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The Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series

David Bruce

THE DAVID BRUCE WINERY: EXPERIMENTATION, DEDICATION, AND SUCCESS

Interviews Conducted by
Carole Hicke
in 2001

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

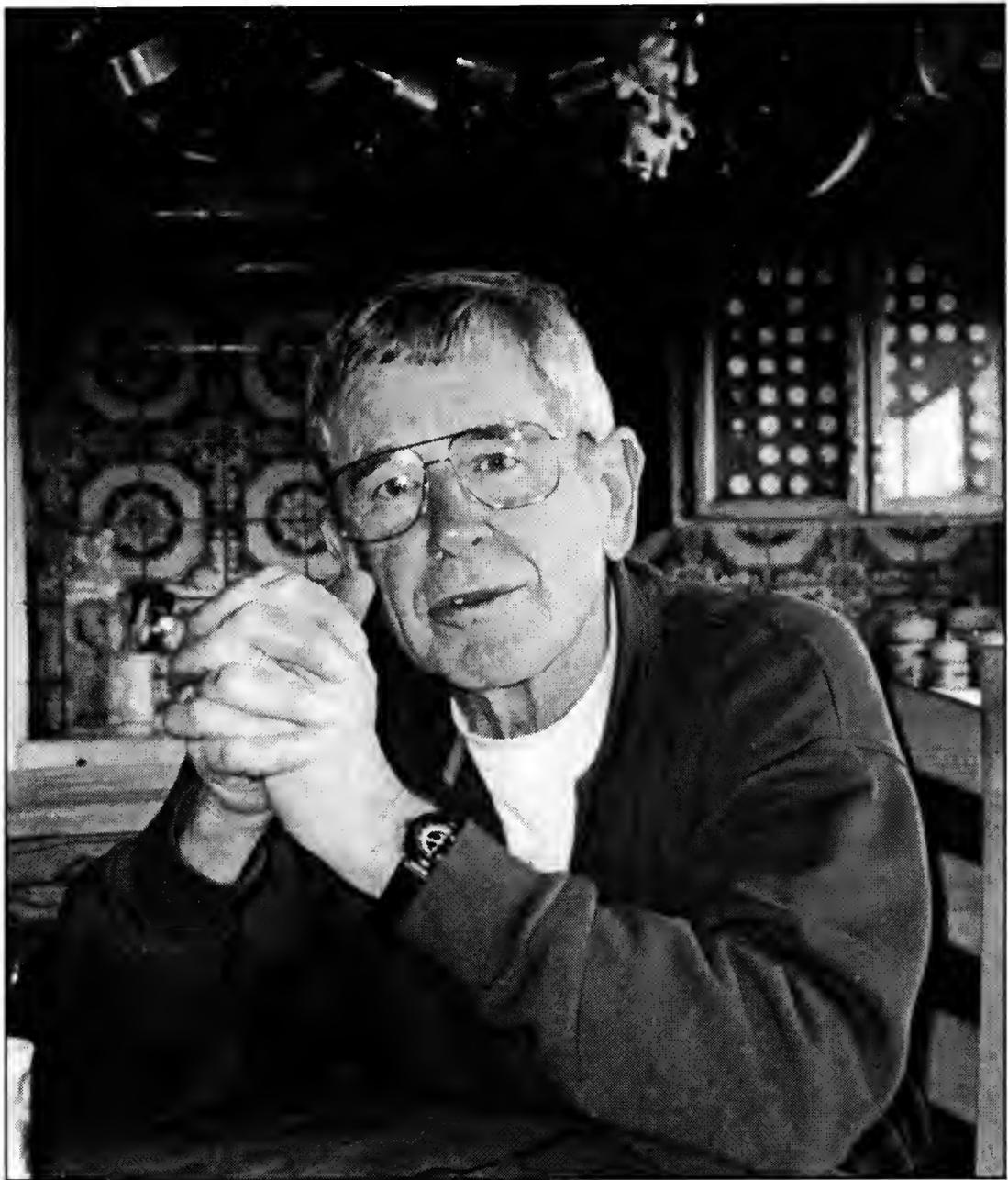
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Making Pinot Noir; Martin Ray; producing wine in Santa Cruz mountains; innovation in making White Zinfandel, malolactic fermentation, foot-crushing, late-harvest wines, whole-berry fermentation, extensive skin contact, rotary tanks, small-barrel fermentation; dermatology practice.

Interviewed in 2001 by Carole Hicke for the Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE

The California wine industry oral history series, a project of the Regional Oral History Office, was initiated by Ruth Teiser in 1969 through the action and with the financing of the Wine Advisory Board, a state marketing order organization which ceased operation in 1975. In 1983 it was reinstated as The Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed has been made by a committee consisting of the director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John A. De Luca, president of the Wine Institute, the statewide winery organization; Carole Hicke, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

Until her death in June 1994, Ruth Teiser was project originator, initiator, director, and conductor of the greater part of the oral histories. Her book, *Winemaking in California*, co-authored with Catherine Harroun and published in 1982, was the product of more than forty years of research, interviewing, and photographing. (Those wine history files are now in The Bancroft Library for researcher use.) Ruth Teiser's expertise and knowledge of the wine industry contributed significantly to the documenting of its history in this series.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grapegrowing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of winemen. In some cases their recollections go back to the early years of this century, before Prohibition. These recollections are of particular value because the Prohibition period saw the disruption of not only the industry itself but also the orderly recording and preservation of records of its activities. Little has been written about the industry from late in the last century until Repeal. There is a real paucity of information on the Prohibition years (1920-1933), although some commercial winemaking did continue under supervision of the Prohibition Department. The material in this series on that period, as well as the discussion of the remarkable development of the wine industry in subsequent years will be of aid to historians. Of particular value is the fact that frequently several individuals have discussed the same subjects and events or expressed opinions on the same ideas, each from his or her own point of view.

Research underlying the interviews has been conducted principally in the University libraries at Berkeley and Davis, the California State Library, and in the library of the Wine Institute, which has made its collection of materials readily available for the purpose.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons who have contributed significantly to recent California history. The office is headed by Willa K. Baum and is under the administrative supervision of The Bancroft Library.

Carole Hicke
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series

July 1998
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

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Charles F. Wagner and Charles J. Wagner, *Caymus Vineyards: A Father-Son Team Producing Distinctive Wines*, 1994

The Wente Family and the California Wine Industry, interviews with Jean, Carolyn, Philip, and Eric Wente, 1992

Ernest A. Wente, *Wine Making in the Livermore Valley*, 1971

Warren Winiarski, *Creating Classic Wines in the Napa Valley*, 1994

Albert J. Winkler, *Viticultural Research at UC Davis (1921-1971)*, 1973

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INTERVIEW HISTORY – David Bruce

David Bruce is a pioneer of the modern premium wine revolution in California and in the Santa Cruz Mountains where he established his vineyard in 1961 and then began making wine. He eventually earned an international reputation for Pinot Noir, a wine notoriously difficult to make. His oral history thus makes an excellent contribution to the Wine Spectator California Wine Oral History Series.

Born in San Francisco, Bruce graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, then earned his medical degree at Stanford Medical School. That was where he first became interested in Pinot Noir. On an impulse, he plunked down \$7.50 — a fair amount of money in those days — for a bottle of Richebourg. “The minute I opened that bottle of wine, the whole room was pervaded by this floral, spicy aroma.”

Following the legendary winemaker, Martin Ray, Bruce decided to purchase property in the Santa Cruz Mountains. He planted the vineyard by hand, establishing at the same time his dermatology practice in Santa Clara.

For 25 years, Dr. David Bruce carried on two careers simultaneously. Eventually, he decided to concentrate on the wine, which was garnering international recognition. He was one of 12 Californians to participate in the famous 1976 “Judgment of Paris,” in which California wines outscored the French in blind tastings.

Bruce’s innovations earned him an industry-wide reputation for experimentation. His “firsts” and “near-firsts” include a Blanc de Noir, a white wine from Zinfandel grapes; late harvest wines; malolactic fermentation for white wines; use of whole-berry fermentation for red wines; and an early importer of French oak. He was also among the first advocates of foot-crushing, extensive skin contact, small-barrel fermentation, and rotary tanks. “I was always experimental,” he remarks.

David Bruce was interviewed in his home in the Santa Cruz Mountains on February 21 and 22, 2001. He reviewed the transcript and made a few changes, then reviewed it a second time.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Ann Lage, Acting Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Carole Hicke, Interviewer/Editor

January 2002
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name DAVID HUNT BRUCE
 Date of birth Mar 25, 1931 Birthplace SAN FRANCISCO
 Father's full name HERBERT DALE BRUCE
 Occupation physicist Birthplace _____
 Mother's full name Thelma BRAUN BRUCE
 Occupation LABORATORY DIRECTOR Birthplace _____
 Your spouse JEANNETTE CAROL BRUCE
 Your children KARLI, BARRY, DALE, DANA

 Where did you grow up? PALO ALTO
 Present community SANTA CRUZ MTS
 Education STANFORD M.D.

 Occupation(s) DERMATOLOGY, WINE MAKING

 Areas of expertise WINE & MEDICINE

 Other interests or activities BROAD IN SCIENTIFIC
NUTRITION & HEALTH

 Organizations in which you are active MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY
KOI GROUP

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BRUCE

I BACKGROUND

[Interview I: February 21, 2001] ##¹

Family

Hicke: I'd like to start this afternoon with asking you when and where you were born, please.

Bruce: I was born in San Francisco, not that I really spent any time there. We moved off in short order. San Francisco is a place that I go to for amusement or meeting people, or that sort of thing.

Hicke: You grew up someplace else?

Bruce: Grew up in Palo Alto.

Hicke: Okay. And about what period of your life did you move there?

Bruce: Well, I came to Palo Alto at age four, and left for my education when I was sixteen or eighteen. Eighteen, I guess. I went off to the University of Nevada for the first year. Then I went to Stanford the second year, then I went to UC Berkeley the third year.

Hicke: Wait a minute, we have to back up. We skipped about eighteen years. Let me ask if you had grandparents around here that you knew.

Bruce: My grandparents were all in Nevada. My paternal grandparents were in Reno, and my maternal grandparents were in Dayton, Nevada.

Hicke: So you did see them occasionally?

Bruce: Yes, I'd maybe go and visit them for summer break, that sort of thing. Spend a week or two, or sometimes more.

Hicke: How about sisters or brothers?

¹## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

Bruce: I have a total of two. My first brother died before I was born. He died of leukemia at the age of three.

Hicke: What was his name?

Bruce: Dale. My second brother, also older, about three years older than I, Bob, he died of pneumonia at age twenty-three. He had schizophrenia. I have what I think to be a very rare condition of congenital myotonia. I think he had that, too. About when Thompsen--spelled with an "e," obviously a Dane--described the disease, about 50 percent of his family became schizophrenic, or at least psychotic. So I guess it's a difficult thing for a young child to grow up with.

Hicke: You went to school in Palo Alto?

Bruce: Went to Addison. Went to David Star Jordan, and went to Palo Alto High School.

Hicke: David Star Jordan is junior high?

Bruce: That was a junior high. Yes. I'm not sure it's still there.

Hicke: In your education process, what particularly interested you?

Bruce: I don't think there's any question that I was much interested in scientific things. In that area you didn't have to depend upon sometimes the quirks of the human species. It was something that you could depend on. I think that had a lot to do with my myotonia; that made me think that way. I was interested in things that I could hang on the walls and I could depend on. It took me a long time to realize that humans have any value. Now I find that of course humans do have a great deal of value. It took me a long time to realize that.

Hicke: Well, tell me about family holidays and birthdays and Christmas.

Bruce: My father was never home. He'd come home twice a year, something like that.

Hicke: You told me before we started that he was a physicist.

Bruce: He was a physicist, right. And, well, at least when I can remember back to, he was seldom at home. I think there may have been a problem between him and Mother so that they didn't quite get along. And so he would get off and do various things. I know that he was very much involved in glues at one time, and he was supposed to be instrumental in the Spruce Goose--the glue that was required to put that extraordinary vehicle together.

Hicke: And your mother, did she have a profession?

Bruce: Oh, yes. I have a strong feeling--although I don't know that she ever told me that, well, she might have told me that--that she would have been a doctor if I hadn't come along at the wrong time. So it was one of those situations. In a sense, I suppose that maybe I had an obligation there. At least, I kind of felt that way.

Hicke: You told me, but we weren't recording, that she ran the lab at the Palo Alto Hospital.

Bruce: She ran the lab at the Palo Alto Hospital for eighteen years or more. Actually she married Fritz Roth, who was one of the three founders of Palo Alto Clinic. Yes. It was Lee and Fritz and Clark. Clark was a pediatrician. She diagnosed my son's illness. My son had cranial synostosis. She found that at about age six months, and so she was instrumental in helping my eldest son, Karli.

Hicke: That's K-a-r-l-i?

Bruce: Right. We had a good friend who was of Swiss origin, and his father always called him Karli, which is a diminutive of Karl. I named three of my kids after my friends.

Hicke: Well, since we're on your own family, tell me about your wife and your children.

Bruce: Well, I'm divorced from my first wife. In fact, she came up to me--it's kind of cute--she said "David, you're crazy." And what she was referring to was that I had two full-time jobs for fifteen years. And that, "You've got to make a decision." To my credit, I have to say that after ten more years I figured out she was right, and I had to make the big decision. I started the winery at the same time that I did the medical profession.

Hicke: I want to get into that later. And your children?

Bruce: I have four children. Karli, the eldest, is in Colorado, in Denver, and he's in avionics. He repairs those instruments that allow you to fly at night without visibility. And then there's one grandchild, a boy, by the name of Jesse. My number two son is the artist in the family, and that's Barry. He's an extremely bright boy. In fact, he's done very interesting artistic work. A lot of it with metal. He comes into the winery and he repairs all of our stainless steel and aluminum. Anything you want, he can repair it. In fact, he can take the most bizarre shapes and he can create these things. Very impressive.

Hicke: Does he have a gallery or something?

Bruce: No. He's interested in water at the present time. But I have to admit I don't totally understand it. It is a type of a water purification system.

Number three son is Dale. He has two children. Both are girls, and that has broken a long, long, long Bruce pure-male jinx. I began to think there were no female sperms in the Bruce family tree, now going back to as far as you can trace. My grandmother said at one time, when I was very young, "You sprung from Robert Bruce's very loins." And you didn't argue with my grandmother.

Hicke: Robert the Bruce of Scotland? Is that who you're talking about?

Bruce: Yes. That's who she was referring to.

Hicke: That's quite a heritage!

Bruce: Yes. Anyway, so Dale broke the jinx and we now have two girls in the Bruce family tree.

Hicke: Number four?

Bruce: Number four is Dana. Dana, well, he went off to school to go into mathematics; then he decided that wasn't his cup of tea. Then he comes to me and he says, "Well, I'm going to go to Germany because I think this is the place to be, and I want to see if I can get into business there. Maybe set up my own business." He spent eighteen months there and that didn't quite work out. I guess it was during a difficult period from the standpoint of their economy.

Hicke: They were assimilating the old East Germany.

Bruce: Yes. They had a very high unemployment rate and had high interest rates. Furthermore, the Germans can be rather rigid in their approach to things. He says, "You know, I just can't handle that. So now I'm going to go to Hong Kong and China. I'm going to become involved with golf equipment," which includes planning golf courses. At the time, China had one golf course and they were planning something like twenty-two. After eighteen months he came back and said, "Well, you know, Dad, if you're not family, you don't get anywhere in the Orient."

He's done a lot of things in the wine area. He's made wine. He planted his own vineyard. For a couple of summers he worked for Jacques Seysse of Domaine Dujac in Burgundy. He's clearly put out a lot of effort in the wine area. He says, "I know you want me to be in the wine business, but two things: one, you work too hard. And two, you don't make any money. So I'm going to make my million first, then I'll think about it." [laughter]

He's still thinking about it. Presently, he's trying to develop an ability in photography. He wants to become a professor of photography. Wants to get into the art area there. He's taking various studies now in Sacramento to see if he can achieve that. So that's where he's at. Not married. I always thought he would be the first to marry. Because he likes children. But he's not. So I don't know where that might go.

Hicke: Don't give up.

Bruce: [laughter] No, I'm not going to give up.

Youth and Education

Hicke: Let's go back to Palo Alto and your growing-up years. Is there anything that is particularly memorable about those years? What influenced you the most? What led you on your way?

Bruce: I remember when I was very young, before I'd went to school, I remember lying on the grass, looking up, and saying, How can anybody learn to read those squiggles? I had a feeling of insecurity. Later, when I was around all these doctors, I wondered how I could learn all the

things they have to know. It's just a vast amount of information. How could I ever become competent at that?

I always had these feelings, and I worked quite hard through school. I was really interested in chemistry and physics, and I enjoyed language to a certain degree. Obviously nothing to do with wine, because I came from a very staunch, teetotaler family. I've always felt that the chemistry I've had and the laboratory experience I've had has been a big benefit here. A lot of help.

Hicke: Did you have any teachers that were particularly helpful?

Bruce: Yes. Mr. Martin. He was our physics teacher in high school. He pushed us to the point where we had to learn quite a bit. So I appreciated his mentor capacity. Not that he had any particular interest in me. He didn't. But I got a lot out of it, and at one time I had to go back and thank him. "Thank you very much."

Hicke: Good for you. That's rewarding for a teacher, I think, to know that they've been able to have a strong influence like that.

Bruce: So, now let me see. There was a biologist. What was his name? Old man Youngerman. Yes. Youngerman. He was very strict, and he made us do vast amounts of work. I'll admit I learned a lot. So I appreciated him as well. I never felt like I needed to go around and thank him, though.

Hicke: Anything else about high school? Did you do sports? Did you have after-school jobs?

Bruce: I worked in the stage crew. Not that that influenced me particularly. I just enjoyed the camaraderie of some of the people--Karli, for example, whose name I gave my first son. Let's see, Barry, I named Barry after a friend from college. And Dale, that's a family name. And Dana was a friend from medical school.

Hicke: Karli was on the stage crew with you?

Bruce: My friend, Karli, was on the stage crew. Right. Exactly. So that's where all these names come from. It's funny, even with animals, it seems I always end up naming them somehow. You'd think that the mother would be the one that does that. But it seems like I've always ended up doing that. I don't know why. Not that it was a competitive thing at all. It was just that we'd come up with the names and we'd agree to them. Accept them. It seemed like, oh, this is a good name. Why don't we do this? So it was acceptable.

Hicke: What did you do summers?

Bruce: Well, I remember working on Blister Rust, which is a fungus disease affecting sugar pines in the Sierras. Wild currants and gooseberries are part of its life cycle. So we removed the wild currants and gooseberries to interrupt the Blister Rust life cycle.

Hicke: Where were you?

Bruce: Up near Quincy. And then there would be certain summers where I could go up and spend with Grandmother. I never knew my grandfather, on the paternal side; he died before I was born. Just like on the maternal side, the mother had died before I was born, or when I was very, very young in that case, I think.

Hicke: So you had one grandfather and one grandmother.

Bruce: So I had one grandfather whom I dearly loved, and a grandmother whom I would visit quite a bit and then go fishing in the Truckee, which was practically going through the middle of the town of Reno. I would do things like that and get myself out of mother's hair. Because she was pretty much running the family. As I say, Dad never came home to speak of. She was very, very busy in her profession. So it was kind of a lonesome thing. My brother, Bob, was alive at the time, but we didn't get along, so he never was around much. So I pretty much was on my own, preparing myself meals and things like that quite often. Not that we wouldn't have some occasions like Thanksgiving, when we'd have some friends in, and family. It was kind of a lonesome childhood, actually.

It seems like I would always reach out and I would make friends with the most unlikely people, like this person who came over from Finland. His name was Kinco Weslin. I'd make friends with some of these people that wouldn't have, that it wouldn't be easy for them to make friends. And some of the black students, whom I liked a lot. We didn't have very many of those, but it seemed like it was easy to make friends with them.

College and Medical School

Hicke: When did you decide to go to Stanford, and when did you decide to become a doctor? Which came first?

Bruce: Well, I think that being a doctor was pretty well in mind. When I went to the University of Nevada, which was '49, they had a pre-med course, so I came up to pre-med. And then when I went to Stanford, I was still in pre-med, as I was in UC Berkeley.

Hicke: Wait a minute. Let's sort this out. You went to, first, the University of Nevada?

Bruce: Nevada first.

Hicke: As a freshman? And then you transferred?

Bruce: I transferred to Stanford the next year, which would have been '50. And '51 would have been UC Berkeley.

Hicke: And you got your undergraduate degree at Berkeley?

Bruce: Actually that's true. After three years, I was able to get into Stanford Medical School.

Hicke: After three years of college?

Bruce: Yes.

Hicke: You graduated after three years?

Bruce: Graduated after three years.

Hicke: Did you go summers, too?

Bruce: No, no.

Hicke: You took a heavy load.

Bruce: Well, I don't recall that it was so heavy. But, that's the way it happened. I guess I must have made all of the requirements.

Hicke: Why did you choose Stanford Medical School?

Bruce: That's a good question. Why would I have chosen Stanford as opposed to, maybe UC Berkeley, or San Francisco?

Hicke: Was it closer?

Bruce: Probably. Probably it was closer. I'm trying to think. I married, back in 1950, or '51, and so I wasn't living at home, so it certainly wasn't for that. They had student housing that married people could rent at a reasonable rate, which is quite different than today, I guess. And then of course Stanford Medical School was still up at Stanford Lane Hospital, which is now Presbyterian, in San Francisco. I remember going into those astonishingly dark and dingy halls of Stanford Lane Hospital with all of the specimen bottles going up to the ceiling, and Mother commented at that point, "You were born here." That was a kind of illuminating comment.

Hicke: Let's get some dates here. When did you graduate from UC?

Bruce: Well, let's see. '53. And then I got my M.D. degree in '56.

Hicke: That was fast going.

Bruce: Then I went to my internship, which I got in, let's see, '56 and '57. That was at the San Francisco County Hospital, and was a very educational thing. Then in '57 to '60, I had my three years of dermatology residency training program up in Portland, at the University of Oregon Medical School Hospitals and Clinics.

Hicke: And how did you happen to go to Portland?

Bruce: Well, that's an interesting thing. I put in a certain number of requests, of course. Probably one, I guess, in Portland interested me, and I guess that's probably the reason I went there. I'm glad I did. It's interesting, because from the wine point of view, when I was going, Dick Erath and David Lett were the first two to start wineries in Oregon. Oh, that's not true. There was the guy down in the southern part of Oregon, Roseburg. He had started. But up in the McMinnville area. Dick Erath has Erath Wineries. David Lett has Erie [Vineyards]. Those were the first two. I might have stayed up there if they had started, because I think that area that those two people started is one of the best areas for it. Very good area. I notice that's where Bob Drouhin went in and did his thing.

II EARLY INTEREST IN WINE

Wines By Wheeler

Hicke: Maybe we should start talking about when you got interested in wine. I believe you made beer before you made wine. Is that correct?

Bruce: Well, let me tell you a story. When I was going to that medical school, I knew Jack then. Jack Smith. He was kind of a teetotaler like I was, but he became interested as well. I was on summer break, and I was working in the Santa Cruz mountains, right out of Soquel, down here, about three miles out of Soquel on a ranch. When I got there, I knew this ranch had water rights up this creek.

So I took my two-year-old son on my shoulders and we hiked up this creek for about two miles until we found a break in this pipe. The ranch had water rights in the spring that was forming this stream. It was a very rocky place and kind of steep. I put Karli down, and I said, "Now you're going to have to stay put, Karli, while I see if I can fix this thing." But he was a hyperactive child.

Hicke: And he was two, besides. That's a pretty active age.

Bruce: Yes. He wanted to help so bad. He could only hold himself in so long when he started screaming at the top of his lungs. Suddenly out of nowhere came the two people looking for the lost child. They happened to be Dan and Betty Wheeler. Unbeknownst to me, these people had a winery. Wines by Wheeler. Their logo is, "Work is the ruin of the drinking classes." It's kind of cute. They invited us to supper that night, and we came on over, and I was surprised because he says, "You have to come into our cave." It turns out it was really a winery--a hand-dug cave deep in this mountain underneath their cabin.

We had to taste some wines first because he was very proud. He got this wine thief out and he started taking wine out of all these barrels. Those names meant nothing to me. I think they were probably ten feet over my head. What I do remember is, after being in that cave for an hour and a half coming out, I said, "What's that odd smell?" and Danny says, "Well, Dave, I think that's fresh air." Kind of cute. But it planted a seed.

A Bottle of Richebourg

Bruce: I was very much into cooking at the time, because there's something very sensual about food. I went right out and I got these cook books with wine. One was Morrison Wood, *With a Jug of Wine*. Morrison Wood made a number of books along this line. That was a fun book. But it didn't take me very long to figure out that maybe I was spending more time than I should on specific ingredients, and so I broke down and I got real wine books, one of which was Alexis Lichen's *Wines of France*. I was reading about Burgundy, and he was describing the wines of Richebourg as having a noble robe. Somehow that sounded so good to me; I had to go and get a bottle of that.

Now the only store that was sanctioned to sell the DRC wines back then, at least in northern California, was Johnny Walker's, down at 111 Montgomery Street. It's no longer there. I walked in there and said, "Do you have a bottle of Richebourg?" He says, "Oh, yes, we do." And he brings up this bottle. I could read the label very well; it said Richebourg, but I also noticed the price. It said \$7.50. Of course, I was very poor. I had the holes in the bottoms of my shoes like a lot of my classmates. That sort of thing. I looked at the \$7.50. Back then, two dollars was a very expensive bottle of wine. I got those seven dollars and fifty cents down on the counter and I eventually had that bottle of wine in my grubby hands and took it home and we cooked a whole supper around that bottle of wine.

Well, it came time to open it. I think it had one of those two and a half inch corks that they put into what the French call a wine from a vineyard that is owned by a single owner. A vineyard that has the entire vineyard. They call it *Monopole*.

Hicke: Incidentally, I'm going to send the transcript back to you, so if there's anything you can't think of offhand, you can put it in later.

Bruce: At any rate, it had one of these big two and a half, I think it was a two and a half inch cork. And I said, "My God, this thing's pure cork." But I finally got it out. The minute I opened that bottle of wine, I mean, the whole room was pervaded by this floral, spicy aroma. I remember thinking, I guess you get what you pay for. As I was drinking that wine, eating that food, I was imagining myself on top of some mountain, walking through a vineyard. And of course the vineyard had to be Pinot Noir, and I was simply making the greatest Pinot ever made. So that's the reason I'm here.

Hicke: That was quite a memorable occasion.

Bruce: Sure was. My good friend Jack Smith, who went through an internship with me, Jack and Margaret, before they got married, they were there, too. He was becoming a vascular surgeon. Now he's retired. He's living up in Napa.

Martin Ray

Hicke: What happened after that?

Bruce: Well, let me see. Where were we? Oh, I was on summer break and I worked there for several years while I was going through medical school.

Hicke: Where?

Bruce: This ranch, down here out of Soquel. Well, let me see. Then I became interested in Martin Ray back in that period of time, because Pinot Noir in America was not very good. In fact, André Tchelistcheff made the statement that his '46 was good, his '47 was half good, and all the rest were bad. He blamed it on virus in the vines. There just wasn't much good Pinot Noir made in California at that time. But Martin Ray was making some pretty exceptional wines, like '51, '52, and '53. You could buy these wines for \$4 back then. That would be a horrendous price back then. I remember that we would get these wines together from various areas--primarily France, you know, Burgundy. And then when we would do the tasting, we were all convinced that Martin Ray was making the best wines back then.

Hicke: Who's "we"?

Bruce: Oh, I've had a lot of wine friends over the years. Back in that early era, Jack Smith was a very strong one, and there were others like Robert Knudsen, M.D.

I remember one time I was going around picking up all of his Pinot Noir Rosé, 1951. I went around and I picked up every bottle of that I could find in the Bay Area. Martin Ray got wind of this, and I received an invitation to his pre-vintage dinner, 1958.

Hicke: He didn't know you?

Bruce: No. He just sent this.

Hicke: He just heard that you were--

Bruce: Yes. And so, myself and my wife Carol and Jack and Margaret came to that, along with about sixteen other guests that he'd invited. I remember we got there about three o'clock in the afternoon. You know where Martin Ray is.

Hicke: Not exactly.

Bruce: He's part of the Santa Cruz Mountains; he's up above Saratoga. Mount Eden is presently there. With Jeff Patterson. Anyway, we got there about three o'clock, and he was preparing for harvest. The next day was going to be the crush for his champagne. He was dropping off the boxes, and the next morning the pickers, who were going to be us, were going to pick into these boxes. He was driving his tractor around with Robert Knudsen at that point. He comes in and he changes his clothes. It was a fairly cold evening. He pours the champagne. And his champagnes were wonderful, I remember. He had a Sang de Pinot and a Madame Pinot. Madame Pinot was the white, and the Sang de Pinot's was pink.

Hicke: These are sparkling wines?

Bruce: These were champagnes, what he called champagnes. These were sparkling wines. Back in that early era, he would always put a champagne cork in with an Agraf. You know what an Agraf is?

It's the thing that the champagne industry used. It's shaped like a "u". And so it fits over the top of the bottle holding the cork in, so the cork can't blow out.

Hicke: Oh, it's permanent?

Bruce: Well, he made it permanent. But the industry always said, Well, this is kind of clumsy looking, so they'd take that off and they would put a nice finish on. It is during the second fermentation period that they just lay them down and put them into the riddling rack.

Hicke: He made his sparkling wines entirely out of Pinot?

Bruce: I think his were primarily 100 percent Pinot. The next morning, he would take the free run into the Madame Pinot, and then the press, the last half, would go into the Sang de Pinot. The blood of the Pinot. Interesting names.

Hicke: Well, meanwhile, you were gathering for dinner, and he came in and changed and opened a bottle of something?

Bruce: Well, he'd come in and he'd pass champagne around. At that point he got together with one of his wine-drinking friends to decide on the evening's wines. First a couple of Pinots, and then to his Cabernet that he'd made back in 1947, which had a fairly high tannin. To limit the tannins he would place the bottle in front of the fireplace like in England, just to warm it up, and it would get up to a certain temperature. They decided that 78 was the perfect temperature to drink this particular wine. He did have names that he called his dinners, like a one-bottle dinner means that everybody drinks a bottle. Well, this one was something that we'd start at three o'clock. We didn't finish until three o'clock in the morning. So that turned into a three-bottle dinner.

Hicke: Per person.

Bruce: A good deal of which he drank himself. He got so drunk. Interesting personality. He had a wooden house, but it all burned down. So then he made this next one all out of concrete, and he'd put terraces all around the house so that he could have a nice picnic table out there. This was where we sat. We sat on this picnic table, and he sat with us. There was about a ten-foot drop to the rear of where he sat. He got so drunk, if it weren't for my wife Carol standing behind him at one point, I figure he would have fallen off. She caught him. But the most amazing thing, and I'm always astonished at this, is how a person can do all this drinking and keep talking. After a while, it's like he's holding court. He's talking to everybody, and everybody's quieted up at that point, because it's pretty difficult to drink that much wine and continue talking, but he was good at it.

Hicke: Tell me why his wine was so good.

Bruce: That's a good question. He made a comment, he says, "If you look the world over, you'll find still wines that are as good as mine, but my champagnes are the best," and this has a lot to do with his connection to Paul Masson. Are you familiar with Paul Masson?

Hicke: Yes. Now owned by Canandaigua Wine Company, I guess.

Bruce: Paul Masson, the real person, [not the winery], was there over the turn of the century. It must have been a very difficult period of time. The types of clones and things that they had, I guess

certain of them had to come over from Europe and Burgundy. But he was very much into champagne-making. That was his prime drink that he and Martin would drink.

But Paul Masson's wife never had much to do with the ranch. She always stayed down at the big house down in the valley. But his love was the winery and the vineyard, and sitting out and watching the sun go down and having a glass of champagne. Sounds kind of idyllic, actually.

Hicke: But you said Martin Ray made the best Pinots of all.

Bruce: Well, this is Martin Ray's statement. Martin Ray's the man that said, "My champagnes are the best." And I'll have to admit, they were awfully good. I don't know if you'd put them up against the great champagnes of the world. Not that Martin Ray didn't do that. He did that all the time. But of course we didn't get all the champagnes in this country as much as we do today. Now you can get just about anything you want.

Hicke: Was it the grapes or the way he handled them?

Bruce: Well, I'm not prepared to say. He would use an old basket press. It was a big basket press--as big as this table--and he would press these things out. He had the habit of keeping his wine in the still state in barrels for a very long time, and so they developed a very distinctive flavor. They would sit on their lees for three or four years.

Hicke: American oak, I suppose, or redwood?

Bruce: Well, he boasted once he got Louis Latour to send him his used barrels. He was boasting beforehand. I doubt he boasted after using them. Louis Latour laughed, I heard, I got the scuttlebutt on that. He thought it was a joke that someone would want his used barrels. At any rate, he was very, very appreciative of what Louis Latour was doing back then.

Martin Ray used no SO₂ [sulphur dioxide] whatsoever. He had to be very clean for that reason. And I, in my first fifteen years, I didn't use any SO₂ either. It's quite possible to make wine like that. The flavors are different in many senses. They're more robust. They show earlier. You have to be extremely careful about oxidation. But if you are, the wines can be wonderful.

Hicke: Okay. That's one good point.

Bruce: So his wines tend to have this unusually aggressive flavors. That's probably the reason that when we would put them up against regular Burgundies, we almost always would choose his.

Hicke: Do you know why he did this?

Bruce: It could have been his experience with Paul Masson. I don't know. I don't know why he did that. That brings to mind another interesting point. For the longest time, the red wines were good in California, but the white wines weren't. At one point, he sent Peter Ray, Eleanor's son, whom he adopted, and a Stanford professor to Burgundy and Champagne to see what they did. Peter came back and said, talking about the Chardonnays now, that they press the living bejesus out of those things. All of a sudden, white wines in California started getting better. It really was through his efforts that this happened.

Hicke: And it was because they pressed--

Bruce: Because the flavoring elements are in the skin, not in the pulp of the grape. They pressed it so vigorously that the flavoring element got into the juice. Martin Ray, and everybody else for that matter, was laboring under the idea, like they do in Champagne, that you use the free run juice. They thought the best wines are made from the freest run, you see?

Hicke: And so they left the good stuff.

Bruce: Certain wineries bragged that they brought over one of these big square presses. You just put the whole grape in there to press it without breaking the skin. So you get this free run juice. So everyone was laboring that the best wines come from this lightly pressed free run juice. But it's not true. The purpose of not breaking the skin is to avoid producing a darker color. You still have to press it to get the flavor.

People don't give Martin Ray credit, but he deserves credit for the quality of wines that California was achieving back then. He really was the instrument. He made a very real effort to improve the quality.

Hicke: We're talking about the fifties?

Bruce: He started in the forties. I think '46 was his first Martin-Ray vintage year. I know that he had Pinot Noir from '46 because he kept it around. But he must have sold off or done something with the '47 and '48 Pinots, because I think the ones that he started thinking were good enough started in '49. He was very strict about the whole process, and he was very strict on himself, too. Difficult person to get along with.

Hicke: I'm interested in him because I know he was very important, and of course we don't have much information about him.

Bruce: It's too bad, Eleanor's getting so old now. I don't know if you could get much out of her. But the daughter, Barbara, you know, they wrote that book, *Vineyards in the Sky*. You've read that, probably.

Hicke: Yes, I read it.

Bruce: But you almost have to read between the lines to get a true feeling--I'm not sure they were totally open about a lot that happened back then. You learn the kind of basics about him if you read that book.

Hicke: How did he happen to start on Pinots? Do you know?

Bruce: Oh, I'm sure it was Paul Masson. Because of the champagne connection.

Hicke: Oh, okay. So really his interest was champagne.

Bruce: Well, early on, Paul Masson, that was his number one wine. I think it was the wine that they were getting the most gold medals for back in that era. It was the wine that was beginning to influence people, because they were getting some notoriety.

Hicke: Was he local? Martin Ray? Did he grow up in this area? Do you know?

Bruce: Well, he was a broker in San Francisco. Then he came down here and bought the old Paul Masson winery, just above Saratoga. Then he felt that he needed even better drainage, so he looked to the mountains above it. He said, Now that's where I need to go. Up there. He looked at the oak trees and things like that, and he said it obviously has the water to support that, then that should do it. He had very strong feelings about that kind of drainage. I think most winemakers from Europe knew that you need great drainage, because you notice over there, even in Burgundy, the best wine comes from such slopes. Not the bottom, and not the top.

Hicke: You're demonstrating the middle part of the hill.

Bruce: Right.

Making Concord Grapes into Pinot Noir Wines

Hicke: As we go along, if anything more occurs about him, let me know. So far, you're still in medical school. I read that you were making beer.

Bruce: Oh, the beer? Well, I did when I was up in Portland. Made beer. But I didn't make it down here. But in Portland I had this need to be involved in something like that. So I did make beer on a number of occasions. It came out pretty good, actually.

Hicke: What do you mean, a need to be involved in something?

Bruce: Well, there were no grapes to make wine. Okay, I'll tell you one story I almost forgot about. I was walking through the halls of the University of Oregon Medical School Hospital, and George, who was a resident in surgery, came by. And he says, "Dave,"--everybody seemed to know I was into wine--"I live on a place there where they have all these grapes, and they always let them go to waste." I said, "They do? Maybe I could pick them." He said, "Yes, they look like they're about ripe, and I just think they're just going to sit there and go to waste like they always do." I said, "Well, can we set up a time? What time?" Well, we set up for Saturday at eight o'clock. So we go there and there are the grapes. They are Concord. But at that point, that didn't matter. They were grapes.

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Bruce: But George wasn't there. So I think we waited around till nine o'clock and I didn't know where the owners were. It was quite a large property. So about nine o'clock, I said, "Well, gee, George is not here, so why don't we get started picking?" And we do. We start picking these grapes. We had, it could have been maybe an acre at most, and we worked our way through maybe a quarter of that. At that point, from a rather imposing house that was way off in the distance, this girl came out on a bicycle. She saw us, and she immediately turned around and went back in. I said, "Uh-oh, owners maybe?" Then in about fifteen minutes, this man came out on a bicycle, wearing his tennis togs. And he goes up this road like this, and we're working over here. And he

looks over as he goes by, opposite us, goes up this way, turns around and gets off. He walks up and he says, "What are you doing?" And I say, "We're picking grapes." [laughter]

Hicke: You're picturing a jail cell?

Bruce: I said, "Didn't George tell you?" "George? George hasn't been back all week." Oh. Oh. Oh dear. Then I told him the story. And he says, "Well, my Aunt Jemima makes preserves out of this every year. So you can have the grapes up to there." We were very fastidious about picking the grapes just up to there. So we brought them home. We had an eleven-gallon beer vat. We pressed all the grapes with hands. We started fermentation with bread yeast and away it went.

It seemed complete to me--well, understand, the books back then weren't anything to write home about, so you were really doing it by the seat of your pants--I said, "Well, now what do we do?" We've got this stuff and the cap was dropping. I said, "We've got to figure out a way to press it." So I got an idea. Why don't we get a big piece of plastic, and we'll put a plank down? We'll put all the grapes on the plank. Then we'll put another plank over that. And we'll take a car? and run it back and forth on that while you're all holding the skirt up like this to hold the juice.

So it seemed to work great. Just squeeze all those grapes, we collected all this stuff, and eventually we put it into these one-gallon jugs. I made these check valves so that gas could get out but things couldn't get back in, out of corks and some needles. About half of it settled out very quickly, but it made a godawful wine. I mean, I might even have a bottle of it left. This was back in '59.

Hicke: With Concord grapes and Fleischmann's yeast, you can't expect much.

Bruce: But the funny thing is that I had eleven jugs, and half of these didn't settle out right away. This half just continued to be active. It was Christmas-time. I was shining a light on it and I could actually see the currents in here--the currents going on in this jug of wine. Well, eventually, that stopped. But I said, I wonder what that is. I take all these samples but the smears never showed anything. So I eventually did a dark field on it.

Hicke: What is a dark field?

Bruce: At one time, our field was called Dermatology and Syphilology. Syphilus was the great imitator much of which was cutaneous. And of course you have to learn to know how to do those kinds of laboratory studies.

Hicke: So that's some kind of test in the lab. That's a dark field?

Bruce: A dark field is a microscope that shines light like this.

Hicke: From the side.

Bruce: So you don't use stains. You can have living things and the light just shines off them, allowing you to see them, an ordinary microscope light shines straight through. But organisms that won't take stains are invisible. So I did a dark field, and there were all these long bacilli that looked like sausages. Bacilli. It had gone through a malolactic fermentation. These wines were pretty good. Not bad. In fact, I got so excited about it, we were going down to San Francisco to meet up

with the Smiths and Robert Knudsen and some others. They brought DRC wines, the most famous wines in Burgundy. They were having just a whole lot of different wines. So I brought this bottle down. It had a flocculate precipitate occupying perhaps half the bottle. So I had to very carefully decant it. I put this wine in glasses and passed them around. I wasn't telling them what it was. Robert Knudsen's comment was, "Mmmmm, a strange Pinot Noir." I didn't hear the "strange." All I heard was Pinot Noir. Here I'd done pure alchemy, going from Concord to Pinot Noir. Maybe that's the real reason why I'm in the wine business?

Hicke: [laughter] All you need is Concord grapes! So it was a success, then.

Bruce: Well, it turned out to be very palatable, even for Concord. Yes. Interesting. But that, I think, was maybe a milestone, or a stepping stone.

III DAVID BRUCE WINERY

Location

Hicke: So you kept on making some of this?

Bruce: No. I had to leave the next year. So the opportunity wasn't there. But then when I did come back to the Bay Area, I searched all over California tasting wines from everywhere. I decided that the only decent Pinot Noir being made was in the Santa Cruz Mountains. So naturally I had to go to the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Hicke: And you were determined on Pinot?

Bruce: Oh, yes. I had become what is known as a Burgundy man from that first exposure to that 1954 Richebourg. Not the greatest year, but in the wine business, especially if they're old wines, you speak of great bottles, not so much of great vintages. Bottle variation becomes more apparent with age.

Hicke: Were there any grapes growing in the Carneros region?

Bruce: I could be wrong, but I think Renés de Rosa and BV came a decade later.

Hicke: Other California Pinot Noirs weren't as good as the Martin Rays.

Bruce: Well, no. One of the big problems is that if Pinot Noir can go bad, it will go bad. You can start with good grapes and not end up with a good wine. Learning how to deal with that problem took a long time. Brettanomyces has probably ruined more good wine than any other particular organism. But that was an interesting era of deciding where to go in California. I tasted all the Pinot I could find. Decided it had to be in the Santa Cruz Mountains. When I came back to town, I was going to start looking in the Santa Cruz Mountains for vineyard land. It took me about a year to find this place, and we moved in here in 1961. We spent a year over at that property, that ranch I was working on, in a little cabin over there, until we found this property here. Then we moved here.

Hicke: I just wanted to ask you, before we got too far along, who else was making Pinot in the Santa Cruz Mountains? Was anybody?

Bruce: In the Santa Cruz Mountains? Back then? Only Martin Ray.

Hicke: So basically it was his wine.

Bruce: Yes. And obviously that had something to do with the man and his determination to make good wine.

Hicke: Okay. So you found property here and bought it in '61, did you say?

Bruce: '61.

Hicke: How many acres did you get?

Bruce: A little over forty acres.

Hicke: And will you tell me about the soil characteristics and that sort of thing?

Bruce: It is primarily sandstone. It's catalogued as a fine Hugo loam. We do not have visible chalk deposits.

Hicke: So is there anything distinctive about this soil?

Bruce: Good drainage. Good drainage. It's interesting. I've planted in areas that have no topsoil at all, and they just grew like crazy. I've had a theory on the Santa Cruz Mountains. I think that Ridge [Vineyards and Winery] has proved that their side of the hill, I call it the Cabernet side of the hill even though it's the Santa Clara side of the hill, is one of the classic Cabernet-producing areas in the world.

Hicke: This is the north side of the Santa Cruz Mountains

Bruce: As far as our wines are concerned, it was really the nineties where we put it all together. I am proud of our accomplishments at the Vintner's Club.

Hicke: Yes.

Bruce: Okay. I guess they're the longest continuous-operating wine tasting group in America, so far as I know. They have their major taste-off for Cabernet and Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and our vineyard has won that twice. I think our vineyard's the only one that's ever done that.

Hicke: And which side of the coast are you on?

Bruce: We're on the ocean side. What I call the Pinot Noir side of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Hicke: Yes. That's clearly the case. And in this forty-plus acres, do you have any microclimates, is there a variation within?

Bruce: Well, there always is. If you make wine from even a flat area, and if you make it in plots, and you keep each one separate, this one goes into one tank, and then another tank and so on, it's surprising the difference between those. In an area like this, you'll find the distinctive differences in different parts of the vineyard. One of our best areas is what I've always called the Pinot Noir slope up at the top. It's not as lush, but the quality of grapes is very high there.

Hicke: This is getting way ahead of the story, but since we're on it, do you ever ferment them separately?

Bruce: Oh, always. Always. Yes. Always try to keep these things separate.

Hicke: For how many plots, or however do you designate them?

Bruce: We do a lot of very small fermentations where we use open-top tanks, barely two tons. These are often kept separate, so we can really see what's happening.

Dermatology Practice

Hicke: Okay. Back to 1961. Did you decide to move here and then find your practice, or did your practice come first?

Bruce: I remember coming to town, and the first thing I did was I went out and I made 200 gallons of wine. That was the legal limit back then for a home winemaker.

Hicke: Which town are you talking about? Los Gatos?

Bruce: That was Soquel.

Hicke: Okay.

Bruce: That was in the Santa Cruz Mountains on the Santa Cruz side. Then I opened my practice. Otherwise, I'd have to wait a whole year in order to make wine.

Hicke: First things first. Let's talk about your practice. Did you open up a practice of your own?

Bruce: I practiced eighteen years in the Willow Glen area. Before that I practiced in, the town of Santa Clara, on Washington Street. I was there for six years.

Hicke: Was it hard to get started with the practice?

Bruce: I visited all the doctors in the area to say hello to them and get to know them better.

Hicke: So they would refer to you?

Bruce: So I'd get referrals, of course. It worked well.

Hicke: How long did it take you to gear up in your practice?

Bruce: Let me see. You'd hire a girl, obviously, for the front office. And you'd have to go around and buy things for it. I think within just a few weeks we were up and going.

Hicke: And you had patients already?

Bruce: Well, we had a few. I was making a real effort to get out and visit people.

Hicke: Did you have any patients that were particularly challenging?

Bruce: Oh, yes. Medicine is a fascinating business. Just to give you an example: when I was still in my residency training program, I had this patient who would come in every year, same time, with this extensive rash. Each year it was getting worse. And furthermore, this year, he had some signs of glomerulonephritis. It was becoming serious. I remember spending quite a bit of time with him. He'd just been in the prior year and his problems had a certain pattern. I said, "It could be a contact dermatitis." So I remember we went over his history in great detail. He brought in a car-load of things to patch test.

In that part of the world, one of the main nut trees was the filbert. This person lived in the filbert orchard. This person was reacting to everything that was underneath the filbert trees. In other words, this oleoresin drips from the leaves. He was allergic to the filbert oleoresin. So I find that if you really want to solve a contact allergy, you really have to get the person away from the cause. Building up resistance is something that we were not adept at at the time, and we're still not very good at it.

Hicke: So he had to move?

Bruce: The person really had to move. Yes. Otherwise, it was becoming serious. I mean, it was affecting the kidney.

Hicke: Anything else come to mind?

Bruce: I think I became very good at this kind of dermatitis, which was a large part of the practice. As an example, this one surgeon came in, and he had a rash on his hands. It was what I called the high-point disease.

Hicke: The knuckles.

Bruce: It turned out it was his rubber gloves. So some of these things are very easy and very direct. You can figure it out in very short order. He had to get a special glove.

Hicke: I was wondering what he could do about that, but I guess he got something besides rubber.

Bruce: There are non-allergic rubber gloves. And there's a host of interesting things that go into the production of rubber.

Hicke: Kind of like detective work.

Bruce: Very much so. One of the most common things that I was seeing was reactions to materials. Clothes. Sizing and things that they use. I never saw a true allergy to polyester, for example. So I liked it. But if you have a cotton polyester, you have to put the cotton into a strait jacket of plastic. It actually lays in this thing like a glove. It prevents it from twisting and contorting and wrinkling.

Hicke: Makes it permanent press.

Bruce: All cottons pretty much are dealt with in that fashion, and so are a lot of wools. It's a big industry.

Hicke: Wool is a problem, too?

Bruce: Well, as I say, wool as a natural fiber is quite often treated. Man-made fibers such as polyester and nylon do not twist and don't need treatment.

Hicke: But untreated wool, isn't that kind of a problem?

Bruce: Untreated wool? If you're allergic to lanolin, it could be. And wool itself is an irritant because it has these "hooks." But that's a physical thing. It's not a true allergy. But lanolin can be a true allergy. In fact, I had a nurse in one day, and she had a very strong reaction to Vaseline. Petrolatum. People can be allergic to the darnedest things. There are some things you don't think of twice until you actually see it with your eyes. Then you have to accept it.

Hicke: Did you have a lot of emergency calls? Or maybe this kind of practice--

Bruce: Well, I had probably more than my share. I tried to be conscientious. I had one person who was allergic to poison oak. He'd be working in it. It was a workman's comp. case. So I think we were getting three dollars a visit. He called me at two o'clock in the morning, and he was suffering so much, I went down to see him. I'll never forget what he said: "When I hurt, everybody hurts." [laughter] Sometimes you almost have to take the clothes and burn them. He was so sensitive to the poison oak oleoresin that you almost couldn't wash it out.

Dermatology is very fascinating. I enjoyed it very much because it was very challenging and there was a lot to it. An area that really needs to be developed improving our understanding of antibodies and immunology immunity and the like. We need to learn how we can use these things to our advantage.

Hicke: Do you do any consulting in that field?

Bruce: No. I've always been the sort that I cut the umbilical cord and I always look forward. I never look back.

Hicke: Let me ask just one more thing. What do you think your career as a dermatologist contributed to your career as a winemaker?

Bruce: It certainly made me keenly aware of conditions and diseases, especially in vines. The laboratory experience was wonderful, you know. In surgery, you practice sterile technique. This was especially beneficial, particularly during my early years when I wasn't using any SO₂ whatsoever. For example, you have this barrel, and usually there's a certain amount of debris that collected around the wooden bungs. You have your wine and your worse situation right next to it. That was when sterile technique was important.

Hicke: Sort of learning the super significance of sterility, is that what you're saying?

Bruce: Take Brettanomyces. It is a serious offender. It causes lots and lots of trouble. And Pinot Noir seems to be more susceptible to it than any other grape.

Hicke: Since we're talking about that, what do you do about it?

Bruce: There is no magic bullet to kill it. It's something you have to learn to live with. Mother Nature made it to fit into a niche. You know, you have your *Saccharomyces* yeast that ferments sugar down to, maybe, 0.2 percent. Bret takes up from there and ferments it all the way down. Then if the organic substrate is susceptible, it continues to work on that. As it's fermenting sugar, it just smells like a yeast fermentation. But if it starts working on the organic substrate, then you get into these horrible horse-barny odors, which can be absolutely vile if they're strong enough.

Hicke: Is there any way to rescue it after it's happened?

Bruce: At this level it is almost impossible to blend out. We're talking about such tiny traces. It takes so little. You have to be alert. You have to know what you're doing. And I have got a crew here that is so sensitive to *Brettanomyces*. Two of them are much better than I am. For years I thought I was the most sensitive person that I knew.

Planting the Vineyard

Hicke: Let's get into planting the vineyard. Tell me how you did it and how you decided what to plant.

Bruce: Early on I decided that it only made sense to plant the four great grapes. And you know what those are.

Hicke: Well, I've read what you planted. Cabernet, obviously Chardonnay, obviously Pinot.

Bruce: And white Riesling, just to see what happens, and go from there. This land is so steep that I terraced it all. I had to get out with my transit and run the slopes. I also went to Davis and I talked to Dr. Alley about obtaining various clones.

Hicke: What clones did you get?

Bruce: I don't believe the clonal science was as well known as it is today. So I got what they had. Davis developed the Mother Plot Program. Different wineries would have special plots where they would plant various clones to clean them up. This was primarily to rid the vine of virus infections. From Davis sources I planted Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Riesling came later. There was some hearsay evidence that the Pinot was originally brought over by Martin Ray.

Bruce: Maynard Amerine was very interested in the Santa Cruz Mountains early on, and I think with Martin Ray as well. So I think that there may be something to that. This Pinot clone came out of the Arroyo Seco Mother Plot area near Salinas Valley.

Hicke: Then Amerine used it in the Mother Plot?

Bruce: This is a distinct possibility. But I can't guarantee that. Interestingly, people have more recently come to call it the David Bruce clone. Dick Graff of Chalone came by in the early seventies. He

said he liked my Pinot Noir and he wanted to buy cuttings. I was happy to sell them to him. So he planted quite a bit in the Mac 1 and Mac 2 parts of his vineyards that he has down in Chalone. In 1991 Pierce's disease destroyed our vineyards. So we had to buy back grapes from him, from our own clone.

Hicke: David Bruce Clone.

Bruce: Yes. It was interesting how it happened. In 1990, I was tooling around up in Andersen Valley visiting Handley [Cellars] and Lazy Creek [Vineyard], and Navarro [Vineyards]. I asked, "Well, what clone do you use?" They said, "Oh, we use the David Bruce Clone." I said, "I beg your pardon." So you see, when we bought the grapes back from Chalone they had gone full circle.

Hicke: So you got some back.

Bruce: So actually we have replanted some of the "David Bruce" clone here. But we've also planted quite a few other clones as well. That, of course, was after the Pierce's disease hit us. We had the infestation of '91. There was pretty much a total kill in the Pinot Noir in a single year. It took two years to do that in the Chardonnay.

Hicke: I want to ask about that again, but let's get your vineyard planted first. Did that take you about a year to get those grapes in?

Bruce: Oh no! We couldn't do it that fast, for the simple reason that you couldn't get enough cuttings back then for the original planting. We were actually planting by cutting. No, there just wasn't that much available. I had worked with Davis and they could supply me with a certain amount. So I would plant those. And then I would build up from my own stock. So I couldn't plant the whole thing all at once. No, it took probably three years. Four years.

Hicke: Just to get it planted, let alone harvested.

Bruce: Right. Yes.

Hicke: You said you planted the first three, and then the Riesling.

Bruce: Yes, the Riesling came later. Right.

Hicke: Was that as hard to get as the--

Bruce: No. Things were getting better.

Hicke: There were no nurseries?

Bruce: I'm trying to remember all of the ordeals that we went through. I wanted to get as good quality as possible. That's why I was dependent on Davis at that time. I can't recall how many places we tried.

Hicke: Did they give you any other suggestions? Did they help you decide what else to plant besides Pinot?

Bruce: No. I knew what I wanted.

Other Vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains

Hicke: You decided because of which wines you wanted to make.

Bruce: Yes.

Hicke: What else was being grown in the Santa Cruz Mountains?

Bruce: Not a lot. In the Santa Cruz Mountains back then, there were very few vineyards. Bargetto had no vineyard. Bob Mullins had a little bit of Cabernet. Martin Ray had Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Later he put Riesling in a few rows as well. Who else back then? Now, the old Paul Masson vineyard was basically defunct. I don't think there was much of anything coming off it. People hadn't got into the thing of planting vineyards like the small plots that people are doing nowadays. Lots of small plots. No, you had to wait a good decade before that started to happen.

Hicke: It seems to me you were taking a huge risk. What was your thinking about that?

Bruce: You can't think of risks on something like that. If I were thinking from the risk point of view, I would have quit long ago, because there have been so many problems that we had to overcome.

Hicke: But you were virtually by yourself here. And I guess, well, you knew Martin Ray's wine, but nothing else indicated how Pinot would do here.

Bruce: A group from SRI lead by Dave Bennion came into the Santa Cruz Mountains at that time. I think their '61 was their first crop. They bought existing vineyards from Short. The vineyard was primarily Cabernet. Now was there any other Cabernet that was existent at that time in the Santa Cruz Mountains? There was quite a bit of vineyard in the Hecker Pass area, really foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. I'd almost forgotten about Short. That's the one that sold to Dave Bennion.

Bob Mullins started very early, about the same time the Ridge people came in, about the same time I did, but they came into an existing vineyard. How could I forget Joe Locatelli? Down there, because I bought the vineyard eventually of Zinfandel. That's where Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard is now. Oh, then there's Schermerhorn Vineyard, which had Traminer. Was that a Gewürtztraminer? I don't think so simply because it didn't taste like a gewürtz. A little bit of Chardonnay. There was another white grape there. Pinot Blanc, I believe. That was about a mile out of Scotts Valley, going up Highway 17. In fact, you could see the vineyard from Highway 17. And if you stand on top of that vineyard, you can look over and see the Locatelli vineyard. It also grew a little bit of Mataro [rolling the r], as he pronounced it, and Mission. Mataro.

Oh, and there was a guy down here, I forget his name, Allen Smith has the property now, but he did have about an acre of Sauvignon Blanc, which I did buy and make into wine. Actually, it was pretty darn good wine, when you could get the acidity down. So there were some old plots around. They would sell to Paul Masson or Almaden. Locatelli was selling it to probably home

winemakers. Oh, and there was another one. Also a Locatelli. Ernest Locatelli. He was up on Empire Grade. Of course, when I came to town, the Pinot Noir vineyard was defunct. Well, maybe everything was defunct. I guess there were no grapes left. Then going up to where Dave Bennion bought the property for Ridge, down below there were more Zinfandel vineyards along that road. Montebello Ridge Road.

I've probably left some out somewhere, but those were the obvious ones. Not so obvious, I guess. It took me a while to remember them. You'd think I'd remember them. Ever read this wonderful book *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps* by Alan and Barbara Piece? They're an Australian couple. They point out a woman uses both hemispheres of the brain and she can go back and forth, back and forth, whereas a man only uses one side. To remember stuff like that, I need a woman's brain.

Hicke: That was a great rundown, because I wanted to ask you what was going on here at the time you bought. That was really good. When I send you the transcript back you can read it over.

Bruce: I might think of some more, but I don't know, because even if you go down in the southern part, there isn't any vineyard up in there. A lot of vineyards now in various spots. No, I think that probably covers it. Actually, if the reader wants precise detail on vineyards, contact our local wine historian, Charles Sullivan. (408) 356-9957.

Hicke: It sounds like none of them was making premium varietal wines.

Bruce: I remember we went to dinner with the Ridge people one time, and they brought out a bottle that Short had made, and it must have had the fermentation where you get higher alcohol, fusel oils. I remember within one sip I knew this would become one of those terrible headaches. They usually wait until maybe midnight, or three o'clock in the morning, and then it just really hits you. The big problem, of course, is brandy. Brandy, if you have too much of the heads and tails, this is where you get into that problem. But his wine had a serious problem. It was dangerous.

Hicke: Let's just go for one more question. What was on the vineyard property when you bought it?

Bruce: Oh, they had German plums, and an old Christmas tree area that had been allowed to go fallow.

Hicke: A tree farm?

Bruce: Well, it was on the side of a hill here, but nobody had dealt with it for years. Around the house there was some Golden Delicious. Oh, and there was a winter pear. I remember going out about midnight one time and seeing that silhouetted. You know, they're just brown and ugly, but they taste so good. They're firm, you know; they almost fracture when you bite into them, winter pears. But this thing, it was no bigger than that. There were a few things around like that. Quince that you make jelly out of.

Hicke: Did you have to cut those down to plant?

Bruce: Eventually those all came out, yes. There were, obviously, old grapevines around. At one time there was a vineyard that before Prohibition was being made, I think, into local wine. In the cellar of the original single frame house, there was an old puncheon barrel sitting there. So they

obviously were making the wine. Then there were all the rumors about what happened during Prohibition. They were apparently making wine or distilling it. But how true that is, I don't know.

Hicke: Is there anything else about planting the vineyard, and then we'll stop for today?

Bruce: No, nothing, it just needed terracing and a lot of work in clearing the area, which we pretty much did by hand.

Hicke: And finding the vines.

Bruce: Yes, getting the appropriate vines. It was a piecemeal thing back then, because I didn't have any money.

Hicke: Were you working full time as a dermatologist?

Bruce: Right. Basically, two full-time jobs, the winery and the medical practice. I worked full time in the medical practice up to about '83, and then I retired in '85.

Hicke: Okay. Well, let's retire here for the day.

Making Wine in the 1960s

[Interview 2: February 22, 2001] ##

Hicke: Yesterday when we left off, you had just been planting the vineyard and I think we more or less covered that. So why don't we start with whatever came next--the winery?

Bruce: You could buy grapes back then, which I did. I started making wine back in 1960, when I first came to town, when I was over on Laurel Glen Road, which was three miles out of Soquel.

Hicke: So you didn't wait for your vineyard.

Bruce: No. No, heavens. I started buying grapes primarily from John Rafanello, a grape broker down in the Morgan Hill area. Incidentally, that area of Santa Cruz Mountains, coming down into the foothills right in that area of Morgan Hill and Gilroy, is really one of the unsung areas of good grape quality. Very high quality in that area. That's where some of the vineyards that we drew grapes from were.

In fact, I ended up using all the grapes out of a specific vineyard, Mary Carter's, back in that era of time, which was Zinfandel, Petite Syrah, and other minor grapes, one of which was Grenache. That Grenache was so good. I'd give anything in the world to find a good vineyard like that that produced that quality of Grenache, because it makes certainly one of most distinctive wine of any that I can imagine. If you have one that really shows off the character of Grenache, you never forget it. Unfortunately, it's extremely hard to find on the world market, to find a wine of that quality.

Hicke: And there's none being grown around here anymore?

Bruce: Well, there is Grenache. Grenache was one of the more populous grapes planted in the valley at one point, and they used it for rosés and things of this sort.

Hicke: You still make that Grenache, right?

Bruce: Well, we get some grapes from the Salinas Valley. They're so-so quality, but it makes a very pleasant wine. But it's not what I'm talking about. It's not to the level of what Grenache can do.

Hicke: Those days are gone?

Bruce: Well, I wouldn't say they're gone. It's just a matter of getting a vineyard in the right area. If such a thing came along, it would be fun to make wine of that quality.

Hicke: What kind of grapes were you buying from John Rafanello?

Bruce: It was primarily Zinfandel back then. He interestingly lived right on the corner of Highway 152 and Morgan Hill Road. And that, incidentally, was all Grenache that he planted probably after Prohibition. Or maybe before, I'm not sure.

Hicke: Were you buying the Grenache from him?

Bruce: Did I buy Grenache back then? The answer is yes, I certainly did. 1969 is the first Grenache I bought from him. I was under the impression that you made that into a rosé, which is what I did. In '69, it was a rosé. I remember I'd sold it all off, and probably fifteen years later, or twenty years later, really, I was up with Wayne Strohecker in Portland, and he happened to have some. We pulled it out and it was just still vibrant and going like gangbusters. It was just a lovely wine. Then the next year, 1970, I made it into a full-blooded red. And 1971. And then I couldn't get anymore after that.

Hicke: Well, back to 1961, where and how were you making the wine?

Bruce: I divide my winemaking times into periods. The sixties decade, the seventies decade, the eighties decade and the nineties decade. In the 1960s I was making wine almost entirely from the Santa Cruz Mountains. I started off buying some grapes from John Rafanello, and then we were getting into using our own grapes and then reaching out for other grapes in the Santa Cruz Mountains, namely the Schmerhorn vineyard was available, and we were making wine from that.

Hicke: What kind of grapes?

Bruce: That was primarily Chardonnay and Traminer.

Hicke: What were you using for equipment?

Bruce: Oh, we had a hand crusher, and we had a basket press.

Hicke: Like about four feet in diameter, something like that?

Bruce: Four feet sounds about right. And maybe four feet high. We crushed the grapes--and this was typical California style of making wine. You'd put it all through a crusher and a stemmer. Then you'd put it into a vat, and ferment it out. They were always open top vats at that time. Then you would drain off the liquid leaving the lees when the fermentation was complete. The lees would be pressed in the basket press. With the whites, you did pretty much the same thing. You crushed all the grapes, and I never stemmed them at that point, and you pressed them.

It was at that point that Peter Ray, earlier, had gone over to France, and he found out that the more you squeezed it the more flavor you got. So we used to start the pressing in the evening after we'd done all of the picking of the grapes. I'd probably end up with the last pressing at three o'clock in the morning. You wouldn't get but a gallon or two, but this was highly concentrated, interesting stuff. I always think of the sixties as being when we made so many different Zinfandels. It was a lot of fun making those. They were from the Hecker Pass area and then from the Santa Cruz Mountains. We were making all of these different Zinfandels, and we gradually begin to reach out and go beyond Santa Cruz Mountains and making Zinfandels from those areas too.

Hicke: Did you keep all the vineyards separate--your Zinfandels--or did you blend?

Bruce: I kept them separate, probably to a fault.

Hicke: Well, I wouldn't say that. You were way ahead of your time if you were doing that.

Bruce: Well, you know, sometimes they probably should have been blended out. But I was really a very staunch purist in that regard, and tried to keep them very much separate so that you could get a feeling of what it was like. It was a fun thing, an interesting thing to do. It didn't always make the best wines, but it was a very strong learning experience. I mean, you have to do these things. You make the wine, and it's nice when the fruit is so strong. But to me, it's not a really good wine until you can kind of watch it over several years and see how it ages and matures into a nice claret-style wine. Zinfandels clearly do that sort of thing. They can become very lovely with age.

So making the wine, you need the longevity. You know, they say the definition of a great wine is one that has wonderful varietal characteristics and also can go the mark. What good is it if it can hit it peak and is gone, you see? You want to produce something that you can be proud of at five and ten and more years down the road.

Hicke: So you make your first batch of wine, and the second batch of wine comes along and you hardly can tell what was good and what was bad about the first batch. Am I correct?

Bruce: No, no, because you're obviously following it to see what it's like and what it's doing.

Hicke: Okay. So you can tell what it's like.

Bruce: That's part of the learning experience is to really make the wine and see how they age.

Hicke: Even within one year you can tell?

Bruce: No, the fruit's still pretty high. It goes kind of like this: you have a high fruit level, and it drops off. At some point it will drop, and then you get bottle bouquet development. You have this kind

of hiatus that might be in the six-to-ten-year period where the bottle bouquet hasn't developed yet. Many people would say, "Gee, the wine's going over the hill," when it really hasn't begun to develop. The fruit drops off, you want the bottle bouquet to start fairly early. When it fails to fill in the hiatus gap, I call the "teenage period."

Hicke: And how do you do that?

Bruce: Well, I suspect it has a lot to do with getting a reasonable extract out of the wine so that it can fill in the holes. Some of the vineyards would insist on having this slow development. Not that they didn't become lovely wines, they could become very lovely wines. But how to avoid the teenage period? Even white wines can do that if they're big enough. I remember talking with Dr. Alley and he described white wines, he said, "A white wine will be at this level, and all of a sudden it will go up to this level." He basically was describing the same thing.

Hicke: And do the tannins, then, have some--

Bruce: Absolutely critical. I mean, tannin chemistry is where winemaking is at, whether it's white wine or red wine. If you talk to 100 people, "Well, why do you like Burgundies or wonderful Pinot Noirs?" Fifty percent right off the bat will say, "Well, it has this lovely velvety texture." Then they go on to describe various nuances. And that really applies to any wine, certainly in the red wine category, whether it's Cabernet or Pinot Noir or Zinfandel, or Grenache, for that matter. Understanding the tannins.

One of the things about grapes, they all have their personality. Of course, the area, the geographical area, may make a distinct difference. But there is a continuity of personality in, say, Pinot Noir, as opposed to Cabernet, as opposed to Grenache, or Zinfandel. You have to come to learn these personalities. Very important. Pinot Noir is demanding. I've always called it the Dune of wine making. You need to read *Dune* to understand what I'm talking about. To me, *Dune* is probably one of the best science fiction I've ever read.

Hicke: Is that four or five volumes?

Bruce: Yes, the first volume, I think, was the best. Pinot Noir is the Dune of wine making because there are so many things that can go wrong. But when you really come to understand the chemistry of winemaking, then I think you can make a decent wine from almost any grape. Obviously, you have to spend, and we're learning to spend, more and more time in the vineyard, because that's where the quality is. My grandmother always said, you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It's important to have good quality grapes.

Hicke: What made you decide to keep the vineyards separate?

Bruce: Well, remember I was an absolute purist back then. Martin Ray was easily making the best Pinot Noir in the state. He also made some pretty spectacular Cabernets. So I was steeped in his lore, if you will. One of the things that was important was the *appellation controlee*. He tried to do that, and I still think that's kind of a neat idea.

It's inevitable that it will happen. Areas that produce great Cabernet, like Ridge over on Monte Bello, or as we're discovering in Pinot Noir here, these will become very special areas as more and more knowledge is learned about them. Each area, I think, will have their specialties. Pinot

Noir is the right thing to do in Oregon. It's too bad that America turns their nose up at Riesling, because I think that might be the proper white grape to grow up there.

Hicke: Yes, I think it's because Rieslings used to be sweet, and we still think of a Riesling as being sweet.

Bruce: Gave it a bad rep, you know.

Hicke: But I think Rieslings are wonderful.

Bruce: Well, out of Germany, but I think even the Germans, every time I get a chance to talk about Germans, and in particular winemakers, it sounds like they're going drier all the time.

Hicke: Oh, yes. And Alsace.

Bruce: Well, they've been dry for a long time. But unfortunately, some of them are going sweet now, especially with the Gewürzes. It kind of ticks me off.

Hicke: Retrogression?

Bruce: I think so.

Hicke: Definitely in the wrong direction. So we're still in the sixties here.

Bruce: In the sixties, the Chardonnay didn't come on till the very, very end. For example, the 1968 Chardonnay was probably one of the best Chardonnays we ever made. I actually started in '60. '61, then '62, '63; '64 was a great year in the Santa Cruz Mountains and we made a wonderful Zinfandel in that year. And '68 was a wonderful year, too.

The in-between years were kind of cold weather Zinfandels, which were interesting. They had very brilliant noses. Almost monotone, brilliant, almost like a Beaujolais type quality, in a sense. The acidities were fairly high, and of course I was making wine by the seat of my pants, so I didn't always understand the malolactic fermentation, or what to do about it, or how to force it to happen. So some of these wines were a bit on the tart side.

But interestingly, European wines back then--and we drank lots of them, because we could afford them--were surprisingly high in acid. The TAs [Total Acids refers to the lemony quality--not tannin] were high. So I didn't mind that. Of course, California has gotten softer and softer and softer and softer, almost to the point where it's too soft, as far as some wines go. It's kind of a growing-up thing.

Hicke: When did you build the winery?

Bruce: The first winery was built in '64, and is that little building, twenty-four by thirty-six feet, and I filled that up in short order. By 1968 we had to build the second building. We just recently built the other building that's on the other side of the road as you drove up. So that's when that happened. We used that little building for a tasting room for years and years, and didn't really change until we built this new building.

Hicke: Just went into the tasting room. But I haven't seen the other parts yet.

What did you use for equipment for your first winery? I guess you had that basket press.

Bruce: Many of those things that I've mentioned. One thing that I would do, and I suspect in Bordeaux, for example, that they really did bottle from barrels, and in Burgundy, when I went there in 1977, I watched them bottle from barrels, which was interesting. These were some fairly good-sized wineries in Burgundy that were still bottling from barrels. And so I bottled from barrels. I would number all these barrels. I think in 1969, for example, 1970, I think I did like forty and fifty different wines, by barrel and numbered them as such.

Hicke: What was your case production?

Bruce: In the sixties, it probably was somewhere between 2,500 and 5,000 cases. Fairly good size, at least for one person.

Hicke: Did you have a winemaker or somebody helping you?

Bruce: Back during that period of time, you'd have people help you in harvest, and when you do the bottling and pressing, that sort of thing. You'd have help.

Hicke: Temporary?

Bruce: Some, well, the people that worked in the vineyard were full time. Early on I had just one, and later a family. It worked out pretty well for well into the seventies. Then at some point I did get a winemaker, but that was, let me see, Steve Millier, when did he first come on board? Probably in 1972, perhaps. And then I had Keith Hohlfeld coming on about 1982.

Steve Millier, probably '74. I think he was there for about eight years. He has his own wine now—Milliare wine—and he works for that big outfit up in Murphy, Ironstone. He came out very well. Doing quite well. They made all their money in truck crops in the Sacramento area. More money than they knew what to do with, so they made a winery. I guess they got rid of some of the money. [laughs]

In the sixties, we concentrated on Zinfandel.

The 1970s

Bruce: The seventies was a period in which I expanded buying grapes from San Luis Obispo County, to the Tri-County area. I made wine from at least eleven different counties, the valley, Amador and El Dorado counties, and from many vineyards, year after year. So I had an opportunity to really get to know some of these vineyards and the grapes that came off them.

Hicke: You went to all these places yourself and bought the grapes or made the arrangements?

Bruce: Yes, I did it all myself. Yes. I was always the one that was involved in reaching out.

Hicke: How would you find out about these, talk to other people?

Bruce: Well, you know, you're always talking to people and seeing what's available, and occasionally taking a quick trip and seeing what you could see. Amador, I'm forgetting the name of that vineyard that became very famous back then. I should remember it, but I don't.

Hicke: The one that Sutter Home had?

Bruce: The one that Sutter Home made early on. Do you remember the name of that vineyard?

Hicke: No.

Bruce: At any rate, that really kicked that ball off. So I became interested in checking that out. Ridge was making some wine out of the San Joaquin Valley, so I tried that for several years, which was actually an interesting experience. Very interesting experience. It taught you about a different level of grape. Not that they were bad, just that they were very different.

In fact, I've been accused of a number of those. Even in more recent times, people would call me up and say, "Your such and such 1974 Zinfandel, you lied, it's really a Pinot Noir." You know, that sort of thing. It's fascinating. I really would keep these things separate as to specific vineyards, and it was something that Dave Bennion at Ridge was doing quite a bit. It seemed like the right thing to do, because of my exposure to Martin Ray. Later on he would only deal with his own grapes. He wouldn't buy. That's not 100 percent true, but it's pretty close to it.

Hicke: Did you keep a huge, expansive notebook to keep track of all these? Or did you keep it in mind?

Bruce: Well, I certainly had to keep track of this sort of thing, and do the planning, and figure out how many grapes we were going to get. I was always experimenting, trying a different vineyard, as we were working with the old vineyards, you see. The 1970s was the era of reaching out and getting a feeling of what California really could do. We even went down to Temecula.

Hicke: So that characterizes the seventies?

Bruce: That characterizes the seventies. At that time we were best known, far and away, for our Chardonnays. As I say, I think that 1968 Chardonnay that really got its exposure in the early seventies was probably one of the best. Then I came out with a number of so-called "late harvest" Chardonnays, which were just late pick, really. They weren't high alcohol. Certainly no more high alcohol than what you find today.

Hicke: That was pretty early on for anybody doing a late harvest.

Bruce: Well, that was in 1969, '70, and '71, and there were three people that without knowledge of each other got into late harvest Zinfandels. One was Dave Bennion at Ridge, and one was Bob Travers of Mayacamus Vineyards. Each one of us was making late harvest wines, unbeknownst to each other. In fact, I just got a call on one of my so-called late harvest wines of 1978. I did make a small amount of late-harvest sweet Zinfandels in the '70s. Somebody has it in their cellar and they want to know what it's all about. Well, after three years, I was known as Mr. High Alcohol for a decade. Because I think, 1970, I think I had some wines that actually achieved an 18.8 percent alcohol.

Hicke: Eighteen point eight?

Bruce: Eighteen point eight percent alcohol. And these were a natural fermentation.

Hicke: Zinfandels?

Bruce: All Zinfandels. Well, not true. Petite Syrah as well. Does that ever get up that high? Probably not higher than 15 percent. So we made these wines, but I figured out after three years that it was becoming apparent that if you make a dry, late harvest wine, that ultimately what you end up is a dried-up port. And I said, "This is not what I want to do." I was exploring the limits. I was going to the top. After all, there was a lot of really low-alcohol stuff, but it wasn't very good. I was trying to find out how in the world to make a good wine. So I had to explore this area as well.

Hicke: Well, we talked yesterday about risk taking, and you kept that up, didn't you?

Bruce: I was always kind of an explorer. I guess it's my intrinsic curiosity as to what was going on.

Hicke: Someplace along the way you made Carignane.

Bruce: Oh, Carignane. Yes. Carignane came off of Mary Carter's vineyard down in Hecker Pass. Very good wine. In fact, I still have some of it. In fact, I've used Carignane from more than one area. But returning to late-harvest wines, the only kind of late-harvest wine I'm going to make is when they're very sweet. I used grapes from El Dorado, and Hecker Pass for that purpose. It seemed like every even year lent itself to making late-harvest sweet Zinfandels, so I did '72, '74, '76, '78.

So this question is about the '78. It's actually a rather nice port-style wine. It's a late harvest, so how high would the alcohol be there? I don't remember, but it would probably only be around 15 percent, something like that. Well, that was a fun thing to do. It taught me a great deal about what I really wanted to do. And this is, of course, a personal thing--where I wanted to spend my efforts.

After that, in the eighties, I became much more interested in making what I call "food wines." I was not as interested in making food wines early on. It was the late-harvest interlude that told what I really wanted to do. I wanted to make wines which would not only be very nice when they were young, but that they'd be very nice when they got older. I was just shooting for wines that fit the definition of great wines.

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Hicke: Well, maybe we should start with a description of a food wine.

Bruce: Food wine is certainly, basically where I started. When I decided I wanted to make the greatest Pinot Noir ever made, that has to be a food wine. But these interludes were very instructive. The seventies were just reaching out in California and exploring what was available. I even made wines that came out of the Mendocino area.

Hicke: You bought some from Andy Beckstoffer.

Bruce: I bought some lovely Gewürtztraminer from him. A pity that people don't like dry Gewürtztraminer. I could pull out my 1980 today, and I think you'd probably like it. It still has that lovely, spicy perfume. Very dry. Completely dry. I refused to make it sweet at all, because I didn't want it to be sweet. I made the Chardonnay and the Riesling and a Gewürtztraminer in 1980, and the Gewürtztraminer is far and away the best of the three today. I've had quite a few Chardonnays which would go twenty years, too, especially on the Santa Cruz Mountains because they seem to live longer.

Hicke: I think a lot of people would like something besides Chardonnay, and even Sauvignon Blanc, now, is getting to be so common. So I don't know why they don't go to Riesling and Gewürtztraminer.

Bruce: I don't understand Sauvignon Blanc. That puzzles me. I just spent a lot of time over in New Zealand, and I think they're doing a great job with dry Rieslings and dry Gewürtztes. People are going for the Gewürtztes. I don't care much for the grassy wines like Sauvignon Blanc. In fact, as I said, I think if you're going to do Sauvignon Blanc, you should avoid that grassiness by going to El Dorado and places like that. But people don't seem to mind the grassiness. I remember producing a Sauvignon Blanc out of Santa Barbara. It was a big wine, very grassy. Some critics just loved it, but not me. [laughs]

Hicke: You have to know what you like.

Bruce: There's no point in this world to try to please everybody. You can't do it. It's impossible. You might as well please yourself. I thought that even as a physician, you set this filter up and people will either get through it or they won't. So you do the best job that you can, and this tends to determine who your clientele is, or who likes your wines, for that matter. I think that's the only way to do it. You make it, as much as you can, so you yourself like it. That has always been my principle, to make it so that I like it. If I don't like it, I have a problem. How can you sell something that you don't like? To me, it's impossible to do. But I suppose if you're the perfect salesman, you can sell anything.

Hicke: Well, now that we're into that, and let's still be talking about the sixties and seventies here, but let's talk a little bit about sales and marketing--how that evolved.

Bruce: Well, let's see. Back in 1975, earlier on, I was selling locally, because people would come to the winery--

Hicke: In the sixties?

Bruce: In the sixties, and in the seventies. Of course, this continued all the way through, because we'd have a tasting room, and we'd even do special events here. We'd invite people, we'd sit around, and my original ones were around the kitchen. Right here. We'd have people come up and we'd show them wines, and they would buy the wines here. Right in this room. A lot of people still remember that, which is interesting.

Hicke: Yes. When did you open the tasting room?

Bruce: Well, that was a winery, you see, from '64 to '68. So we couldn't do much tasting there. There wasn't any room. But as soon as we built the new building, from '68 on, that became the tasting room. So prior to that, this was where we sold the wine.

Hicke: But it was pretty much by appointment.

Bruce: Pretty much by appointment. I think weekends, it would have to be Saturday or Sunday when I had time.

Hicke: And who came to taste? Distributors?

Bruce: On occasion they would. But mostly just people. Just ordinary type people that were interested. It always amazed me how far away people come from. They really make the effort to find you out. They come long distances.

Hicke: It's not just easy to drop in here. It's not on your way to anything else.

Bruce: But interestingly, when you do a count on the folks that come to the tasting room, going back several decades, it's very significant. A lot of people come up here.

Hicke: And sales in the tasting room?

Bruce: If you'd go back, let's say, fifteen years, at least. A thousand people a month would be pretty regular.

Hicke: And did you sell in southern California? A distributor?

Bruce: Early on. And then there were always these restaurants. You'd develop kind of restaurant accounts.

Hicke: How do you do that?

Bruce: I'm trying to think. I would have primarily brokers or their agents who got out and would sell the wine. And this would change over a period of time. So you'd sell a certain amount in Texas, or New York. In fact, it seemed to me that I sold more wine there than I did locally here.

Hicke: In New York?

Bruce: Yes. It seems like it. It is interesting. Sales was done here until '68, and then it was mostly friends that would get out and sell for me. Then starting in '75, we got the San Francisco Wine Exchange. So we've been with the San Francisco Wine Exchange for over twenty-five years, and they're a national broker. So it's been a long-term relationship, which is interesting for such a little winery such as ourselves. Of course, we're both fairly small to begin with.

Hicke: But that's really helpful, I would think.

Bruce: Oh, at this point it seems to be almost de rigeur. I think a lot of people would like to have a national broker.

Hicke: Over a long term you can really develop a good relationship.

Bruce: Well, you know, I'm fortunate in that the person that started that huge venture is just one of these terribly honest people. But then I find I'm the same way. I may be faithful to a fault in some instances, where maybe you should make a change, but I tend not to.

Hicke: Well, he's a compatible person to work with.

Bruce: He's very gruff, but he's a big teddy bear.

Hicke: You mentioned that the Pinot, I think, went to malolactic fermentation.

Bruce: Yes, it was natural, it always did.

Hicke: You just mentioned that first batch. All the rest of it--

Bruce: Yes, pretty much, it was just inherent. It went on its own. I did not, not that I didn't add cultures as I played around with different things, but it just happened naturally.

Hicke: And do you still do that?

Bruce: For the most part, we'll add a culture at this point.

Hicke: I've read that you were early in getting French oak.

Bruce: First year that we got French oak was 1968. Now I think the first French oak to come into California was Hanzell, and that was 1964. I know that Dick Graff and I ordered some sirugue barrels in that year. I think that was probably the first year that we got French oak.

Hicke: What about other equipment?

Bruce: In 1977, I went to Burgundy asking the vintners there what their favorite stemmer-crusher was. That is when I picked up the special piece of equipment. I'm trying to remember the name of it but I can't remember. We eventually sold it, but it was a good piece of equipment. I guess I was the first one to use it. Also I believe I was the first one to use a tank press? Well, I think I was. But that's open to question.

Hicke: You were on the cutting edge.

Bruce: I was always experimental, and of course the tank press is the state-of-the-art press even today.

Hicke: About when was that, do you recall?

Bruce: Well, we got that Howard roto-press in 1971. Then came our first tank press in '78. The big Bucher came in '82. We've had it a long time.

Hicke: Do you still have it?

Bruce: Oh, yes. We use it. That's our press.

Foot Crushing

Hicke: Then I need to ask you about foot crushing.

Bruce: Well, the story goes something like this: I was well aware of the fact that the greatest wines ever known had been made by what I call the classic style of winemaking, where you cut off bunches and you simply take that bunch and throw it into an open top vat, then have someone get in and thrash about. But I couldn't understand for the life of me why this should be.

So I remember having, it was 1980, a vat of grapes delivered to the back door, because my wife and I had rather stringent schedules, and we drew straws, and I remember I drew the short straw. So there I was, at three o'clock in the morning, thrashing about in this tank. Of course I was completely naked, you have to cross all the t's and dot the i's, so I was trying to do it in the classic style when it suddenly struck me. I said, Well of course this is why this method makes the greatest wines in the world. I mean, what's a winemaker's job but somehow to get the flavoring and solid elements out of the skin into the pulp, and how do you do that? You do it by mixing. And what's a better mixing machine than the human body? There probably isn't one. But there's the flip side of that coin: You want to get every drop of extract you possibly can, but you don't want one drop too much, because then you start to get into the bitter elements which comes from metal-to-metal bruising of skins, stems, and seeds. And the human body's too soft for that.

At this point, and I was being well-aware that Pinot Noir had a bad rep, and deservedly so, because they were making rather thin wines with these uncomfortable tannins. The large molecules tend to drop out as the wine ages, but the smaller ones tend to stay in circulation so that uncomfortable, somewhat bitter kind of astringency would not go away, might even accentuate as the wine ages. So I was trying to figure out how to achieve this wonderful, velvety texture that so many people talk about when they speak of wonderful Burgundies or great Pinot Noirs.

You expect it in Cabernets, too. But Cabernet is not quite as essential because they've got so much other stuff in them. But I think that people in the Cabernet business would use some of these techniques. One, they would learn that they would be surprised at how high their tannin level is but how good it is, how soft it can be. And it would also improve the amount of aroma that they're producing. The intensity of the aroma would increase because these techniques tend to do that. Foot crushing is important because one of the things that it does is that it crushes the grapes slowly. So you're going to have some element of carbonic maceration which, you know, gives that very brilliant Beaujolais-type quality which you don't get if you crush everything immediately.

So in foot crushing you crush slowly, over a two- or three-day period. But ultimately, it's all crushed and you get this fermentation, so you have the best of both worlds. You have that lovely, forward fruit, but you also have the big fullness of a completely fermented wine where all the skins are crushed. At some point in time all the grapes no longer go through that carbonic maceration. You have the typical fermentation.

Hicke: It sounds like you're saying you did the foot crushing first, and then figured out afterwards why it's so successful.

Bruce: Yes.

Hicke: How long did you keep up with it?

Bruce: Well, in 1981 I announced that we were going to do all foot crushings. I remember it was a Sunday when I first did it. I went down to check and make sure they were doing that and there was Art Reddich, and he had built himself one of these punch-down wooden devices, and I said we're not going to do that. We were using waders, because I guess it would be inappropriate to be completely naked. So I put this on and I showed him what to do, and you should have seen his look. But by the end of the season, there wasn't one of my people who did not agree to the value of this technique.

Hicke: So '81 you were still doing it.

Bruce: So we did it, and we are doing it to this day.

Hicke: Oh, you are?

Bruce: The very best wines. Yes.

Hicke: I didn't know that.

Bruce: Yes, our very best wines. In 1997 I just about killed my people, because of course we had a bumper crop, and we foot crushed 100 percent of what we made that year. As I say, I just about killed my people. So we got those rotary presses, which is the closest thing to foot crushing. The grapes basically crush themselves, and they do it gradually. The only difference seems to be that it's not open, not exposed to air. But you can actually put some oxygen into it, and we've been working with some of those things.

Hicke: And that was the one that won the Vintner's Club, in 1997? One of the ones?

Bruce: No, no, the wines that won the Vintner's were '90 and '91.

Hicke: Do you give extra pay for foot crushing?

Bruce: We always invite our visitors to come in, and if they have big enough feet, we have a sign-up list. It's surprising how many people are actually interested in doing that sort of thing. In fact, I'll tell you kind of a cute story. This very petite, very attractive young lady who was an agent for a distributor I think in Kentucky. She came with her twin sister; you could hardly tell them apart. She comes in. She sees what we're doing, and she says, "I'm going to do that." Have you ever tried to talk a woman out of doing something? It's not easy. She probably didn't weigh 110 pounds. When we got her into this--she had to strip down a little bit before she donned the waders. She had this white T-shirt on and with the waders, and she looked like schmoo, so to speak, with her nose peaking over the top. She walked out on this cap. The cap's probably this thick.

Hicke: Three feet? Four feet?

Bruce: That's about right. What's that? Two and a half feet? Call it three feet, I guess. But at any rate, she walks out on this cap, like walking out on this floor, you know. She didn't have any effect at all. But that wasn't going to get in her way, and she commenced to work on this area. That area got smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. Eventually I looked up there and she was down to her ankles. I was called away and didn't come back for some time. The next time I saw her she'd built herself a hole and she was up to about here--

Hicke: Waist high--

Bruce: She was getting too close to a fermentation mass like that, the CO₂ becomes physiologically rather disruptive. I told Barry, my son, that girl is enervated. You better get her out of there. So he sits on the top of this tank with his feet kind of like this [shows feet crouched on rim of tank]. And he reached into this foaming mush, underneath her armpits, and he pulls her up and you could audibly hear this pop, because he pops her out of this hole she'd made and gets her down on the concrete. I said, "Oh my God!" Because here were these two perfect red hands marks on her white T-shirt over her breasts. I said, "Barry, did you have to do that?" And he says, "Dad, she was going under. I didn't have any choice." She went into the bathroom, and when she came out she was mumbling something about untouched memento, or something like that. But it was an interesting experience and I suspect she learned something to boot.

Hicke: [laughs] You need a lifeguard for your foot crushers.

Bruce: Well, you need to be pretty darn strong, for one thing, and it doesn't hurt to have a certain amount of weight. No, it's probably as rigorous and enervating an exercise as you can figure out. It's not easy. It's tough work.

Hicke: How long at a time do they keep that up?

Bruce: Well, they would do a tank and they'd hop over and do another one and so on. They worked for a long time at it. They would get pretty strong after a while.

Hicke: These are your employees, I imagine. The guests probably give up after--

Bruce: No, they don't work for long. [laughs]

Hicke: What about whole-cluster fermentation?

Bruce: In 1981 we were using the whole cluster. A portion of the '81 was 100 percent whole cluster. There was no stemming at all. The perfect year, of course, would give you that sort of thing. So the stems would be fairly lignified and there wouldn't be any of this grassy, herbaceous quality that comes through.

But it's a rare year that gives you that, at least in California. The spiciest wine you can get, and some of the most amazing wines I've had, have come from very high stem content. But you have to be very careful, because you're walking a very thin line. If you get too much, you're into that grassy, herbaceous quality. If you get too little, you miss some of that wonderful spice you can get from that type of fermentation.

So it's an interesting process. We do the best job we can of trying to get as high a level of spice as possible. But you have to be very careful. We've got in the habit of we'd pull up a bunch of these stems and we'll chew on them and taste them and try to determine green flavors. The only way to improve on that, I suppose, is to figure out some kind of a method where you could actually do it in the lab. In a year or two we could find out how much we can get away with of those simple so-called monimers.

Hicke: Wait a minute, before we get to the eighties, there was the 1976 Judgment of Paris. One of your wines was entered in it.

Bruce: Probably it was a '73. The wine where I didn't do any fining or filtration, so you had to decant it carefully. I guess it was pretty obvious to the French judge. They said that's obviously California, because they would have filtered their wines. So it came in last. But I felt good about the fact of even being included in it.

Hicke: Did you go over for it?

Bruce: No. I didn't know about it until after.

Hicke: Oh, is that right? Well, in '69, maybe it was, that you did a Blanc--

Bruce: Blanc and Noir? I did a Blanc and Noir.

Hicke: That was a white Zinfandel.

Bruce: Oh, yes, the first white Zinfandel I did was in '64? Yes, '64.

Hicke: And that was before anybody had ever heard of white Zinfandel. How did that happen?

Bruce: Oh, I just decided to do it. Just curiosity. Just exploring.

Hicke: Was it dry?

Bruce: Completely. My wine was a good food wine. I can't say this about a lot of those that have come along since. I made four of them during this period, the last being 1971. Later I called them Zinfandel white starting in 1967, I said, This is interesting, but not what I want to spend my life doing.

Hicke: And then you did a white from Pinot Noir?

Bruce: Yes, did that.

Hicke: That was a Blanc Pinot Noir. And the white Pinot Noir, how did that turn out?

Bruce: They're pleasant wines, you know. But again, it wasn't what I wanted to waste my Pinot Noir grapes on.

1980s and 1990s

Hicke: Okay. Let's go on to the eighties.

Bruce: Now, the eighties was a decade in which it was a fine-tuning process. We were still making wines from a lot of different areas, but we were really beginning to understand the chemistry of wine, in particular, Pinot Noir. So this was a decade in which our understanding was becoming better and better in this endeavor. We had to deal with years that were easy and years that were difficult.

I think by the end of the eighties we understood the wine chemistry sufficiently so I think we could go into any vineyard in California and if the grapes were halfway decent, make a decent Pinot Noir, which is something we never could have done years ago. Obviously, you still want the best Pinot Noir possible. But I think we can go into any vineyard and make a decent one. So that's why we're making Pinot Noir from so many different areas. After all, this gives us the opportunity of fulfilling my mission to make the greatest Pinot Noir ever made.

The nineties we were working really very vigorously with our own grapes here, and we had been doing that from the eighties into the nineties. So the quality from 1990, '91, '92, '93, of course was high. That was when the infestation for the sharp shooter came in in '91.

Hicke: That was the first sharpshooter?

Bruce: The blue-green sharpshooter. So by the end of '92, the Pinot Noir vineyard was essentially destroyed, and by the end of '93, the Chardonnay part was essentially destroyed. Since then we've become what I would call one of the world's experts in Pierce's disease.

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Hicke: Well, I trust you haven't seen anything of the glassy-winged sharpshooter?

Bruce: Oh, no. We've all got our fingers crossed. Pierce's disease has always come in waves. I think that someone had an article where they've had four different waves of Pierce's disease, starting back in 1851. The first one was that large Chardonnay vineyard around Los Angeles, which was destroyed. There were at least two, or maybe three others that came and went. Of course they had no idea what was doing it back then. They didn't even know it was a bacterium. Now they do. They know that it's a bacterium that gets into the xylem. It doesn't stain readily. You need very special stains to show it. It plugs the xylem up. In fact, it's the inflammatory reaction, the immunologic reaction to the presence of a bacterium that plugs up the xylem and starves the plant.

Hicke: I thought it attacked mostly vines around the edges of a vineyard, this early type.

Bruce: Well, that would make sense, I suppose, because most places have wet areas around the edge, and provide plenty of vegetation that the sharpshooter likes.

So, Santa Cruz Mountains is a fairly dry area, and we don't have a lot of wet areas. So the vineyard itself has become the wet area, if you will, because everything else pretty much dries

up, whereas we preserve our nice, lush leaves, at least to a fairly late time in the year. That seems to be the explanation of why Santa Cruz is somewhat different. Obviously this problem had been around when Randall Gramh planted his vineyard in Empire grade. I mean, his vineyard was totally destroyed in a very short period, whereas my vineyard was the pride of my eye for a long time because it was so nicely kept.

Starting about fifteen years ago, I noticed that certain areas were having problems, and nobody could tell me what it was. It didn't happen until 1991, when we had this tremendous blue-green sharpshooter infestation. The year following they came in and said, oh, it's a classic case of Pierce's disease. So these grape advisors could finally figure out what it was. Our vineyard was down about a third in that decade prior to that final infestation.

Hicke: Did a lot of the vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains get hit?

Bruce: Yes. Yes. Now, interestingly, only on the Pinot Noir side of the hill. The Cabernet side of the hill has not been touched, as far as I know. It seems to like this side. The humidity and rainfall and all that is higher on this side, and I suspect it has a lot to do with it.

But something brought it into this area, and there's a fair number of plants that are good sharpshooter hosts, but they're not particularly affected by it. It turns out that *Vitus vinifera* is one of the most susceptible plants known, and there are very few others. Of course, there's some strains of this Pierce's disease that even can affect eucalyptus. I was talking to someone who's in the business of studying mycorrhizal relationships. He says that there's lots of eucalyptus trees that are being hit by a Pierce's disease in Australia.

If you talk to Sandy Purcell, who is the world's expert on Pierce's disease, he'll tell you about Brazil and the orange crops down there. Then there's a different one for oleanders, and another for alfalfa (wilt). These are different strains.

Hicke: They seem to be gathering up a lot of resources to try to--

Bruce: It took them about eight years to get the powers that be mobilized and realize, oh, there is a problem, when they went down and looked at Temecula and saw all those For Sale signs in all those vineyards down there.

Hicke: What about phylloxera? Did you have any problem with that?

Bruce: Phylloxera was certainly not unknown in the Santa Cruz Mountains. In fact, I found a little bit on the edge of my vineyard early on. And my wines were planted on their own roots. What with the coming of Pierce's, of course, we decided to plant on resistant roots.

Hicke: What did you use for rootstock?

Bruce: We have used several different rootstocks.

Hicke: There was a little bit of phylloxera around, you said.

Bruce: I had a little bit. You know, there must have been more grapes planted on Empire Grade. I know this was all vineyard at one time. But Empire Grade has had more trouble from phylloxera than we have.

Hicke: You're pointing west?

Bruce: This is west, yes, to Empire Grade. And Pierce's. Whereas we weren't quite so bad in that regard. Not that we didn't have it. We did. What little I had I was able to kill it.

Hicke: This is phylloxera.

Bruce: For phylloxera. Yes.

Hicke: How about eutypa?

Bruce: Well everybody up here has some level of eutypa. Come to think of it, I haven't seen much of it in recent years, although Jack Bates over there above Hecker Pass, his vineyard's in bad shape from eutypa. That's a problem that the viticulturalist has to deal with.

Hicke: Did we finish talking about the eighties wines?

Bruce: I was really concentrating on Pinot Noir in the Santa Cruz Mountains, as well as making Zinfandel from a variety of different locations as well. Chardonnay. Oh, yes, I almost forgot. We were becoming a Chardonnay house. In fact, two-thirds of our production was Chardonnay.

Then we had the corky wine problem in 1978. We got a batch of corks that had as many as seven bottles out of a case tainted. I guess we were doing 20,000 cases and I had to pull 7,200 cases back. It cost me \$420,000, which was an awful lot of money back then. Still is! The fact that I'm still here is pretty astonishing. Because of all the insults that I've had, that's been the hardest one to deal with. It destroyed my Chardonnay market, and it forced me into doing what I wanted to do anyway. So every cloud has a silver lining. We survived that, and now things are doing okay.

Hicke: Did you have recourse to the corks company?

Bruce: No. We're talking about such infinitesimally small amounts of taint to cause a corky wine to be corked. I mean, the corks looked perfect, of course. If you understand what happens in Portugal there, that the farmer peels the oak trees. They let these slabs of oak sit out for two or three years in the woods, with the water splashing on them, and they get a certain amount of growth of microorganisms in the woody parts of the cork. Then they bring the cork into the co-op, and the co-op does the final processing. Then jobbers buy batches of cork and sell it to houses over here. We learned not to get all our corks from one source. Buying from one source was a mistake. Then we went to altec corks. To make the altec cork they remove the woody portions where the microorganisms reside. And this worked great. We didn't get any corky wines after we started using them, until recently. Now we are beginning to get tainted wines again and we have to discontinue their use. So now we've gotten away and we're going back to real corks and in some cases, actually, synthetic plastics.

Hicke: Yes, I wanted to ask if that seems like a solution--synthetic corks.

Bruce: No. The cork industry, they claim that you simply won't ever have that problem again, that they have gone through enormous efforts to solve the problem. Let's hope they're right, because it's a serious, serious problem, having seven bottles out of--I mean, you almost couldn't go through it without finding corked wine.

Hicke: I suppose it got out to the public before you found out about it.

Bruce: Well, you know, the market has a long memory. But at any rate, it was a good thing in the long run. It forced me to do something which would have been very difficult to do in any other circumstance--to go all to red wines. So this is good. It was '78 when that happened. So we're really talking about the early eighties when all this hit the wall.

The eighties was an interesting decade, because we were being sued for the Shandon name, the name of a particular wine and the town near where it grew. Domaine Chandon forced us to stop, and I think they did us a favor. We didn't like it at the time, but it forced us out of that.

Another insult included a law suit over price of grape purchase from Mary Carter. I think I was forced to pay the highest price known to man for Black Muscat up to that time. Humorous now, but serious cash then.

Also, the 1989 earthquake shook us up quite a bit. We were extremely fortunate actually. Because of the World Series, employees left the barrel room minutes before the quake. One at least would surely have been killed. The cost was significant but I thank my lucky stars.

Hicke: That's good. You mentioned that in '77 you took a trip to Burgundy. Did you go often?

Bruce: We went into Paris, and then we drove to Burgundy, and then went down into the Rhone area, and then finally went up into Chablis. We spent a couple of weeks. That was a lot of fun. I learned a fair amount during that period. Let me see. I was surprised about one thing. Their use of wood was very interesting. Visited Comte Lafond. We tasted more Chardonnay than we did Pinot Noir. I guess Pinot Noir sold better. But they would have this much Chardonnay and they would buy this much new wood, and they would keep some of the new wood and the rest of it they would keep in the old wood. They apparently didn't bother blending it.

Hicke: You're indicating about three-fourths to one-fourth.

Bruce: Yes, something like that. It was interesting. I remember going into a restaurant, Lameloise, which was a two star working very hard for a three star back then, and having a wine there which had so much oak in it. I said my God, this is more than we put in it.

Hicke: A Chardonnay?

Bruce: Yes, a Chardonnay, right. It was interesting. You think of the French having low-wood wine, but that's not necessarily true. I had a feeling that they weren't sending their best wines to us. They may consider the highly wooded wines as a very good wine, because when I went to Lameloise, and I know they were very highly considered. They obviously gave them something that had a lot of wood. It may be that the owner of Lameloise went there and said, "I want this barrel." I think they did it that way, because they bought it from barrels.

Hicke: Speaking of oak, what kind of cooperage are you using now?

Bruce: I couldn't begin to name off all the different ones that we've experimented with. I agree with some of the French I've heard say they don't like any particular wood to show through. I feel the same way. You want a sufficient blend of wood so that you don't get a dominant character of wood coming through. There's only one level of wood that I don't mind to show off well, and this is that level of spiciness that comes along with a very nicely coopered barrel. So we have quite a variety of different woods.

Hicke: You should write a book. You've tried everything on every front, and you could do a lot of explaining about what not to do and what to do.

Bruce: Well, I guess I have been around a while. I haven't thought about that.

Hicke: We talked about risk taking and curiosity; you experiment with everything. Some people would find something that's pretty good and stick with it.

Bruce: Well, you know, you only have so much time in this life. You might as well have fun while you're about it.

Hicke: Great philosophy. Good. Well, what haven't we covered? How about the nineties?

Bruce: Well, the nineties, you know, as I say, the eighties was really trying to get to grips with what we wanted to do. When the nineties came along, we said we're doing a pretty good job. Not that we wouldn't consider fine tuning there, but let's really accentuate. One story that fits, I guess, is Petite Syrah. Back in 1970 I made my first Petite Syrah. I made it in the usual California style, which was complete crushed at fairly high temperature, ninety degrees. It came out so black and inky. You know, it might be ready to drink in 2010, but now I'm beginning to question that. I said, Well, I guess maybe this is not the way you're supposed to make it.

So I made it in a much different style the following year, trying to limit all of those tannins, which I was successful in doing. It turned out to be very nice. Had a very nice fruit and a nice palate, and very drinkable. So off and on over the years we'd work with that. Coming into the 1990s we became serious about Petite Syrah.

I rather like being a big frog in a little pond. In other words, work with Pinot Noir because not very many people really do that. The same applies to Petite Syrah. So we said, Well let's concentrate on Petite Syrah, so we did. We found the more we made it like Pinot Noir, the better it became; so I said in 1990, Let's pull out all the stops. We'll foot crush everything. We'll use the best wood. We'll do all this same things. In 1994 we were particularly excited about it, and we said, Let's send it off to some of the competition.

The first one was always Jerry Mead's New World International Wine Competition. He called me up and he said, "Dave, your Petite Syrah did very well." I said, "Really? What happened?" He said, "It got a gold medal." I said, "Well, that's nice." He said, "And by the way, it got best value in the show." I said, "How many wines were in the show?" He said, "I think there were about 1,800." I said, "Oh, that's impressive." Then he said, "By the way, it also got the Fetzer Trophy." "What's that?" He said, "Oh, that's the best Petite Syrah in the show." "Oh, really??" He said, "By the way, it also got the BV trophy." I said, "What's that?"

Hicke: The BV?

Bruce: Beaulieu Vineyards, yes. I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, that's the best red wine in the show." Then he said, "It also got the American Airline trophy." I said, "Really? What's that?" He said, "That's the best wine in the show."

Hicke: Amazing. I have to ask you, why do you spell it S-y-r-a-h, because this is going to be a problem for me.

Bruce: Well, the reason goes back to about 1968 when I went to Dr. Alley at Davis and I said, "Dr. Alley, I'd really like to make a wine like Hermitage. I really like those wines. I want to know if our Petite Syrah is, in fact, the Syrah of Hermitage." He said, "Well, I think so." Based upon this strong evidence, I commenced to work on Petite Syrah, and that's the reason. My first year I put it out, I spelled it "Petit Syrah," without the "e." And now we spell it Petite Syrah, to try to make it Americanish. But I notice there are a fair number of wineries that are going to S-y-r-a-h with the Petite Syrah. Three or four of them.

Hicke: Is that right? I thought I'd always read that it was a completely different variety.

Bruce: Well, it is. It took a long time to figure that out. The interesting thing, though, we planted both Syrah and a little Petite Syrah here. Not every year lent itself to making a Petite Syrah because it likes warmer weather, but a couple of years ago it came out and made some pretty good wine. I was astonished at how close those two wines are. They both have the black pepper, but Petite Syrah has more. They both have very similar bodies, and I said, Hmm, maybe there is some relationship between Petite Syrah and Syrah. Now it has been shown to have two parents, Syrah and Pelousin.

Hicke: Yes. Which year was this that won all the prizes?

Bruce: '94.

Hicke: And you're still making that, I know.

Bruce: Oh, yes. That's becoming our second most popular wine, most abundant wine. If I had been intelligent, I suppose, and I was concerned with developing a well-known winery, I would have gone into Cabernet. It would be a lot quicker. But I'm not unhappy about that. There are some awfully good Cabernets out there. But I still think the holy grail is to make a great Pinot Noir. Any winemaker worth his salt wants to make the great Pinot Noir.

Hicke: Yes. It's certainly a much bigger challenge.

Bruce: Yes. It certainly is.

Hicke: And a bigger success, that you've made it. I have just a few more questions. What is your response to public reactions to your wine? In other words, do you get feedback from your tasting room?

Bruce: A certain amount.

Hicke: I guess what I'm asking you is, does it affect your style? You told me that you make the wines that you like.

Bruce: Well, also I pointed out that you tend to make these filters, and people pass through it or they don't, depending on what they like. Like last night, I went to listen to this Michael Kasivonia. And he was the one who studies mycorrhiza relationships.

Hicke: No.

Bruce: All plants depend on fungi, really, to grow.

Hicke: Oh, your mushroom thing.

Bruce: There are two types of mycorrhizal fungi. You have the ecto-mycorrhizal fungi group, and then you have the endo-mycorrhizal fungi group. The first one is if you imagine a surgeon's hand and you put a glove on. This is the ecto type. It covers every part of every little root fiber that goes out, and this allows for the transmission of water and minerals. In return, the plant supplies it with food. So without that, the plant has a terrible time growing.

Now, certain plants like maples don't have the ecto type. They are serviced by the endo-type. The endo is microscopic and penetrates into the fibers, doing the same service. You won't find fruiting bodies (mushrooms) under maples because it has this endo-mycorrhiza type situation.

I was just going to point out that while I was there, some girl that was serving us came by and had to exclaim that she liked the Pinot Noir. But it happens all the time that people are certainly aware of the Pinot, and they do like it.

Hicke: But even if people don't like it, that wouldn't affect your style?

Bruce: It depends on what they don't like about it. I mean, if it's something that you can do something of a positive sort about, I would--but if you're going to change the style--if someone says, "I really don't like big wines with loads of fruit that sit wonderfully on the palate, I want some simple little thing that isn't too forward," et cetera, I wouldn't pay too much attention to that. You do get a certain number of French people that say, "Your wines are just too forward." But we're dealing with the American palate at the present time, and it happens to be my palate, too.

Hicke: What about wine writers?

Bruce: They're quite a bit more finicky, of course, and some of them are hopeless cases, as far as I'm concerned. So what do you do with people like that? I mean, there are a certain number of engines that really drive small wineries, and I think the *Wine Spectator* and Robert Parker and, to a lesser degree, *Wine Enthusiast*, are important to the little guy that doesn't have a huge marketing budget. So you really depend upon those people to a certain degree. I guess I've been around long enough that it's not a live or die sort of thing, but they are important. Those engines do sell wine for the little guy.

The Future

Hicke: What about the zero zeros? Last year and this year. We got up through the nineties. What about this millennium and the future?

Bruce: This is really exciting. At the present time, I feel the best areas to make the great Pinot Noir are the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Russian River Valley.

Hicke: David, I'm sorry to stop you--

##

Bruce: We are working with a number of small Santa Cruz Mountains vineyards, not to mention the fact that our own is really coming back like gang busters. The Russian River Valley is very definitely one of those very good areas. We've talked to Warren Dutton up there who is dealing with 1,100 acres, a lot of these very small plots, and I guess he's going up to 1,300 acres. We've arranged to have what I feel are some very fine vineyards--most of them which are just being planted, that will come into bearing--that are in very, very good areas. They'll be relatively small in the sense that they may be five or ten acres. We'll be making vineyard-designated wines which will be distinctly different, one from another. We're dealing with about five or six at this point, and the option of making some truly great wine, I think, is very real. So we're looking forward to that.

If you ask me which areas in America produce the greatest Pinot Noir, I would say certainly in California the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Russian River Valley are the two best. Though I wonder sometimes about Templeton Corridor, but that's an unknown entity. This area, sometimes I feel that it makes certainly a different wine than Russian River Valley. More complexity. To my feeling, at least, they have longer longevity, these Santa Cruz Mountain wines. So we're definitely working in this area. Not only our own vineyards, but some others, as well. The options, I think, are marvelous. They're wonderful. The opportunities are really exciting.

Hicke: Where's the Templeton Corridor?

Bruce: Oh, that's down in San Luis Obispo County. There's an area there, coming from Templeton, where you have a very cool area coming over that mountain there. Otherwise it gets pretty hot around Paso Robles and further south. It's right up by the base of the mountain where there's a couple of vineyards right there, where I think the potential might be pretty high.

Hicke: Let me ask you as an overview question: what changes have you seen in the Santa Cruz Mountains, other than the advent of quite a few wineries?

Bruce: That's probably the major change right there. All the new vineyards to choose from and worth with. These are exciting times. Of course they wanted to go to Chardonnay, because they saw the dollar sign: more money for Chardonnay. I said, well, It's not always going to be that way. You're going to get more money for Pinot Noir. Of course, they ignored me, and they planted this Chardonnay. Now they're realizing that they should have put in Pinot Noir, and a certain number are doing it. That is what's happening. I think this exciting area as long as we can keep the Pierce's disease out, but that applies to all of America. Now Sandy Purcell said all of the diseases that grapevines have have come out of America.

Hicke: Out of what?

Bruce: All the disease that the vitus vinitera grapevine, or any grapevine, for that matter, have come out of the Americas.

Hicke: The Americas. Oh, I see. North and South America.

Bruce: Well, I don't know about South. But Central. When you think about it for a while, think about those poor people back there when they were planting all those vineyards. I guess they started, really, in Turkey, and they came more west. If they were beset by even one thing like powdery mildew, we might not have a grape industry, a wine industry today. It's very possible that we were very fortunate that it happened this way. I could see powdery mildew alone could have really stopped the entire progression of winemaking.

Hicke: Oh, you mean because they didn't have powdery mildew.

Bruce: They didn't, no, they didn't have any of that stuff.

Hicke: Okay. They had no diseases.

Bruce: They didn't have any diseases.

Hicke: That's a staggering thought.

Bruce: So we're very fortunate in that sense. Otherwise we just might not have a wine industry.

Hicke: We might have to move it to Turkey. Eventually.

Bruce: I'm afraid they have all the diseases now.

Hicke: Yes. We've probably exported them.

Bruce: Powdery mildew, I guess, didn't take long, and then these other things. Phylloxera, of course, got over there. Pierce's hasn't got there. I hope it doesn't, you know, I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. It's the most malignant disease a grapevine can have. Anything that can kill a grapevine in a single year has got to be pretty potent.

Hicke: Grapevines over here [points to vineyard] don't look too old.

Bruce: All of this was planted after the Pierce's disease. Actually, some were right in the process of being planted. This coming year this vineyard's going to look pretty full for the first time since the really serious part of the disease process.

Hicke: Well, that's an upbeat note to end on.

Bruce: I'd say so.

Hicke: Thank you very much.

Bruce: Well, you're welcome. Thank you for taking the time.

Transcriber: Teresa L. Bergen
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David Bruce

PRIVATE CELLAR CLUB

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David Bruce

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PINOT NOIR
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David Bruce



David Bruce

1997 SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS
PINOT NOIR
ESTATE BOTTLED

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PETITE SYRAH

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David Bruce



David Bruce

1998 CENTRAL COAST
PETITE SYRAH



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1998 MONTEREY	14.00	11.20	_____	_____
PINOT NOIR				
1999 CENTRAL COAST	20.00	16.00	_____	_____
1998 SONOMA COUNTY	25.00	20.00	_____	_____
1998 SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	30.00	24.00	_____	_____
1998 RUSSLAN RIVER VALLEY	35.00	28.00	_____	_____
1998 CHALONE BROSSAU VINEYARD	50.00	***	_____	_____
1997 ESTATE BOTTLED	40.00	32.00	_____	_____
1998 ESTATE BOTTLED	50.00	***	_____	_____
SYRAH				
1998 ESTATE BOTTLED	28.00	***	_____	_____
ZINFANDEL				
1998 PASO ROBLES	16.00	12.80	_____	_____
CABERNET SAUVIGNON				
1997 SANTA CLARA VALLEY	28.00	22.40	_____	_____
LA RUSTICANA D'ORSA				
1997 SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS	36.00	28.80	_____	_____
PETITE SYRAH				
1998 CENTRAL COAST	16.00	12.80	_____	_____
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	A 25% discount			
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(2) 1998 Grenache, Monterey		(1) 1998 Zinfandel, Paso Robles		
(2) 1999 Pinot Noir, Central Coast		(2) 1998 Petite Syrah, Central Coast		

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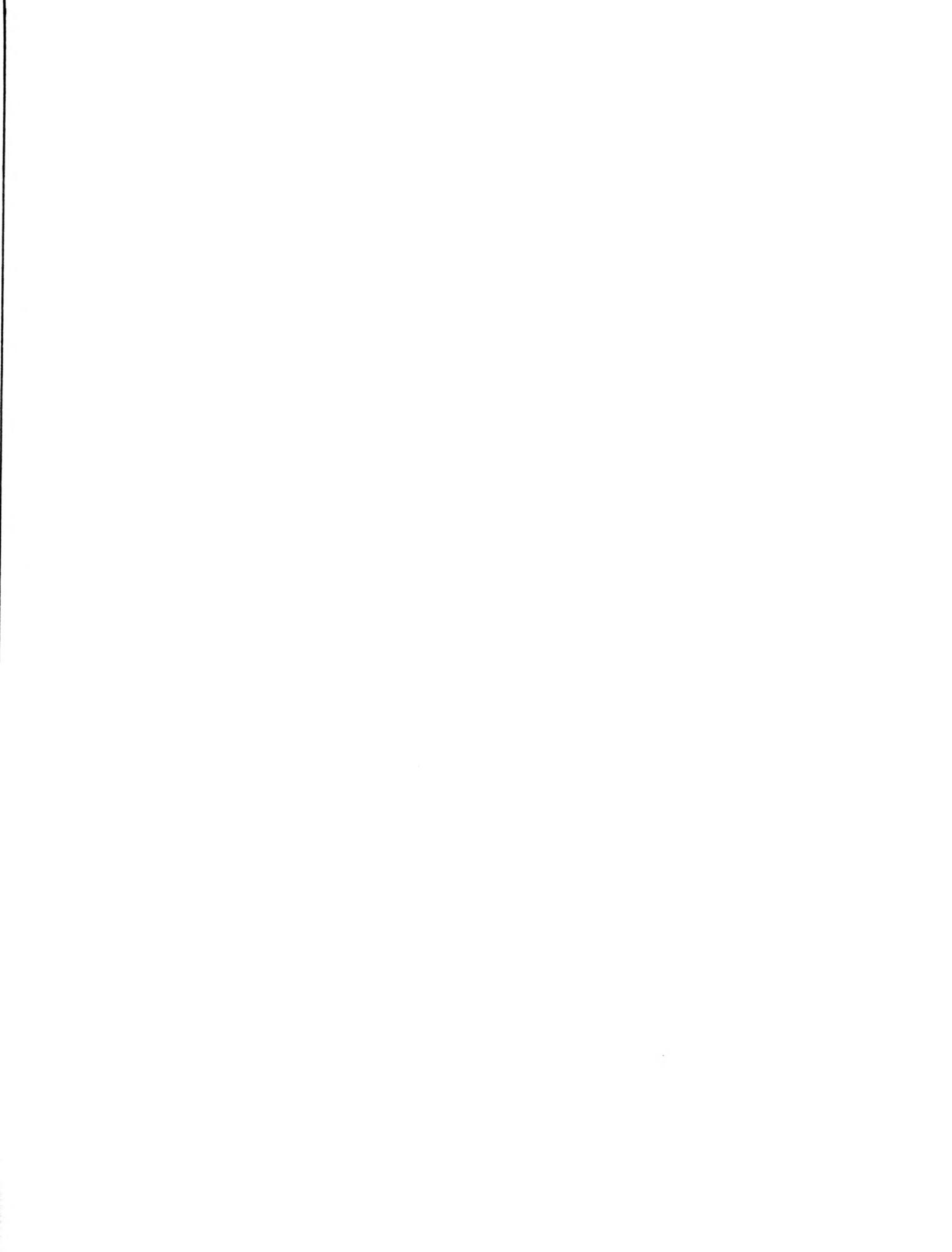
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