

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Louis “Bob” Trinchero

Bob Trinchero: On Making California Wine Accessible

The Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2019

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Bob Trinchero

Louis “Bob” Trincherro is former Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board of Trincherro Family Estates, the parent company of Sutter Home Winery, among many other wine labels. Trincherro was born in 1936 in New York and moved with his family to Napa Valley after his uncle purchased Sutter Home and his father joined the business in the 1940s. Trincherro became winemaker for Sutter Home just before the winery’s expansion and its innovation in producing White Zinfandel, which transformed the American wine market. Trincherro served both as President of the Board of Napa Valley Vintners in 1981 and, later, as chair of Auction Napa Valley. In this interview, Mr. Trincherro discusses: his family’s arrival in California and the expansion of Sutter Home Winery; the transformation of Napa Valley Vintners in the 1960s and 1970s; the Napa Valley Agriculture Preserve and Winery Definition Ordinance; Auction Napa Valley; efforts to demystify wine and wine culture through marketing and education. Note that the Oral History Center conducted a longer oral history with Bob Trincherro in 1991 and the transcript is available here: https://ohc-search.lib.berkeley.edu/catalog/MASTER_766

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Napa Valley Vintners Project History

The Napa Valley Vintners (NVV) Oral History Project was initiated in 2018 following a series of conversations between representatives of NVV and UC Berkeley's Oral History Center. In anticipation of the NVV's 75th anniversary year in 2019, the NVV agreed to sponsor an oral history project documenting the contributions of the organization to the growth and improvement of the wine industry in the United States; the establishment and protection of "Napa Valley" as a place known worldwide for the quality of its wines; and the people who made all of this possible.

The oral histories in this project were designed to be rather brief two-hour interviews; in these the narrators were asked about their interest and engagement with the wine business in general before turning the focus to their participation in and observations of the NVV. Interviews in this project are wide-ranging, touching on a number of issues and topics going back to the very beginning of the organization in 1944—in fact, two of the first project narrators were children of NVV founders (Michael Mondavi is the son of Robert Mondavi; Robin Lail is the daughter of John Daniel, Jr.). Narrators describe the growth and transformation of the organization in the 1970s and 1980s; during this time the NVV ceased being a small group of vintners who viewed the organization as a social club as much as an industry group and changed into something much more consequential. Narrators, including Bob Trincherro and John Shafer, tell how the NVV grew into a large and influential organization that impacted the law, policy, trade, and marketing of wine in the United States and abroad. Other narrators describe the organization's emerging and expanding interest in protecting the environment, limiting urban growth, preserving agricultural lands, and advocating for sustainable practices in the vineyards and cellars of Napa Valley. Key people and projects of the organization are touched upon in most interviews, with special attention paid to Auction Napa Valley, the country's premier charitable wine auction that was established in 1981 and now raises millions of dollars a year for community health and education organizations in Napa Valley.

The Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project builds upon decades of interviews conducted by the Oral History Center that document the history of wine in California and, in some cases, the specific history of the NVV. These oral histories date back to the late 1960s and include interviews with NVV founders Louis M. Martini and Robert Mondavi, as well as Eleanor McCrae, Joseph Heitz, Dan Duckhorn, and several other NVV leaders.

Martin Meeker
Charles B. Faulhaber Director
Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library

Interview 1: January 25, 2019

01-00:00:01

Meeker: Today is the 25th of January, 2019. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Louis “Bob” Trinchero for the Napa Valley Vintners Oral History Project. And this is our first session together, and we are here at—what do you call this property, Sutter Home Main or—

01-00:00:23

Trinchero: Main Street facility, that’s what we call it.

01-00:00:25

Meeker: Okay, Main Street Facility of the Sutter Home Winery or Trinchero Family Estates? Like, how would you describe this property here?

01-00:00:37

Trinchero: I’m not sure. It’s a winery. We crush grapes and make wine. Well, actually, it was originally built by the Christian Brothers. We’ve added a few things to it, but mainly it was their winery. But, of course, I don’t think they’re in the business anymore. I think they walked away from it.

01-00:01:02

Meeker: Well, before we really get started here, why don’t you just tell me your name and date and place of birth?

01-00:01:10

Trinchero: Louis Trinchero. I was born July 3, 1936, and in New York City, but actually on Welfare Island, which is now Roosevelt Island, by the way. The name was changed in the early ’40s. And, actually, when I was born there, it was the City Hospital for the Indigent. So, I didn’t cost my parents a dime, being born. And they said I grew up and I well was worth that, what they paid for me. And then I spent the first twelve and a half years of my life there in Manhattan, on the west side, and was sort of one of these street-smart kids that grew up in New York City. And then, all of a sudden, my dad wanted to join his brother, John, who had just bought a broken-down barn called Sutter Home Winery. And so, we all came out here.

You talk about a change. Here I am, on a busy street in New York City. As a matter of fact, there was this buzzing sound in my ear, and I complained to my mother about it. So, she took me to the doctor, and he said, “Where are you coming from?” I said, “New York City.” Well, that’s it. You haven’t gotten used to this quiet. So he said, “Wait a couple of weeks, and if it’s still there, come back.” Of course, it was gone by then. But, the Napa Valley was much different than it is today.

01-00:03:03

Meeker: Do you remember when your mom or dad came to you when you were twelve years old and said, “Hey, we’re going to be moving across country to a completely different place where you’re not going to know anyone?”

01-00:03:18

Trincherro: It caused a little problem. We had a nice apartment in New York City. And, everyone had their life. And my dad decided—well, actually, my uncle kept writing him and saying, “Look, New York City is no place to raise kids. Come out to sunny California.” So he said, well, you know what? I’m going to take a trip out there and see for myself. Well, he came out here in the spring of ’48 and loved it, so he sent for my mother and me and my sister Vera and my brother Roger, who then was only two years old. And, so we moved out, came across on a train. And, what we found was a real mess.

Sutter Home Winery then hadn’t existed since before Prohibition. And, because of Prohibition it just went out of business and never restarted. So, when we started in the business, we started getting a little bit involved but not much. My father’s English wasn’t that good, and my mother’s English was pretty good. But, we didn’t socialize except with the growers, the farmers. So, but as I got older, I certainly heard about the Vintners. And, I learned a few years later it’s a very exclusive club at the time, very few members. And then, the members we think of being old members actually were in a different organization called the Napa Valley Wine Technical Group. That would be Louis P. Martini, Bob Mondavi, Peter Mondavi, André Tchelistcheff, Brother Timothy. They were in that.

01-00:05:21

The actual Vintners, which was something you just couldn’t join—you had to be invited to join—would be Louis M. Martini and Forni and all these other—John Daniels [*sic*], the really old-timers. So, I grew up, and I got more and more interested. Well, I joined the Napa Valley Technical Group, and by that time it had morphed into pretty much what we have today, except you couldn’t join unless you were invited.

01-00:05:57

Meeker: Can you tell me what the Napa Valley Technical Group was?

01-00:06:01

Trincherro: Well, it was mainly the winemakers who got together, tasted wines. We had dinner once a month and just had usually a speaker who would talk about wine and shipments, whatever. And, so it was a good learning realm for me. As a matter of fact, for some reason I’ll never know, they voted me president of the Napa Valley Wine Technical Group. But the Vintners, then the Vintners changed. Pardon me—I got ahead of myself. So, I was invited to join the Napa Valley Vintners, and so I did. This was 1973. And I was one the very young ones there. And the first day I showed up, I felt, my God, what am I doing here? These are the real guys here. I wasn’t very old then. I wasn’t even thirty years old. So, I was standing there, and I heard, “Hey, kid. Hey, kid, you.” And I turned around, and have you heard the name Louis Stralla?

01-00:07:26

Meeker: Yes.

01-00:07:27

Trincherro: It was Louis Stralla. He said, "Come here. Sit down next to me." So I sat down there, and he said, "Look, I'll give you the history of this valley and the Vintners if you will point out the new people that are joining now," because they had opened it up to people wanting to join. And it was kind of interesting. He filled me in of the past and what have you, and he was a really interesting story, Louis Stralla.

01-00:07:55

Meeker: Tell me about him. What winery was he associated with?

01-00:08:03

Trincherro: The co-op.

01-00:08:05

Meeker: Down in Oakville?

01-00:08:08

Trincherro: Well, there were several co-ops. I'm not sure which one. There was one which is now north of town, which is now—I forget what the name of it is, but anyway, and then the one over here, Hall. That was a co-op. and then there was a co-op in Oakville. But, we didn't have anything to do with that part of the business.

01-00:08:36

Meeker: Tell me about Louis Stralla. He was somebody who you already knew before this meeting in 1973, right?

01-00:08:43

Trincherro: Well, yeah, I'd heard of him. I didn't ever talk to him until he started talking to me. So, he was kind of an interesting guy. As a matter of fact, he was the first one to buy Krug in 1933, and I guess then later, I don't know how the Mondavis got it, but they got it about soon after. But, he was a grower. As a matter of fact, he told me that when Lake Berryessa was—they thought about flooding the Berryessa Valley, he planted several hundred acres of quick-growing grapes. And so, before they condemned everything, because he had friends in Sacramento, they told him. They said, "We're going to flood the valley."

Well, you're going to have to pay for my vineyard. He was a real character. I enjoyed it. And, of course, we got close. And at, like, 11:00 at night he'd call me up and say, "Hey, my car won't start." So I had to go down there and jump his battery. But he was a nice guy. As a matter of fact, he was a very good friend of John Daniels of Inglenook. And John Daniels would give Louis a case of each of his vineyards as they were being released, starting, I guess, with '34 would be the first one. Well, I talked him into donating a bottle of '36, which was my birth year. And so, he did, and I bought it at auction to raise money for—I'm not sure what it was. But yeah, he was part of my life back then.

01-00:10:35

Meeker: Did you ever drink that bottle of '36 Inglenook?

- 01-00:10:38
Trincherro: No, I still have it.
- 01-00:10:39
Meeker: No kidding?
- 01-00:10:39
Trincherro: As a matter of fact, another friend, Francis Coppola, is having an eightieth birthday party, and I'm invited. And I'm going to bring it to him and give it to him.
- 01-00:10:49
Meeker: No kidding? That's quite a gift.
- 01-00:10:52
Trincherro: Well, I don't know how good it would be after all these years, but it's still full. And it's been laying in only two cellars, Louis Stralla's and mine.
- 01-00:11:01
Meeker: I bet it's going to be fantastic. Maybe he'll open it when you're there.
- 01-00:11:05
Trincherro: No, I'm not going to—
- 01-00:11:07
Meeker: So, Louis Stralla, I believe, was one of the founders of the Vintners Association.
- 01-00:11:11
Trincherro: Yes he was.
- 01-00:11:13
Meeker: Were you friendly with any of the others over the years? John Daniel was one of them.
- 01-00:11:19
Trincherro: Well, no. That first group I had very little to do, because by the time I was old enough, they were already gone or retired, whatever. And then, the Vintners changed into—instead of being a very difficult place to join, they were very careful about who they invited. And, they would never have invited me because I was nothing back then. First of all, I was too young.
- 01-00:12:03
Meeker: The way that I understand it is the Vintners is open to those who have a bonded winery, right? So, they own a winery. They're not just grape growers. There's a separate organization for that.
- 01-00:12:15
Trincherro: Well, the grape growers have their own organization, yeah.
- 01-00:12:16
Meeker: Right. But Sutter Home was a bonded winery.

01-00:12:22

Trincherro: My father, to him, he never closed the tasting room to sales. That's where most of our wine was being sold, right out of the tasting room. And, at night once in a while he'd have a couple of his grower friends come over, like Mr. Bianco, who had a little vineyard over there. We used to buy his grapes. And they'd play Pedro.

01-00:12:49

Meeker: What's that?

01-00:12:50

Trincherro: It's a card game. They don't play that anymore, but that was the big game. When we got here in '48, 1948, Saint Helena had only one bank and twelve saloons. Now, they have twelve banks and only one saloon. Some people think that's progress. I'm not really too sure. But it's been quite an evolution for the Vintners. Now, of course, especially under Linda Reiff's direction, because she's really a first-class person, it's doing a lot of good. And, we're at the limit, of course, of dues, thank God, or we'd have to pay a lot.

But we also belong to the California Wine Institute. As a matter of fact, I was chairman. When the heck was I chairman? Oh, '81, 1981.

01-00:14:04

Meeker: That's when you were chairman of the Napa Valley Vintners. That's what I have down.

01-00:14:09

Trincherro: No.

01-00:14:09

Meeker: No?

01-00:14:10

Trincherro: The California Wine Institute.

01-00:14:11

Meeker: The Wine Institute? Okay.

01-00:14:13

Trincherro: Oh, no, you're right. This is going back here. Eighty-one, you were correct. That was when I was chairman of the Napa Valley Wine Vintners. And so, let's see. The California Wine—oh, 1994.

01-00:14:41

Meeker: Okay. We'll talk about that in a few moments. You had mentioned these growers who your father used to play cards with. Who else? Do you remember any of the other names of those guys?

01-00:14:57

Trincherro: No. We sort of kept to ourselves except for a few close friends. I was the first one of the family to actually say, "Hey, you know, we should belong to the Napa

Valley Vintners and that sort of thing.” But, in 1973, I would have been twenty-seven years old, so that’s about when I—once they invited me, then I thought, I’ve got a chance to be noticed in this valley.

01-00:15:25

Meeker: Before that, before you joined the Vintners, you were talking about your dad and his friends, the other growers. It sounds like a lot of these were Italians or Italian-Americans. Is that right?

01-00:15:40

Trincherro: Mm-hmm, yes.

01-00:15:41

Meeker: Can you tell me about the culture around that? Did it feel like a real immigrant culture?

01-00:15:48

Trincherro: A little bit of the history. The first settlers here were Swiss-German mostly.

01-00:15:56

Meeker: Like Charles Krug?

01-00:15:57

Trincherro: Charles Krug and the champagne sellers. I forget.

01-00:16:04

Meeker: Oh, Schramsberg, [Jacob] Schram.

01-00:16:05

Trincherro: Schramsberg, yeah. And then, they kind of died out. And then, here come the Italians. And it’s mainly because of some crop failure or something in Italy. As a matter of fact, Crockett, California were all Italian from one particular place in Italy—Lombardy, I think. So, there were a lot of Italians coming in after World War I. And, my dad got here in 1923, although in New York City, not here. But then, all of a sudden, it’s all Italian. Even the German-sounding wineries were Italian. Like, Krug were owned by the Mondavis. So, it’s quite an evolution. Now, of course, it’s everything. Everybody is here.

01-00:17:14

Meeker: Looking back on that time, say, the fifties and sixties, would you say that there was a really strong Italian cultural presence in the valley?

01-00:17:25

Trincherro: Oh yeah. Well, there’s the Sons of Italy. We used to go to the spaghetti feed every month or something. As a matter of fact, I sat across from Cesare Mondavi’s wife, Mrs. Mondavi, and she was a very pleasant lady. And Cesare Mondavi was the member of the Krug family that was in the Vintners, the old Vintners. Now, of course, after a while, then Bob and Peter were part of it. But no, I think it’s been quite a trip really.

01-00:18:09

Meeker: Did your family go to church?

01-00:18:16

Trincherro: Sporadically, like Easter, Christmas. That's all we went. In New York, though, we did go more often. As a matter of fact, most of the time we went there was when—part of the lecture you get in the Catholic Church is all the movies you shouldn't go see. And so we'd write them down and make sure we went out and saw them.

01-00:18:52

Meeker: So, you were saying in 1973 the Vintners really starts to open up to new folks in the valley. Did you ever get a sense—

01-00:19:01

Trincherro: But it was still a food and wine thing. But, all of a sudden, I don't know when, it started creeping in. But it started with, I think, the one before me. And then there's after me. Right about that time we started to become a trade organization. We started getting into politics more and that sort of thing. And, we lost a few members because of that, because they wanted to eat and drink and that's it. It was a party. And about the early eighties it changed. I mean, pardon me, the mid-seventies.

01-00:19:55

Meeker: Can you describe for me some of those early meetings you went to when it was mostly just a food and drinking society?

01-00:20:02

Trincherro: Yeah. They'd have just sitting around and enjoying each other's company, basically. Well, once in a while we'd have a speaker or something, some new laws or something, but very little, very minimal. As a matter of fact, I joined a group which would be over in the corner, drinking brandy and smoking cigars. Boy, that quickly ended. But then when we got serious as a trade group, that was gone. And actually, we lost a few people because of that.

01-00:20:42

Meeker: Where were these dinner meetings? Where did they happen?

01-00:20:47

Trincherro: At the Lodi Farm Center.

01-00:20:48

Meeker: Can you describe that for me?

01-00:20:51

Trincherro: Do you know where the Lodi Farm Center is?

01-00:20:52

Meeker: Well, I know it's up on Lodi Lane, but I've never been to it.

01-00:20:55

Trincherro: Well, the building is not there anymore, but it was an old, broken-down building that we used to get for almost nothing. And, what was the name of the—Sally, Sally Schmidt and Don Schmidt were our hosts. And, that's how we—good food, wine. Everybody would bring a bottle of wine, and that was it.

01-00:21:28

Meeker: Who made the food? Do you remember?

01-00:21:30

Trincherro: Yes, Sally Schmidt. As a matter of fact, when they quit doing it and moved away—they're up in Hopland or someplace up in the hills. And they've got a really nice restaurant. That's the last time I heard of them. That was about ten years ago.

01-00:21:47

Meeker: What kind of food did they prepare?

01-00:21:49

Trincherro: All kinds, absolutely. And she was a very good cook.

01-00:21:57

Meeker: When the Vintners started to become more politically engaged, what were some of the big issues that were interesting people like yourself?

01-00:22:09

Trincherro: Well, I was still part of the nav Wine Technical Group. But the Vintners didn't talk about wines much. It was mainly politics, about who to back, who not to back, things like that, which were interesting to me because obviously it's the only place I could find out what the rest of the industry's thinking about. But, it's always been a place. We've been members since '73, so what can I say? We learned a lot.

01-00:22:53

Meeker: Do you remember any issues that were a big concern to you, that were brought up at the Vintners?

01-00:22:59

Trincherro: Well, of course, the big thing was passed in '68.

01-00:23:09

Meeker: The agricultural preserve?

01-00:23:10

Trincherro: Agricultural preserve, and how do we save the valley? For instance, they started to build a freeway from Napa, four lanes. And we said, where's it going? Well, it's going to Calistoga. No. So, we stopped it. It was created by the Napa Valley—I forgot what the name of the group was now. But anyway, and we put it in court, and finally Caltrans said the heck with you. So, they cleaned up their mess and left. So it ended in Yountville. No, we didn't want a—because a four-

lane freeway is 180 feet wide, counting berms and stuff and fences. And, can you imagine 180 feet wide going right up the middle of the valley?

And then we started to find out that they were thinking about Napa as a bedroom community for the Bay Area because I remember looking at BART when they first proposed BART, the original BART. There was a station in Napa. I said you're going to put a BART station in Napa? Then, of course, we're farmers but we're not dumb farmers. And, so we said, well, let's see. A four-lane freeway going down the middle of the valley, and BART so you can hop BART to go to San Francisco. We said, a lot of us said, no way. So, that was it, because they were going to put houses instead of vineyards.

01-00:24:59

Meeker: Well, that's the thing. Think how much prime vineyard land with 180-foot freeway going straight through it.

01-00:25:09

Trincherro: Yeah.

01-00:25:11

Meeker: Another thing that happened in the wake of the ag preserve of 1968 was the Winery Definition Ordinance.

01-00:25:20

Trincherro: That was another one, yeah.

01-00:25:22

Meeker: Can you tell me about what that is? I think for somebody outside of Napa Valley, it's kind of a head scratcher, right?

01-00:25:30

Trincherro: Yeah.

01-00:25:31

Meeker: So, can you tell me about what the issues were and what you thought about it at the time?

01-00:25:37

Trincherro: The bottom line, what is a winery, because some of these were more retail than a winery. I remember sitting in. I used to go to the county hearings. And this one winery, their tasting room and sales room was bigger than the square footage for the winery. Wait a minute. That's not right. And, they looked at it as hospitality, which is important. Don't get me wrong. I think all wineries should have the right to have hospitality things and things like that. We certainly do. And we've got three tasting rooms, as a matter of fact, because we own three wineries up and down the valley.

But, it can go too far. So, that's what really said, okay. We took it to court, and the court said, how can you do this when you don't have a definition of what a winery is? So, that started the definition ordinance.

- 01-00:26:51
Meeker: Do you remember those conversations at the Vintners? Were there debates about whether this should be done and how it should be done?
- 01-00:27:02
Trincherro: I recall we talked about it, certainly. But I don't remember the day-to-day stuff.
- 01-00:27:10
Meeker: One of the provisions of it, and I can't recite this law chapter and verse, but had to do with origin of grapes that are being produced.
- 01-00:27:24
Trincherro: Well, that was another issue. And, another issue was the name Napa. What does that mean? It was a lot of stuff that is now in place, and it's come back to really reward us.
- 01-00:27:44
Meeker: So, you look back on all of that as positive developments?
- 01-00:27:48
Trincherro: Absolutely. You have to protect the name Napa, although I had to chuckle when I saw this T-shirt the guy was wearing. It said, "Napa makes auto parts; Sonoma makes wine." Wait a minute. There's always been a little rubbing of egos between us and Sonoma.
- 01-00:28:13
Meeker: I live over in Sonoma County, but I won't take that personally.
- 01-00:28:16
Trincherro: No, are you kidding me? Sonoma County has great wines. But we just like to poke each other.
- 01-00:28:26
Meeker: I think there's a lot of debate within Sonoma County about where the best wines in Sonoma County come from.
- 01-00:28:33
Trincherro: Now, that's something else, too. We, I think, did it right. I think except for maybe one thing—it went through some changes, and it was a difficult time. For instance, I was on the committee that mapped out what is Napa Valley. And, we went to the hearings, and I'm going, wow. We went to the hearings, and what is Napa Valley? Well, jeez, I lost my train of thought.
- 01-00:29:20
Meeker: I think you were talking about the establishment of the first Napa AVA, right?
- 01-00:29:26
Trincherro: Yeah.

01-00:29:28

Meeker: And you said you were on the committee that was figuring out how to answer that question.

01-00:29:33

Trincherro: Oh yeah, okay. And, we went to the meetings with the government, and they laid down what it had to be. It had to be unique. It had to be all of this. And so—jeez, I keep losing it, that one part.

01-00:30:03

Meeker: Just from what I know about it, there was a big debate about was Napa Valley just the valley, or was it the whole county?

01-00:30:11

Trincherro: Okay, yeah. So, we created what we thought was the largest defensible position, and that would be the watershed of Napa Valley. Actually, at the time, 95 percent of the grapes were grown there. So we thought we could get that in. Then the hearings started, and all of a sudden, well, I've got a vineyard in Pope Valley. I've got a vineyard in Chiles Valley and all the other valleys here in Napa County. And so, they said okay. They cut out only the part of this county that doesn't have any grapes. And they said everything else is Napa Valley.

But, see, one of the problems we had was, okay, Napa Valley. Now, Napa County, you could have Napa County on the label. It could grow anywhere in Napa County. But Napa Valley had to be in this—it's the difference between 75 percent and 85 percent of grapes. So, it has its shortcoming, but still it's working now. And then, we had another problem that the guys said, yeah, but I want it smaller. So, Stag's Leap area, and now of course they came out with districts, Saint Helena District, and of course I haven't been part of that.

01-00:31:54

Meeker: Well, you definitely have some property, vineyard land, in Napa County now.

01-00:32:00

Trincherro: I do, yeah, about 300 acres.

01-00:32:03

Meeker: Okay. I'm curious. All these issues that you're bringing up—the Winery Definition Ordinance, the ag preserve, the AVA—were the Vintners meetings a place that people could hash these ideas out?

01-00:32:20

Trincherro: Oh, sure. Oh, absolutely. It was the Vintners that were doing it.

01-00:32:25

Meeker: It's actually remarkable to me as an outsider that all of these difficult issues could in fact be discussed in a place like the Vintners and not have those issues destroy or overly disrupt the organization.

01-00:32:45

Trincherro: You mean like the Democrats and the Republicans?

01-00:32:47

Meeker: Yeah, exactly. How was peace maintained when people had different points of view?

01-00:32:57

Trincherro: Once in a while, sure, somebody maybe says, well, I'm going to leave the Vintners, but that was rare. It really was. We all were on the same thing. And, well, as a matter of fact, at the hearings, when we were trying to tell the ATF what we call Napa Valley, Bob Mondavi testified, because he had vineyards elsewhere, too. And he said, no, it doesn't make any difference. And he made a good point. So, everyone says, hmm. So, the government took it away from us, and they created their own. But basically all they did was include every vineyard grown in Napa County except the very northeastern corner of Berryessa, which of course had no grapes.

01-00:33:58

Meeker: At this most recent annual meeting that just happened last week, we met briefly, and I was really happy to be able to attend. There was interesting conversation and hearing from various people about what the Vintners means and what Napa Valley means. And there's this constant refrain that we're all very different, but we all serve this common cause. Do you think that that is the main function of the Vintners?

01-00:34:44

Trincherro: I think it's turned from a production to sales and advertising and things like that. A big thing, of course, is direct sales. For the small wineries, you have wineries here that make five, six hundred gallons of wine a year. And, of course, then there's the large ones like us where we sell millions of gallons, cases. But we all get along, I think, although frankly I haven't been to a Vintners meeting in quite a while. So, that was one, because Linda asked me to say a few things, and she gave me the script, so I had to read it. And then these stupid glasses, they're bifocals, and the glasses kept sliding. It's a little loose. And I'd lose track, so I'd have to go like that—oh, okay—then start again.

No, I think we get along pretty well. Sure, the small winery thinks they make the greatest wine in the world, and that's wonderful. We all should feel like we're making the greatest wine. And then, of course, they look down on someone like us, who are more—how should I say—well, for instance, we created white zinfandel, which many people don't even consider a wine. Well, millions of people do. But we all get along. We try to help each other out a little bit, because that's what helped me when I started as a winemaker.

01-00:36:43

My first vintage was 1960 where I actually made the wine. And, boy, I needed help. And I ran across the highway there to Louis Martini. Hey, Louis, can I borrow this wrench or whatever? And, of course, he had a shop, big shop. And

Joe Heitz, he showed me how to run certain processes. How do you determine the acid and all of that? And, it was quite a learning experience, but I got a lot of help from the Vintners. We all helped each other.

As a matter of fact, my pump, I had this piston pump. And, somehow the rubber came off of the ball. There's two balls in there. And so, I went across the street to Louis Martini, and he had extra. So, I borrowed it for the vintage. It's just that kind of thing.

01-00:37:48

Meeker:

One looks at some histories of Bordeaux, for instance, and many of the estates there are famously secretive and competitive with one another. You can see why that is, but it's harder to explain why there would be so much cooperation in Napa Valley.

01-00:38:11

Trincherro:

Yeah. I don't know how to do this. Well here, let me show you. It's as simple as that. The French, of course, have been at it for centuries, and the Italians and most of Europe that grow grapes. I've got the secret of grape—come on, what secret? There are no secrets in the wine business. You can buy a book and it tells you all about it. But they like to be mysterious.

01-00:38:45

Meeker:

Why do you think folks in Napa were so willing to cooperate and help each other out?

01-00:38:52

Trincherro:

I don't really know. There's always been a feeling for the valley, and we're lucky in the sense that Napa Valley is a small valley instead of San Joaquin Valley or upper Sacramento Valley and things like that. It's a very small one. As a matter of fact, Sonoma County is two and a half times the size of Napa County. There is a Sonoma Valley, but it's really teeny compared to the county. But here, most of the county is valley because it's the watershed of the Napa Valley. But, that's a hard question to answer. Why do we get along so well and very few other people do? I don't know, truly. There's just good people.

01-00:39:52

Meeker:

Over the years, have there been—tell me about, over the years, your social habits, the friends that you kept and where and how you socialize. How do you establish those closer bonds of friendship with people?

01-00:40:09

Trincherro:

Usually, with the same interests, things like that. How do you make a friend? It's just, usually you have something in common, and then you expand on it and you become friends. I was lucky that I grew up here from twelve to eighteen when I graduated from high school, so, I still have some high school friends. And then I made friends all through the years just because I was part of this or certainly part of the Vintners. A lot of the Vintners are friends of mine. And then we created our own little group called the Napa Valley GONADS.

01-00:41:01
Meeker: I've heard of this.

01-00:41:02
Trincherro: Oh, you've heard of them?

01-00:41:03
Meeker: I have. Tell me about the GONADS.

01-00:41:06
Trincherro: There's twelve of us, and we meet once a month. And each person hosts wherever—their home, their restaurant, wherever. And we talk business, mainly government. That's always, you know, what are they going to do to us now, type of thing. But otherwise, it's just fun. We've been together for, oh God, thirty years now, more than that.

01-00:41:36
Meeker: Who are some of the guys in this group? And I think it's all guys, right?

01-00:41:41
Trincherro: Yeah. Who are some of the guys?

01-00:41:46
Meeker: Yeah.

01-00:41:47
Trincherro: Well, I don't know if I should tell you.

01-00:41:50
Meeker: Okay, fair enough.

01-00:41:53
Trincherro: I'm not sure they want me to tell you.

01-00:41:55
Meeker: I think that some of the names are known, but I'll let you be discrete and not say anything.

01-00:42:01
Trincherro: In the past?

01-00:42:01
Meeker: Yeah.

01-00:42:02
Trincherro: The ones that are gone like Chuck Carpy. Oh, Jesus. How soon we forget.

01-00:42:20
Meeker: You get to review the transcript, and so if you want to add some names in writing, we can do that.

01-00:42:27

Trincherro: Well, I don't want to list them, although they're certainly not bashful or afraid of—okay, Carl Doumani, Mike Chelini, Bob Steinhauer, Stan Teaderman—he's not in the wine business. He's in the propane business, but he's a kick. There's twelve of us, I know.

01-00:43:05

Meeker: It's interesting you had mentioned the government was always on the topics because the wine industry is heavily taxed and heavily regulated.

01-00:43:15

Trincherro: Absolutely. We pay taxes every time we turn around.

01-00:43:19

Meeker: Why do you think that is?

01-00:43:22

Trincherro: It starts off with drinking alcohol is a sin, that type of thing, our early development of puritans and what have you. And in a lot of states, see, the thing is the government didn't know what to do. They created in, what, nineteen-something, Prohibition, and it was over in 1933. And it started in 1919, something like that.

[side conversation deleted]

01-00:44:13

Trincherro: And then, what they did is, I think it was the Supreme Court said that every state had the right to regulate its alcohol. And they tried to stop them from taking wine, but it went in anyway. So now what do you do? And so, every state is different. Most things, if you make a widget, you can send that widget anywhere, all fifty states. We can't because every state's different, so we have to deal with fifty principalities that we have to deal with. And, some of them are easy. I wish everyone was like, say, Nevada or some of them because they're very easy to get along with. But some of them are just unbelievable. The biggest thing, the largest distillery is Jack Daniel's. It's in a dry county. Can you imagine that?

01-00:45:29

Meeker: I didn't know that.

01-00:45:29

Trincherro: But they got grandfathered in because they were there when all of this happened. They've been there a hundred and something years. And, in Lynchburg, which is the county seat, you can't drink at all. But they've recently allowed you to buy a bottle. But you've got to go out of the county to drink it. I mean, what is this? But, it's the way they want it. And, instead, they should have just turned it over to the federal government so that it was a level playing field, but they didn't.

01-00:46:15

Meeker: So, addressing these kinds of issues and maybe providing some remedies for them, is that something that you've seen the Napa Valley Vintners engage in?

01-00:46:33

Trincherro: Oh, yeah. Well, of course, if you're lucky like we, we have three people that make sure we've got the licensing and everything in all these states because we sell in all the states. But most of the smaller wineries don't sell in all fifty states, and that's why direct sales was so important to a small winery. They create their little club, and they sell their wines through the club or their tasting room, whatever. But if they wanted to sell in some of these states, they'd better read the book.

01-00:47:21

Meeker: You were president of the board of the Vintners in 1981.

01-00:47:26

Trincherro: I think it's chairman, isn't it?

01-00:47:27

Meeker: Chairman.

01-00:47:28

Trincherro: Yeah, chairman of the board.

01-00:47:30

Meeker: Thank you, chairman of the board of the Vintners in 1981. Can you tell me what the job description of that role is, or as it was when you took it on?

01-00:47:42

Trincherro: You know how long ago that was?

01-00:47:44

Meeker: A long time ago.

01-00:47:45

Trincherro: Yeah. Well, that was the first year of the Napa Valley wine auction, and so we were busy doing that. I don't know. It was a busy year, I know. Well, also, that was the year my father died. And Louis Stralla died that year also, who was a good friend of mine. And it was just a tumultuous year.

01-00:48:19

Meeker: That's interesting. Did it feel like a change, like a generational shift had happened or something that year?

01-00:48:30

Trincherro: A generational shift?

01-00:48:32

Meeker: Yeah, so like the new auction is starting, and then these new important figures in your life had passed away.

01-00:48:39

Trincherro: I think that was developing before me. I think Chuck Carpy, who was before me, started a lot of that. Certainly, let's see, not the auction. The auction was '81, and I was there from start to finish. And luckily Louis Martini—he didn't volunteer.

We coerced him, Louis P. Martini, to be the first chair. And it was quite a mess, frankly. No one knew what they were doing. But you know what? We came away with the feeling that in this valley we have a lot of talent. All of a sudden we're going to do this big party for hundreds of people. Who's going to make the food? Martha May walked up and said, "I'll take care of the food." And I don't know how she talked—and I forget who the first chef was, but talked him into cooking it. And then, somebody volunteered to collect the wine and all of this.

And, unfortunately, the weather didn't cooperate. It was 110 in the shade that day, and everyone was in tuxedos. And I think a lot of them were drinking beer anyway. But we raised 400 and something thousand dollars.

01-00:50:06

Meeker:

You said it was a big mess. Aside from what Mother Nature gave you in terms of hot weather, what else went wrong that day?

01-00:50:13

Trincherro:

Well, that created a lot of problems, because how do you keep the wine cool? As a matter of fact, I've got a picture of me and Louis Martini and Michael Broadbent, who was the auctioneer, and his son standing behind him. And, I don't know what we were talking about, but I remember that Michael Broadbent had his feet in cold water, ice water, in and out, to keep him cool, because it was 110 in the shade there. And so, we got some fans. We ran around getting fans. It was just like, what do they call that—

01-00:50:57

Meeker:

Keystone Cops or something?

01-00:50:58

Trincherro:

Yeah, Keystone Cops. You read my mind. And it was just that kind of thing. But, it turned out good. As a matter of fact, interesting, there was a follow-up meeting. And the question, the big question is, should we do it again, because there's a big auction in France every five years. We said, five years? I don't know. How about two years? And I don't know who said it, but oh, the hell with it. Let's do it again next year. And we did, and it keeps getting bigger and bigger, of course, and very well-known.

01-00:51:40

Meeker:

Do you have any other memories of that first auction?

01-00:51:48

Trincherro:

Oh, boy. I know it was really busy. No.

01-00:51:54

Meeker:

Did you get a chance to sit down and enjoy the auction, or were you mostly moving around?

01-00:51:58

Trincherro: Not really. It was a busy time. And remember, we didn't have as many vintners back then. We certainly got, what did Linda say, 500 and something wineries? But, of course, a lot of that is the advent of, what do they call it, virtual wineries.

01-00:52:21

Meeker: Yeah, using custom crush operations.

01-00:52:23

Trincherro: Yeah, right. So, I don't know. The BATF, well, of course, it's not the BATF anymore. It's the TTB, because over half of the BATF dealt with weapons and explosives, and so that's part of the land security. And, the TTB does, I guess they do alcohol and tobacco.

01-00:52:52

Meeker: Have you consistently gone to the auction over the years?

01-00:52:57

Trincherro: Yes, except for the last two. I don't know. I think we were in Hawaii both times. We have a place in Hawaii we like to sneak off to for a couple of months every so often.

01-00:53:16

Meeker: I think this past year was another 110-degree day, so it's probably good you missed it.

01-00:53:21

Trincherro: Yeah, I don't do well in the heat.

01-00:53:27

Meeker: How has the auction changed over the years?

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Trincherro: Well, first of all, it's very well organized. They have their own group that creates it. It's just developed beautifully, I think. And every year they make it interesting. Of course, I haven't been for the last two years, so I don't know about the last two. But I hear it was fabulous.

01-00:54:00

Meeker: Have you ever been involved in the grants committee or anything like that?

01-00:54:03

Trincherro: No.

01-00:54:06

Meeker: Have you noticed any change in the valley since the auction has been helping—

01-00:54:12

Trincherro: Oh yeah. It's the place to live. Try to buy a house up here, and you'll find out—okay, I'll share this with you. I bought my first house in 1966, and I paid \$12,000 for the house. Today, there's no such thing as a \$12,000 house. They start at a

million, and these are the fixer-uppers. And I've noticed in Saint Helena they've bought these little houses, tore them down and built nice houses and then selling them or just keeping them. I've never seen that much, but the cost today, I'm glad I came in 1948, or I couldn't afford a house here.

01-00:55:06

Meeker: Do you still live in the valley?

01-00:55:07

Trincherro: Oh yeah. I live in Saint Helena, always have. Well, actually, technically I live half a mile outside of Saint Helena, along the Silverado Trail.

01-00:55:21

Meeker: I mentioned to you I read your earlier interview from 1991, and there's a lot of really interesting ideas in it. One of the ideas that you talk about in it is your lamenting what you call the "wall of intimidation" that the wine industry puts up around wine for the American consumer.

01-00:55:51

Trincherro: The Vintners do what?

01-00:55:52

Meeker: That put up around wine, so you call it a "wall of intimidation." In other words, it's like you're offering a critique of winemakers who don't make it easy for Americans to learn about and enjoy wine.

01-00:56:13

Trincherro: Oh, do you mean the attitude that if you don't like it, it's your fault, not mine?

01-00:56:17

Meeker: Yeah.

01-00:56:21

Trincherro: Ego, sure, there's a little of that. Come on. Look at over 500 wineries. Some are in the wrong business, frankly. Some use it—I want a wine with my name on it, God forbid a picture of me or whatever. Sure, there's a few like that, but most of them are honest. They just want to produce a nice bottle of wine, and yeah, and have their name on it, so why not?

01-00:56:52

Meeker: The thing that you were getting at, I think, was you were talking about how American winemakers insist on using a cork and not easier ways to even open a bottle. And you were talking about this idea that we're trying to recreate French culture in America, but this is America. I'm wondering if, you know, now it's twenty-five-plus years after this. Do you think the wine industry has made strides to dismantle that?

01-00:57:30

Trincherro: Well, first of all, the wine industry moves in slow, sometimes mysterious ways. And, you'll notice what I said back then was, screw caps are the way wine should

be sealed. We've proved that time and time again. It ages better with a screw cap. I know it flies in the face of tradition, but a cork is 400-year-old technology. It's a piece of wood, soft wood, obviously. So, it has certain shortcomings. First of all, cork taint is a big thing. I even find it in some of my wines. And it's nothing we can do about it. It's in the cork.

But the screw caps, we've run a lot of tests over, God, twenty, thirty years, of the 187s, the small—I think they're five and a half ounces. And, they don't change. They do change, but they age better. You'd think a small bottle like that would change faster. It would if it had a cork in it because you can't stop some air to getting in there. You want some air, actually. But, the screw cap is so much better, and I see quite a few of them on the market now, like chardonnays and expensive ones.

01-00:59:09

Meeker: A number of your wines you use screw caps as well.

01-00:59:12

Trincherro: Yeah.

01-00:59:13

Meeker: Do you think that the wine industry as a whole has made strides in those twenty-five years to begin to dismantle that "wall of intimidation," to make it easier for Americans to get into wine?

01-00:59:30

Trincherro: I think so. Of course, the opposite is also true there. It's easy to make wine intimidating. But I always remember my ex-brother-in-law. We were out for dinner. And, of course, this is a long time ago. And, he said, "Let me order the wine." Oh, okay. So, the waiter came in. I'd like a bottle of pinot noir. Okay. He didn't have a brand. And he looked at me. You know how long I practiced "pinot noir" to say it properly? Well, Americans learned to say chardonnay, as simple as that. It's a very intimidating word, but once you say it, it's the way it is in this business. I always say drink what you like, drink what you can afford, simple as that.

01-01:00:39

Meeker: Do you think that there are things that the wine industry could do to further demystify wine for the American public?

01-01:00:47

Trincherro: No. I suppose there's some peripheral things you can do, but I've got no answer to that, because if the vintner himself thinks his wine's the greatest thing since sliced bread, there's really not much you can do about it. He's going to make it as romantic as mysterious as he possibly can. As for me, no, I believe in stack them high and watch them fly.

- 01-01:01:18
Meeker: Well, what began as a very small, modest operation, Sutter Home, in 1948, although I think you had a number of labels, you had Chianti—
- 01-01:01:32
Trincherro: Oh, God, in the fifties we had fifty-two labels. And the local joke was that we only had two tanks of wine in the winery, one white and one red.
- 01-01:01:46
Meeker: Is that true? I've always wondered, because I go back, and it's like even in the store now, for some you still see American wines that will say Chianti and Burgundy.
- 01-01:01:57
Trincherro: Well, they can be anything.
- 01-01:02:00
Meeker: But are they any different? It sounds like you're saying maybe it was just the same wine but different labels.
- 01-01:02:05
Trincherro: Burgundy and what?
- 01-01:02:05
Meeker: Chianti.
- 01-01:02:07
Trincherro: It could be. Now, we had both Burgundy and Chianti. And they were similar, except we add a little port to the Burgundy and CO2 gas, a little spritz. It was pretty popular. We used to sell it in half-gallons and gallons even. But it's not the same wine, and yet it is, if you know what I mean. A little port doesn't hurt anything. It gives it that little mellowness to it. And then we spritz it up a little bit so that you've got a little fizz.
- 01-01:02:45
Meeker: It's like a dosage in champagne or something, right?
- 01-01:02:48
Trincherro: Yeah, right, just a little bit.
- 01-01:02:51
Meeker: But now, of course, you don't just have Sutter Home. You have dozens, I think, of labels.
- 01-01:02:59
Trincherro: Yeah, they're all different, though. We've gone past—we, being the winemaker—'85 was the last year I made the wine. I followed it a little bit for the next five years, but now we've got a team that makes the wine. We have specific people make certain wines. And then, of course, we've got 11,000 acres of grapes in the state. And so, we've got wines all the way from—I mean grapes. Oh, jeez, we go

down to Santa Cruz and that area all the way out to past Sacramento. So, you get all these different types.

01-01:03:49

Meeker: One area that you've expanded into is the premium varietal market with your Trinchero label. Can you tell me about the decision for your family to go into that?

01-01:04:01

Trinchero: Well, after we were a success, everything from white zin to all our other wines—chardonnays, pinot noirs, et cetera—that we decided this is a good area to grow grapes, because by this time now we've had several vineyards. We've got 300 acres in five or six vineyards in different areas—high-altitude, low, here in the valley. So, we say you know what? We need a winery with our name on it. Here we've got a little bit of ego. And so, you say okay. So, we built a winery just north of town here, and we hired who we considered an excellent winemaker. And that's all he does is Trinchero, and only from our grapes in our vineyards. And it's been very enjoyable making wine with your name on it.

01-01:05:11

Meeker: Can you tell me about the family conversation that was had about whether to take this endeavor on? It's kind of a high-risk endeavor.

01-01:05:19

Trinchero: By that time, we were pretty confident in our ability to sell wine. So, it was a natural progression to us. What are we going to do next? Let's build a winery with our name on it. Okay. So, we built a winery. But we have seven properties with wineries. And a lot of these labels—and then we have some joint ventures also.

01-01:05:54

Meeker: Like Neyers? Is that one of the joint ventures?

01-01:05:55

Trinchero: Neyers, Gott. There's a couple of others. I can't think of them.

01-01:06:03

Meeker: What does it mean to be a joint venture? I didn't know that you were involved in Neyers until I looked at your website recently.

01-01:06:09

Trinchero: Well, we don't make the wine. We don't bottle it either. What we do is we sell it. So, it becomes part of our portfolio. And I'm not sure what the deal is because, my God, no one told me. But anyway, we've got the best president of anybody, Bob Torkelson. And Bob is a really sharp guy, and he's fair, and we like him very much. So, he just does what he wants to do. But probably, what, fifty percent? No, not even that much, I wouldn't think, twenty-five, something like that.

01-01:06:58

Meeker: The Trinchero wines, are those your wines of choice at home?

01-01:07:05

Trincherro: Yeah, for red wine, but we don't drink a lot of red wine.

01-01:07:10

Meeker: No? Why not?

01-01:07:11

Trincherro: My wife and I drink chardonnay. And our winery, Napa Cellars, really good. This guy really makes great chardonnay. But, see, Mario Monticelli, our winemaker at Trincherro, he doesn't make any white wine, all red. And he's great at doing it. But I've had people tell me how much they like the red, the Trincherro. And, fine. I drink it. It's my red wine. But most of our cuisine is light, like chicken and things, or fish. My son bought a place up in Sitka, Alaska, and he sends us down all this halibut and salmon, and so we eat a lot of fish, so we drink white wine.

01-01:08:03

Meeker: You can't serve that with a big Napa Valley cab, can you?

01-01:08:07

Trincherro: Actually, you can, but you've got to cook the fish with the wine.

01-01:08:13

Meeker: Oh, interesting.

01-01:08:13

Trincherro: If you use cabernet to sauté the fish, it'll go very nicely with red wine, but not if you do it normally, no.

01-01:08:26

Meeker: I've seen it reported that some of your properties have moved into sustainability in terms of the viticultural practices and the winemaking practices.

01-01:08:39

Trincherro: Yes.

01-01:08:40

Meeker: Can you talk about that? What does that mean to you?

01-01:08:43

Trincherro: Sustainability is nothing new. It's just that you use the land to propagate the land. You create compost, and we do all of that. As a matter of fact, we were selling it. We were producing so much of it, because you take the grapes, and you let them go through their natural fermentation, and then you create fertilizer, basically, and it keeps the soil. But sustainability is just a mindset, really, more than anything. You just do the best you can without hurting the ecology.

01-01:09:37

Meeker: This is something that has become more and more important for the Napa Valley Vintners group.

01-01:09:44

Trincherro: As a matter of fact, we received the WRAP award about eleven years in a row now.

01-01:09:51

Meeker: What's the WRAP award?

01-01:09:52

Trincherro: It's the award that they have in the Bay Area for people who recycle at a high level, because we recycle all our cardboard, plastic, glass. I guess that's about it. We don't bottle aluminum cans. And, we pack it, and we send it to—this is a huge truck and trailer. And we send it to Richmond, and they pay us. We take the money, and we put it in a fund for the employees. We call it the Employee Assistance Funds. We had a couple of our employees have their homes burn down. And so, what we did is we took, I think it was \$5,000 each. They had insurance, but there was a \$5,000 what?

01-01:10:54

Meeker: Deductible?

01-01:10:55

Trincherro: Deduction, so we filled it in for them. And we do stuff like that. If there's an emergency, we take money out of that fund. So, there's quite a bit of money in there.

01-01:11:07

Meeker: With the Vintners, again, one of the things they've been focusing on is the environment, and there's the green task force and all that sort of stuff. Do you feel like there's now a consensus in Napa Valley about sustainability and how to do it?

01-01:11:27

Trincherro: Oh, yeah, I think so. I'm not saying everybody is on board, but yeah.

01-01:11:36

Meeker: Do you find there's still areas of controversy or particular issues that are difficult to get agreement on?

01-01:11:46

Trincherro: If there is, I haven't heard it.

01-01:11:50

Meeker: Did you take a public position on Prop C? That was on the ballot in June 2018?

01-01:11:57

Trincherro: Oh, yeah. I don't know how I voted on that. I didn't know what it was.

01-01:12:03

Meeker: Okay. I think you were in Hawaii when the election happened.

01-01:12:04

Trincherro: Yeah, right. I spend a lot of time in Hawaii.

- 01-01:12:08
Meeker: What island are you guys on?
- 01-01:12:09
Trincherro: Maui. Wailea.
- 01-01:12:14
Meeker: I want to ask you about your reflections on the role of Napa Valley Vintners. Maybe the way to begin that conversation is ask you about this event that just happened last week, a little over a week ago. It was the seventy-fifth anniversary annual meeting.
- [side conversation deleted]
- 01-01:12:45
Meeker: So, when you went to that meeting, did it inspire you to be reflective or looking back on your years and your engagement with the organization?
- 01-01:13:01
Trincherro: Inspire me to look back?
- 01-01:13:03
Meeker: Yeah.
- 01-01:13:04
Trincherro: I've always been somebody who is always looking forward. That's why I'm not very good at interviews like this. I'm trying to remember, but I'll tell you what I'm going to be doing. But in the past it's tough for me because, well, first of all, I'm eighty-two years old, so a lot of it I forgot. My brain is full, as they say.
- 01-01:13:34
Meeker: That happens. I've done some reading in neuroscience around memory, and that old joke about you have to un-remember something if you want to remember something new is not far from the truth.
- 01-01:13:48
Trincherro: Yeah, I believe it. All the information I'm taking in now, I have to get rid of some way back here in this little rolodex file I've got in the back of my brain. So, I don't know, but the future is bright. There's no question about that.
- 01-01:14:08
Meeker: Rather than talk about the past, because you're still looking to the future—
- 01-01:14:12
Trincherro: Oh, no, I'll talk about the past, what I remember.
- 01-01:14:15
Meeker: We've been talking for an hour and a half now, but just, I guess we'll talk about the future in a second. Looking back to the past of seventy-five years of this organization, do you have any thoughts on what its biggest contributions have been?

01-01:14:34

Trincherro: Well, it brings, first of all, most of the vintners together so they can discuss things. That's the big thing. It's an assembly of the vintners airing out their whatever. Are they happy, are they said, whatever. And, oft times you can help them. I only have high ratings for the Napa Valley Vintners. Over the years, especially under Linda Reiff's direction, things are, I think, great.

01-01:15:11

Meeker: What is it that you think her particular contributions have been to the organization? Is there anything in particular that you would identify as having a Linda Reiff stamp on it?

01-01:15:28

Trincherro: I can't think of anything because I'm not that in it anymore. I'm sort of past it.

01-01:15:37

Meeker: Fair enough. Looking back on the history of the Vintners, have there been any difficult challenges or moments in the organization that you were throwing your hands up?

01-01:15:52

Trincherro: No, I never throw my hands up. I always figure there's a solution somewhere, and so that's what I do. I find a solution. Or I hire somebody who knows the solution. If I've got a talent, my talent really is picking the right person to do the job I can't do. And, here I retired about five years ago because we reached a point where—okay, I'll tell you a little story. I sat down with our winemaker, Mario Monticelli. This was a few years ago. And I said, "Mario, how do you—" we were talking about winemaking and grape picking. He said, "Well, I don't pick the entire vine." I said, "You don't pick the entire vine?" No, no, no. I pick certain parts. Sometimes I'll have four picking of one vine. I said, "Why?" Well, it's the exposure to the sun.

Are you kidding me? When I made wine, I picked the whole vine. I can't believe winemaking has changed that much, but it has. I can still make wine, but not like they do today. So I figured, look. I was chairman of Trincherro Family Estates. I turned to my brother. Isn't it about time you became chairman? He was vice chairman. Okay. So, I retired, and he became chairman of the board. No, in our family we have good relationships.

01-01:17:34

Meeker: You happily handed the gavel to your brother?

01-01:17:36

Trincherro: Oh, sure. Are you kidding me? I didn't want it. I'm basically lazy. I like going to Hawaii and just laying on my lanai and just soak up the warmth.

01-01:17:50

Meeker: You know, there are some pretty famous and notorious family disputes that have happened in the valley. But, your family has managed to avoid any of those

pitfalls, and three siblings worked together for many years productively. At least, that's what it appears.

01-01:18:17

Trincherro: Yeah.

01-01:18:18

Meeker: What was the secret to your family's success in this regard?

01-01:18:22

Trincherro: Well, it's funny. Several times, at least ten times now, brothers of other wineries or businesses have taken us out to lunch, my brother and I, and asked that same question because we're at odds—that's them. And, how do you guys get along so well? And I said, "It was our parents, simple as that." It was instilled in us at an early age that family is what's important. And that's the way we go through life. Decisions are made not for the winery or the business. It's made for the family. What's good for the family? And any family member can work in the winery or not work, whatever they want to do. We've never pushed them. I don't know. It's just common sense. But my brother and I do it so naturally, I guess people—I do get along. We're always poking at each other, kidding. Mom loved you best and all of this stuff. There's a lot of humor. That's the only thing I can say is our parents instilled it on us.

01-01:19:47

Meeker: How do you think you figure out what's best for the family? Is that easy, or do you sometimes have to think about that?

01-01:19:54

Trincherro: Sometimes we have to think about what's good for the family, yeah. But, if it's a family member, that's who we're dealing with. And we're not easy on them. If you come here to work, you'll get paid. If you don't work, you don't get paid. And, you've got to do the job. If you fail, you're out. We'll send you money because you're my cousin or whatever. But, you can't work here. So, we're walking that fine line of making sure nothing takes away from the quality of the wine and the winery and our employees, because they're paramount. Like I tell them, I said, "You're doing a job I don't want to do. That's why I pay you so well." And, it's part of that. And so, our employees are our family, and we treat them like human beings, like equals.

01-01:21:02

Meeker: You said you like to look forward to the future. What are you most looking forward to in terms of the future of Trincherro Family Estates?

01-01:21:14

Trincherro: Well, I want it to succeed at whatever level. Of course, we're at a high level right now. We're the fourth-largest winery in the country. But, just success as long as it serves the family. And, of course, I read that article how each generation the percentage of success is. And after three, you're down to 10 percent. But, if you look at families like DuPont, there's, what, a couple thousand that get their check.

They don't work for the company and that sort of thing, because they get along. And that's exactly how we do it. We take care of our family first, then the winery.

01-01:22:19

Meeker: Do you think the estate needs to continue to expand?

01-01:22:24

Trincherro: No, not necessarily, although it should expand a little bit, like one or two percent, just to overcome inflation and things like that. But, other than that, no, not really.

01-01:22:40

Meeker: Are there areas that you are looking to expand into or you think that Trincherro should expand into?

01-01:22:47

Trincherro: You mean other businesses?

01-01:22:49

Meeker: Well, however you define it, either other regions or other businesses.

01-01:22:57

Trincherro: Well, we're always open to anything. That's one thing about us. We're open. And we listen to the customer. We always listen. And when they come in—it was a customer that made the white zinfandel, not us. We just bottled it almost by accident. And all of a sudden people are going crazy over it, so we start making more. There you go. They really like your wine, so you're going to make more, of course. And so, that's how our success was built. But now that we are successful, we're going to stay that way.

01-01:23:37

Meeker: What do you hear the customers telling you now?

01-01:23:41

Trincherro: Well, they like my wine because we've increased—of course, we're at a huge base now—about 3 percent this past year. And, that's all we want to grow, or actually less than that. It was a little too good a year. But, one or two percent would be fine because the economy is slow, has been slow, as far as interest rates and things like that. And we've got no real debt.

01-01:24:14

Meeker: Are you hearing the consumers' taste change at all or modify? How close?

01-01:24:20

Trincherro: Oh, God, yes. That's our biggest challenge, is that what's hot now may not be hot tomorrow, and so how do you keep it hot? And, we've had a lot of surprises, by the way. We've always made a wine called Moscato. It's a Muscat wine. And, some rapper I've never heard of rapped this thing of Moscato and—it's a vodka—Cîroc, Cîroc and Moscato. And the inner city, they were going crazy over it. They were mixing vodka with Moscato. And we're producing Moscato big-time, and it just went bananas. All of a sudden I'm looking at the numbers. I'm going, what's

happening with Moscato? It's going up. And then, it leveled off, and now it's declining, okay? How often can you drink vodka and Muscat?

But, we've been through this so many that we never—my dad always had a saying. Never take a step longer than your stride. Well, yeah, you try that, you fall on your face. So, it's things like that we've got to be careful about. Let's see. Tastes change. That's why you've got to listen to the consumer.

01-01:26:01

Meeker: How many cases are you guys producing a year now? Do you count in cases?

01-01:26:06

Trincherro: Oh, yeah. It's got to be, what, twenty-five million.

01-01:26:10

Meeker: Wow.

01-01:26:12

Trincherro: Oh yeah, it's unbelievable. If you look at some of our plants, you'll see. This is the largest plant we have in Napa County. We've got one in Lodi that makes this one look like teeny. And, we have bottling machines that very few wineries have. Like, our 187 bottling machine, you can't even see the bottles. That's how fast it is. It's 600 bottles a minute. Can you imagine 600 bottles in a minute?

01-01:26:47

Meeker: You don't want to get your hand stuck in that, do you?

01-01:26:48

Trincherro: No. And you never want to wave your hand around the machinery because it's got so many electric eyes. And it's just flying.

01-01:26:59

Meeker: What about the future of the Napa Valley Vintners? What do you think they should be working on?

01-01:27:07

Trincherro: Oh, what they should be working on? I think they're doing very well what they're doing. Just continue doing what you're doing. They obviously help the smaller wineries quite a bit with direct shipping and stuff like that. We don't need that kind of help. We've got our own sales force. We've got a couple hundred people in the sales force. Actually, we have 1,500 regular employees and 500 what we call on-call part-time working. So, you've got 2,000 people. So, we don't need a lot of the things that the Vintners do. We just like to be part of the Vintners.

01-01:27:52

Meeker: That's a good question. Why do you remain part of the Vintners?

01-01:27:57

Trincherro: We mention that every once in a while. Why are we part of the Vintners? No, but it helped us through the hard times. They helped us when we had label approvals,

because they always had somebody in Washington. And we'd send it to them, and they'd get the label approved. We didn't know who to send it to. And for a lot of reasons, so you've got to kind of pay back a little bit for the past.

01-01:28:26

Meeker: Did you have trouble with *Ménage à Trois* or something like that?

01-01:28:30

Trincherro: *Ménage à Trois*? Talk about lucky. If that's the luckiest thing, because we bought this little winery called *Folie à Deux*. And, it wasn't going anywhere. It was, I think, ten or fifteen thousand cases of sales. And, we bought it, and we tore the thing out and built a winery and all of that. Well, they had two labels—*Folie à Deux* and *Ménage à Trois*. I said, "That's an interesting label. Let's see." So we produced a wine called *Ménage à Trois*. People liked it, and it just—oh, God, we're at least a couple million cases just of that. That paid for the winery.

01-01:29:26

Meeker: And I see that you've done a *Duck Dynasty* wine as well.

01-01:29:29

Trincherro: Oh, yeah. That was fun because those guys are crazy, but I love them.

01-01:29:36

Meeker: You got to meet them then, huh?

01-01:29:39

Trincherro: My brother did. They were here, and I was in Hawaii. I miss a lot of meetings because I'm in Hawaii.

01-01:29:46

Meeker: Yeah, must be a nice place.

01-01:29:48

Trincherro: Yes, it is. You know what's funny is I don't play golf, and I'm surrounded by golf courses. I don't go in the ocean even though it's right there. I really don't do much over there. They say, "What do you do?" Well, I read, or I just stare out at the beautiful ocean and look at the whales and stuff like that. That's all.

01-01:30:15

Meeker: It's hypnotic to look at an ocean.

01-01:30:19

Trincherro: And it's gorgeous because from our lanai—it's an eight-story building. We're on the eighth floor. And you can see Lahaina over there and just all kinds of things. And it's just a warmth. It's cold here in the wintertime, as if I didn't know.

01-01:30:44

Meeker: Is there anything that you want to say about the Vintners in particular that I haven't asked you about?

01-01:30:51

Trinchero: No. I think the Vintners over the years have played a very, very important part of the success of the Napa Valley. Now, how do you quantify that? I have absolutely no idea, but I know it was there. And, we've been extremely lucky to have someone like Linda Reiff being the president because she's a very straight shooter. And even the Vintners themselves, the smaller wineries, as I said, have—oh, wow. I hope you don't sell the vocal part about this, but have had more of the benefits of joining. But, we were small for years. We were small from 1948 all the way until probably '80 or high seventies. Well, look how many years. And the Wine Institute was a big help to us. Plus, I made a lot of friends, not so much now because I don't go to meetings. I'm retired, and I'm in Hawaii a lot and that sort of thing. But no, I think they're a good outfit and deserve our support and that sort of thing.

01-01:32:31

Meeker: Great. Well, on that note, why don't we wrap up, okay?

01-01:32:34

Trinchero: Okay.

01-01:32:35

Meeker: Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]