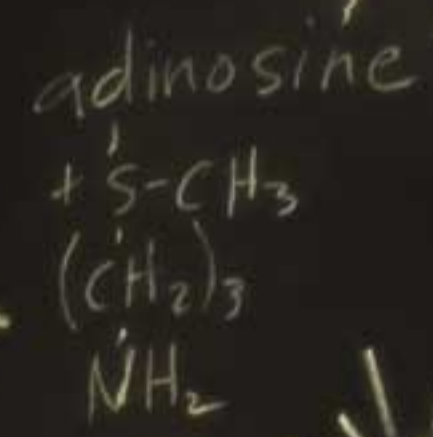
ornithine  
decarboxylase



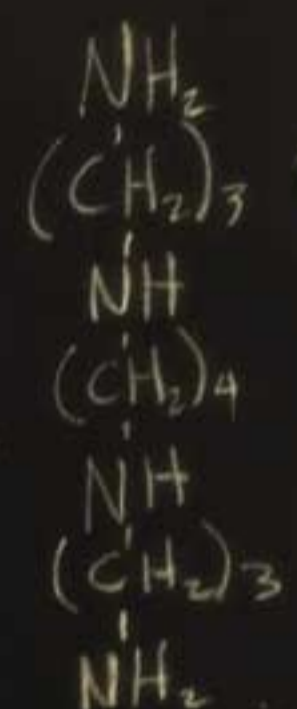
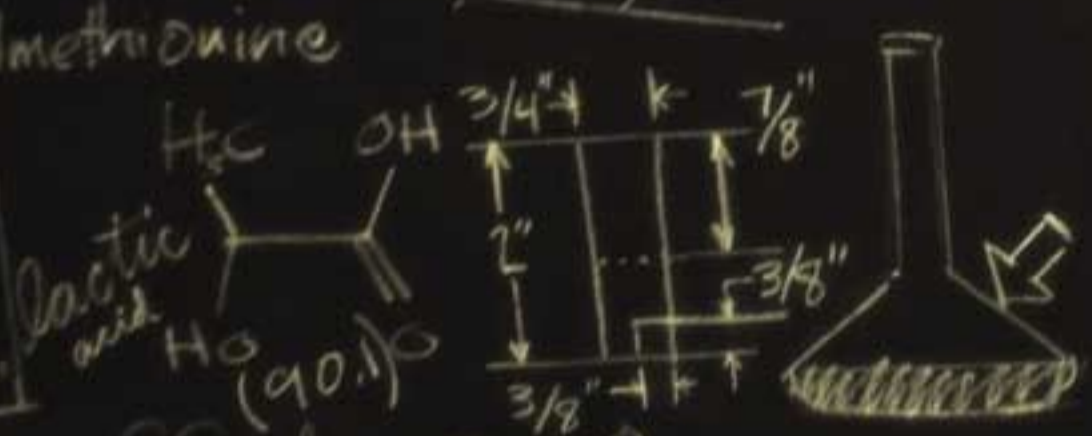
PARTIMQUE FIGURAS RETTULIT  
ANTIQUES, PARTIM NOVA  
MONSTRA CREAVIT.  
METAMORPHOSES - Book the First,  
[LINES 436-437] OVIDIUS PUBLIUS NASO,



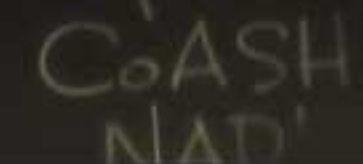
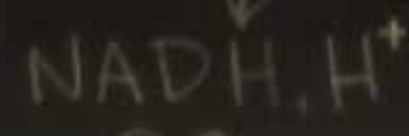
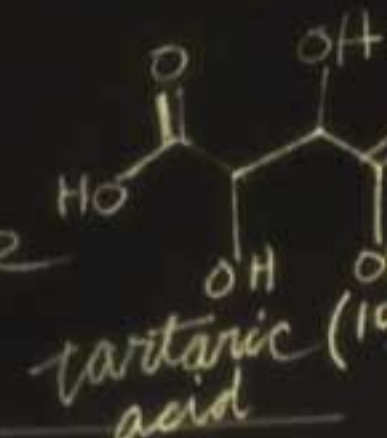
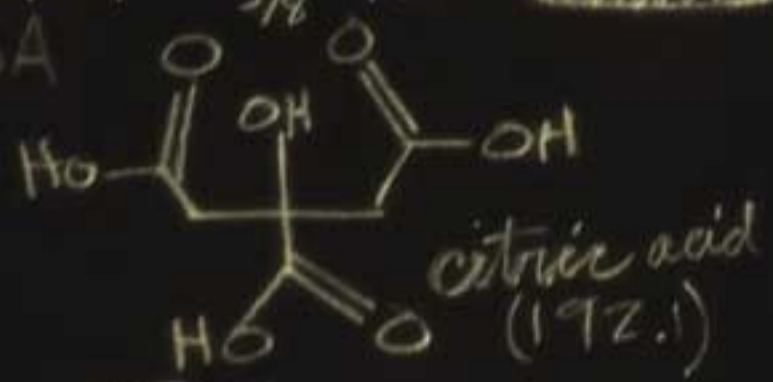
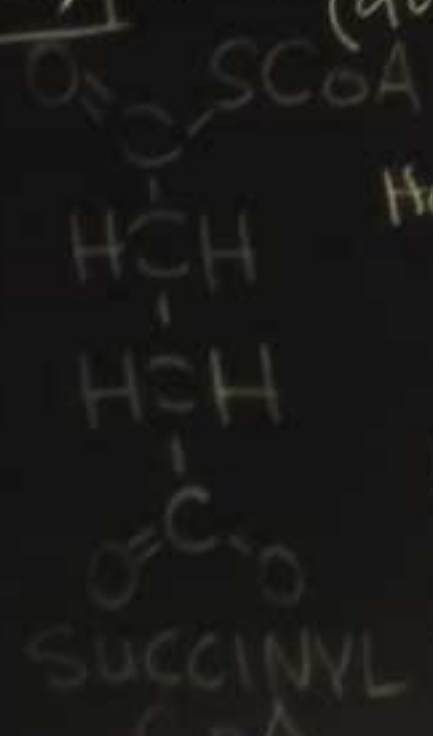
S-adenosylmethionine  
decarboxylase



S-adenosylmethionine



Spermin  
synt



...in glutamate/  
...as amino donor/  
...acid anhydride  
...indicate identical  
...paths



Consider the case of Scarecrow, Napa's hottest new brand, whose first vintage debuted in 2006. Scarecrow was launched by Bret Lopez, a photographer from Los Angeles who inherited one of the region's most hallowed vineyards from his late grandfather, a former producer at MGM (with the *Wizard of Oz* among his credits—hence the name). In 2003, his freshman year in the valley, Lopez created Scarecrow. Through only word of mouth, the entire 480-case first vintage sold out in six months—a wonderful success story. But then came the morning of December 23.

"At five in the morning, the phone started to ring," says Lopez. "At first we didn't answer. But, fearing an emergency, Mimi [DeBlasio, his partner] picked up. The guy on the other end was from New York and said, 'I assumed you'd be awake because of the score.' What score? He said we got a 98 and then asked to order some wine. After that, the phone was just ringing and ringing and ringing until we turned it off. I went down and checked the email, and messages just started filling the screen."

Today, you can't even get the wine. There's a list of 9,000 people who are simply in line to get on the actual mailing list that gives them the opportunity to buy a few bottles for \$175 apiece. And not a single soul on the list will turn the offer down. Rob Renterria, wine director of the Martini House, a high-end restaurant in Napa Valley's St. Helena, bought his entire three-bottle allocation. The day he received it, he put Scarecrow on his wine list at an arbitrary price of \$638. Two bottles sold that very night. In March of this year, the entire 2005 vintage sold out in a matter of hours. Lopez and DeBlasio, who retain a humbleness and charm born of their bohemian Los Angeles days, were completely unprepared. "It's been beyond even our wildest imaginations," Lopez says, throwing up his hands.

Cult wine fervor hit its stride in the mid-'90s with several upstarts from (mostly) Napa Valley that boasted very high scores and prices. Wines like Screaming Eagle, Harlan Estate, Araujo, Colgin Cellars and Bryant Family, which have since become legends

(almost literally, since most oenophiles will never taste them), blazed the way. These are wines made in such small quantities that finding bottles for sale is far more difficult than scraping together the cash to buy them. Sales are made only to restaurants or fans on the wineries' private mailing lists, creating exclusivity. Bottle prices tend to be in the \$100–\$200 range upon release (though Harlan now fetches \$400, and Screaming Eagle, the cultiest of the cults, recently unveiled its 2005 vintage at \$750).

Even at prices like that, consumers will do almost anything to get the wines. Lopez admits he gets hit up all the time. "My dentist—while he was putting a cap on my tooth—mentioned that he never got any of the 2004," he says, laughing. Ann Colgin of Colgin Cellars was once offered a Mercedes SUV for a case of her wine. She turned it down. There was even a man with whom Scarecrow's DeBlasio entered into correspondence, a guy who claimed to be the commander of the Navy SEALs in the Middle East. He said he wanted to buy some wine "for the boys." DeBlasio invited him to visit Scarecrow if he ever found himself in the valley. "He came right over," she says. "Very quick to get here from Afghanistan." He was unmasked as an impostor and sent away.

You can also just get the wine the old-fashioned way—when money's no object, that is. At the most recent Napa Valley Wine Auction, six magnums of 1992 Screaming Eagle went for half a million dollars, while 10 magnums of Harlan vintages from 1995–2004 went for \$340,000 (both included a dinner).

Scarcity is something that drives the fervor, says viticulturalist Annie Favia. But it's often rational. "These wines are scarce because these are projects built on winning combinations. You start with a great vineyard site. Then you have a great person to develop and farm the vines. Then you have an incredibly intuitive winemaker who works really well with the vineyard managers."

Favia understands these relationships well. She's the viticulturalist and project manager for Screaming Eagle, and her husband, Andy Erickson, is the winemaker. Young talents with



INSIDE THE CULT COMPOUND *From left:* The vineyards at Ovid; a prized bottle gathering cobwebs; the barn and a stack of empty crates at Scarecrow; and the cement wine tanks at Ovid.



polished résumés, both have also worked on (or are currently involved in) several other high-end wines, including their own brand, Favia. As we taste the Favia wines, as well as a 2005 Scarecrow, one night over pizza in San Francisco (these being very unpretentious celebrity winemakers), it is easy to sense what sets wines like these apart.

First is texture. The Scarecrow has a unique, pillowy-soft roundness and satiny smoothness. Its tannins have been polished to the fineness of a river stone. Yet the flavor is massive—big and mouth-filling, with cassis, blackberry, violets, minerals and chocolate—and pushes deep onto the back of the tongue, where it remains, seemingly for minutes, before it dissipates. You wouldn't think that a wine this plush and concentrated could be, at the same time, so soft and gentle. If a winemaker can find a holy grail such as this, Robert Parker will surely smile upon it.

Who knows whether newcomer Ovid, whose first wine was just released, will achieve that. I haven't tasted it. But I did visit the winery, where I discovered that Ovid stands to become the apotheosis of cult wine. It's already the buzz of Napa, with a maxed-out mailing list—and a lengthy waiting list to get on that list. Ovid resides in Napa's equivalent of a cult-wine gated community: Pritchard Hill, where greats like Colgin, Bryant Family and David Arthur, among others, grow their grapes. Ovid's production crew is an all-star team featuring the aforementioned Erickson (as winemaker) and David Abreu (vineyard guru to the stars). Globe-trotting French consultant Michel Rolland is the icing on the cake. Even managing partner Janet Pagano is a trained oenologist with an impressive résumé. Ovid's winery is a spectacular piece of minimalist design with the gamut of modern conveniences (and some less modern—like throwback concrete fermenters, rarely seen in California, that the team had admired in the cellars of many of Bordeaux's top chateaux).

Ovid is geared to succeed, alright, and the tension of high expectations is palpable. "The most important thing is to remember that it's all about the wine—and not to believe your own hype," says Pagano. Which must be difficult, considering that lately, she tells me, she spends all of her time dealing with wait-listed customers concerned about their ranking and wanting to know when they might have the chance to shell out \$175 per bottle, the wine's opening price. While some cult wineries almost revel in being imperious, Ovid seems downright saddened that not every interested consumer will get some wine. But if they did, it wouldn't be a cult.

And that's the paradox—to get a shot at getting on a list, a hopeful consumer must act before the wine breaks out. As is the case with Ovid, to wait for the wine's first scores is to be too late. If you want to join a cult, it's imperative to find out (perhaps from internet wine forums) not just which are the hot wineries, but who the rock-star winemakers are. Then do some research and find out what other projects they're working on. (The best winemakers always have several projects going at once.) For instance, take Carmen Policy. As an aspiring small producer, he naturally hired a hip young winemaker, a fellow named Thomas Brown, to create Casa Piena. ("It's like picking a coach," he said. "You choose a guy, and then you hope.") A few seconds of Googling reveals that Brown is listed as winemaker on the websites of Outpost, Shrader, Tamber Bey, Maybach and his own label, Rivers Marie. Study the racing form, and decide if one of these is a good horse to bet on (if it isn't already too late). And you might just find yourself with some very delicious, probably expensive, rare wine that no one else owns—but that everybody wants. **A**

## 30 CULTS TO COVET

### THE ENSHRINED *Ultimate Bragging Rights*

1. **Screaming Eagle** The highest flier—'nuf said
2. **Harlan Estate** The epic wine, but forever No. 2
3. **Sine Qua Non** The only non-Napa (from Santa Barbara), non-Cab super cult; known for rich Syrah and artsy labels
4. **Bryant Family** This was from the first wave, and remains hot today, with winemaker Mark Aubert at the helm.
5. **Colgin** Former fine-art specialist Ann Colgin transitioned into fine wine on Pritchard Hill.
6. **Araujo Estate** From Calistoga; now biodynamic
7. **Abreu** Wine from the premier viticulturalist in Napa goes for big bucks.
8. **Marcassin** Sonoma Coast Pinot and Chardonnay from star winemaker Helen Turley
9. **Dalla Valle Maya** With its first vintage in 1988, it skyrocketed in the 1990s.
10. **Shafer Hillside Select** A 20-year classic that still gets lots of love.

### THE ARRIVISTES *Slow Climbers and Shooting Stars*

1. **Quilceda Creek** Washington's jewel. Not Napa-sexy but it has soldiered to the top with consistent excellence.
2. **Rochioli** These single-vineyard wines were some of the first cult Pinots.
3. **Williams Selyem** Rochioli's Russian River neighbor has been right there since the beginning.
4. **Aubert** Turley disciple made his name with Chardonnay.
5. **Pride** High on Spring Mountain, star winemaker Bob Foley earned fame with massive wines.
6. **Kistler** These intense Pinots and Chardonnays are still hard to get.
7. **Hundred Acre** Young financier Jayson Woodbridge burst onto the Napa scene in 2003.
8. **Scarecrow** The new phenom. Some of the oldest vines in Napa with an interesting tale
9. **Schrader** After his split with Ann Colgin, Fred Schrader's wine has done almost as well.
10. **Sloan** The 100-Parker-point specialist from Rutherford

### THE NEW WAVE *Wines with Buzz*

1. **Favia** Star couple Erickson and Favia may do for the Sierra Nevada foothills what others did for Napa.
2. **Ovid** Just recently unveiled, and immediately sold out, it's the newest star in the Pritchard Hill constellation.
3. **Maybach** The same family whose name graces a Mercedes scored a 95 with Thomas Brown's second release.
4. **Levy & McClellan** The winemaking power couple behind Harlan and Sloan releases first vintage at \$350.
5. **Futo** New Oakville producers tap the talents of Mark Aubert and David Abreu.
6. **Dancing Hares** Howell Mountain vineyards gets the Ovid team (Erickson, Abreu, Rolland).
7. **Rhys** Venture capitalist goes to the Santa Cruz Mountains to make grand cru-style Burgundy.
8. **Rocca** Celia Masyczek (Scarecrow, Cornerstone, DR Stephens) is a blind-tasting giant-killer.
9. **Buccella** Buzz-worthy winemaker Mark Herold always garners excellent reviews.
10. **Tor Kenward** Tor, a 30-year vet from Beringer, retired to make a small wine that scores major Parker points.