

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series

Louis (Bob) Trinchero

CALIFORNIA ZINFANDELS, A SUCCESS STORY

With an Introduction by
Darrell F. Corti

Interviews Conducted by
Carole Hicke
in 1991

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 modern research technique involving an interviewee and an informed interviewer in spontaneous conversation. The taped record is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The resulting manuscript is typed in final form, indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and 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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TRINCHERO, Louis (Bob) (b. 1936)

Winemaker, winery executive

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Buying Sutter Home winery in 1946; making wine in the Napa Valley in 1950s and 1960s; specializing in red Zinfandel; development and growth of White Zinfandel in 1970s; expanding winery and acquiring vineyards; developing vineyards; developing other varietal wines; wine industry today.

Introduction by Darrell F. Corti, Corti Bros., Sacramento, California

Interviewed in 1991 by Carole Hicke for the Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series, The 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 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 reinstituted as The Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series with donations from The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation. The selection of those to be interviewed is 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; Maynard A. Amerine, Emeritus Professor of Viticulture and Enology, University of California, Davis; the current chairman of the board of directors of the Wine Institute; Ruth Teiser, series project director; and Marvin R. Shanken, trustee of The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation.

The purpose of the series is to record and preserve information on California grape growing and winemaking that has existed only in the memories of wine men. 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 (as yet treated analytically in few writings) 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 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 in many cases unique 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.

Ruth Teiser
Project Director
The Wine Spectator California Winemen
Oral History Series

July 1992
Regional Oral History Office
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University of California, Berkeley

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INTRODUCTION--by Darrell F. Corti

I first met the Trincherro family in 1965-66 when Joe Heitz, from whom we were buying wine, suggested Sutter Home as a likely supplier of wine for our jug wine program, which, at that time, represented a lot of business volume. We had been buying from the Mondavi family under the Monterra Wine Co. label and were not having much joy from the new Central Valley supplier we had.

My first visit to Sutter Home with my father and uncle, the Corti Brothers, was to a kitchen, laboratory, reception area, tasting room at the back end of the Sutter Home retail room. Though we were prospective customers for a modest volume of wine, our reception was extremely cordial. Mario Trincherro, the household head, though Piedmontese spoke Genovese, the same Italian dialect that my family spoke at home with my grandparents. This sort of smoothed the way, since we could banter back and forth in dialect. Our first purchase from Sutter Home was bulk red wine to be bottled and sold under our Tosca Brand label, a private label taken with us when Monterra stopped doing private labeling.

Little by little our purchases from Sutter Home began to encompass their whole product line: from wine vinegar to sparkling Muscat wines. For our own label or as special bottlings, we would take small lots of wines either lying in the cellar or bought in. The first of these special bottlings was a lovely medium dry sherry, aged at Sutter Home, and this was the first wine we bought as an entire lot. It was labeled with Sutter Home's label and had a strip label across the top saying that this was a Corti Brothers Selection and was to justify the bottling. It was a real production for the time: a bottle limitation and numbered labels. The selling price to the consumer was \$1.79 a bottle. It was only modestly embarrassing when customers began to call inquiring if the bottling was correct since, although the number of bottles produced was one number, they had bottles with numbers several hundred digits higher! Mary Trincherro, Bob's mother, who had hand written the bottle numbers, had not stopped at the justification number but had written out more strip labels than there were bottles, and these had been left inadvertently on the top of the label pile and were used first. No harm done, but it did seem like the multiplication of loaves and fishes.

The most vivid image of Sutter Home I have is one regarding wine pricing and shows how far we have come in the California wine business. It was spring, 1969, and Bob had just bought two fifty-gallon barrels of a 1959-60 blend of Cabernet Sauvignon from Mario Gemello in Mountain View. He called me and said to stop by on my next trip to Napa Valley to taste this new wine which he thought exceptional. When I arrived at the winery, it was sitting in two parafined barrels still labeled "Lemon

extract." These two re-coopered barrels had been used to transport the wine to Napa Valley. Bob and I tasted the wine, and it was really superb. The few bottles still in our cellar are still so. Bob said that it was fairly expensive and that he had to ask a good price for it to justify such an expense to his father. I said I would buy one barrel, and he could sell the other. A deal was struck.

Since it was about 5:30, the close of the business day, Mario came through the swinging door from the tasting-sales room into the winery and asked if we wanted a drink, a martini. (I have never experienced a better martini mixer than Mario Trincherio, with the possible exception of Fred McCrea of Stony Hill.) Bob said to Mario, "Dad, Darrell just bought one of the two Cabernet barrels." "What did we sell it for?" inquired Mario. Bob replied, "A high price, about \$2.97 a bottle retail." Mario exploded. "We'll have this wine here for twenty years at that price; wines don't sell at such high prices. We'll go bankrupt!" Fortunately our customers had better sense. The wine sold out very quickly, and both Corti Brothers' and Sutter Home's reputations were enhanced by the sale. By the time another bottling of this basic blend was made, Sutter Home had been able to sell the remaining cases at about \$25 per bottle to one customer. This left Mario just shaking his head. Doubtless with today's prices, Mario would be rendered speechless.

Darrell F. Corti
Corti Brothers

April 1992
Sacramento, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY--Louis "Bob" Trinchero

Under the leadership of Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Louis "Bob" Trinchero, Sutter Home has become a world-famous winery, one of Napa Valley's most prominent success stories. Trinchero was interviewed as part of the Wine Spectator California Winemen Oral History Series to document the unfolding of this story from the time his father and uncle bought the winery in 1946 to the present. Although in 1991, Sutter Home ranked 26th in the nation in size, the winery is still a family operation.

In 1968 Trinchero produced a highly regarded "Amador County Red Zinfandel" and continued to produce Zinfandels from this warm Sierra foothills region. In 1972 "Sutter Home White Zinfandel" appeared on the market. Although acceptance was slow at first, demand for this wine grew to its present phenomenal sales, and dozens of other wineries began making similar products.

Trinchero's untraditional approach to wine marketing rests on his belief that Sutter Home should make the wines people like. Present expansion into other varietals, such as Chardonnay, and interest in experimental plantings of Italian varieties by Montevina Winery, owned by Sutter Home, indicate the winery's responsiveness to the public.

Trinchero was interviewed in his office on the second floor of a lovely, restored mansion that was the home of the original Sutter family. The interviews took place on April 3 and 4, 1991. Trinchero reviewed the transcript and furnished some photographs.

This series is part of the ongoing documenting of California history by the Regional Oral History Office, which is under the direction of Willa Baum, Division Head, and under the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Carole Hicke
Interviewer-Editor

May 1992
Regional Oral History Office
Berkeley, California

I FAMILY BACKGROUND AND NEW YORK CITY CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: April 3, 1991]##¹

Hicke: I think we should start with when and where you were born.

Trincherro: I was born at twenty after eleven o'clock at night on July 3, 1936.

Hicke: That's pretty exact.

Trincherro: It was at the City Hospital on Welfare Island in the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn, under the Triborough Bridge.

Hicke: I guess there's no doubt about that. [laughter]

Trincherro: New York City, anyway.

Father and Paternal Grandparents

Hicke: Let's go back and get a little bit of information about your parents and grandparents.

Trincherro: I really don't know that much about my grandparents because they were all gone except my father's mother. My grandfather's name was Luigi Trincherro; I'm talking about

¹This symbol (##) indicates a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes, see page 117.

my father's side now. I don't remember what my father's mother's name was, because I only called her Nona, which means grandmother, but her maiden name was Argento, which is Italian for silver.

My father was born February 3, 1899, in a little hill town called San Marsanotto d'Asti, which was three miles outside the city of Asti, Italy.

Hicke: Can you spell the name of that town for me?

Trinchero: I was afraid you'd ask that. I have to write it because-- the nice thing about Italian is that it's phonetic, so as long as you can pronounce it properly--. There couldn't be more than ten houses in the town, but it's actually San Marsanotto Alto, meaning high in the hills, as opposed to the town of San Marsanotto Basso, which is at the valley floor. It's really crazy, because both towns have maybe ten houses in them. Why they don't just call it all San Marsanotto, I don't know. I was there in 1985, and it was kind of fun to see it. It's just ten old houses!
[laughter]

My father left there when he was three years old, so they left in 1902. Actually, what happened was that my grandfather had a vineyard in San Marsanotto that had been destroyed by hail. He replanted it, and it was destroyed again, while it was still young, by hail. We don't experience hail [like that]--I mean, my father was talking about hail the size golf balls, and the tender vines just couldn't take it.

So my grandfather came to the United States in 1901. My father would have been about two years old.

Hicke: Do you have any idea what kind of grapes your grandfather was growing?

Trinchero: No, I haven't the faintest idea.

My grandfather became a lumberjack in Maine. He spent five years here, made enough money, and went back [to Italy] in 1906. My father would have been seven years old. He took them off the farm and went to Savona, which is close to Genoa. He bought a combination restaurant, on the ground floor, and a cantina or winery in the basement, near the shipyards in Savona. My grandmother and the

kids--it was a big family--would cook lunch for the longshoremen--only lunch, which of course is the big meal anyway--and my grandfather would make wine and sell it to local merchants. That's basically what they did.

My father fought in the First World War. He was sixteen when he was inducted, which would have been 1915, and he spent three years in the service.

Hicke: That's pretty young.

Trincherro: Well, back then at sixteen you were a man. He contracted malaria. He never talked much about it, but from what he said, World War I was really a dirty war. They had gas and all kinds of things then. We don't realize how uncivilized that really was--the first world war on a real big scale.

Hicke: Was he part of the flu epidemic?

Trincherro: I don't know about the flu. My grandmother on my mother's side died in the flu epidemic of 1914, on the East Coast in the United States.

Aunt Diana's Speakeasy

Trincherro: Getting back to my father's side, the first one to come to the United States, after my grandfather did in 1901 but then went back in 1906, was my aunt. She came over in 1919. Her name was Diana. Diana came over and married--I don't know what the guy's name was, but he was always referred to as "the little gangster." And he was; he was just a small-town hood. They opened up a little speakeasy down around Bleeker Street in Greenwich Village in Manhattan. Then she slowly brought everyone over.

My father's name was Mario, and his younger brother was named Marino. Marino is the only one of the second generation who is still alive today. They came over in 1923. So between 1919 and 1923, the entire family came over to join my aunt to operate the speakeasy.

But then she divorced "the little gangster," and they all moved to upper state New York to a place called Lake

George and opened up a speakeasy called the Paradise Inn. It had rooms, like a hotel, and you could spend the weekend. They had dinners, and of course they would make wine in the basement. I guess it was a big building. It was actually quite lucrative until Repeal came and threw them out of business, because the people with money would not go all the way from New York City to Lake George to spend a weekend and have a good time. They had the alcohol and the good times in New York City after Repeal.

Grape Growing and Winemaking During Prohibition

Hicke: Lake George is a grape-growing area, I assume?

Trincherro: No. It's kind of interesting, because this ties into what happened to the wine industry during Prohibition. Most of the wineries closed, as you know, but the vineyards kept prospering. As a matter of fact, it was only a few years ago that we surpassed the acreage planted in grapes in 1926.

Hicke: As a country, you mean?

Trincherro: As a country. The reason was that at the eleventh hour, when Prohibition became Prohibition, [Congressman Andrew Volstead] wrote into the law that the head of a household could produce two hundred gallons of wine, so there was a great demand for grapes from California. So the grape grower, if he was a good businessman, usually made out fairly well.

My father would talk about getting a truck and going down with his father to the railroad depot--whichever was the closest depot to Lake George. The grapes were in boxes, and they would buy the grapes and fill up the truck. As a matter of fact, there were some little businesses there that would sell you bottles, corks, labels, and all the paraphernalia needed to make wine--presses, crushers, and everything. So it was a good little business. He'd fill up the truck--I don't know how many trips they made--and this is what they turned into wine. It was an interesting thing.

Mother and Maternal Grandparents

Trinchero: My mother's side was somewhat tragic. My mother was born on July 19, 1911; she was twelve years younger than my father. Her mother died in 1914 in this flu epidemic. She was only twenty-seven years old when she died, and my mother was three. My mother is the youngest of three sisters. This was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where my mother, Maria, and her two sisters were born. The two sisters' names were Vera and Caterina, or they used to call her Rina.

For some reason my grandfather, my mother's father--her maiden name was Beda--took her back to Italy to stay with relatives. He was a machinist, actually the foreman of a machine and tool company in Pittsburgh.

Hicke: He was from Italy?

Trinchero: Yes, he came from Italy, and my mother's mother came from Italy. But my mother and her two sisters were born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Hicke: Were they back in Italy living or just visiting?

Trinchero: The mother died, and the father felt after a few months that he couldn't care for the three girls because he was alone now. He took the three girls and put them back in Italy in a convent in Torino (Turin). That's where they were when he died, when my mother was ten. That would have been 1921. He died of pneumonia or something. It was weird. So my mother was ten, and her sisters were twelve and fourteen, and they were orphans and had to stay in a convent.

Hicke: They weren't even citizens of Italy, were they?

Trinchero: No. Well, I think, if your parents are Italian--because their parents weren't Americans.

Hicke: Maybe they had dual citizenship.

Trinchero: Yes, something like that. Anyway, when my mother turned eighteen she left the convent and became a secretary for a couple of years. Then, when she was twenty years old, she and her two sisters decided to come back to the United

States, because they still had some relatives in Pittsburgh.

Well, they just walked in. My dad had to do the Ellis Island thing, but they didn't; they were born here, so they didn't have all that. Then they moved to New York City, and my mother and father met, I believe, in 1933 or '34, and on October 8, 1935, they were married.

My grandfather Luigi died New Year's Eve, 1935, right after they were married. She was pregnant with me, because I was born the following July, and I was named after my grandfather Louis (Louis, from Luigi), which is another story, because everybody calls me Bob. I didn't know my name was Louis until I was nineteen and joined the air force. You had to bring a birth certificate with you, and I never even looked at it. I filled out all the papers "Robert Trinchero," and the guy checks them out with my birth certificate and says, "Who's Robert Trinchero?" I said, "I am." He said, "That's funny, because on your birth certificate your name is Louis Trinchero." I looked at it, and I didn't know where it came from. So I had to do all the paperwork over again with the name Louis Trinchero. And I had no middle name; there is no middle name.

Hicke: Where did "Bob" come from?

Trinchero: My mother never liked "Louis," so she always called me Bobby. She never told me my real name. Now my legal name is Louis Trinchero, I sign things Louis Bob Trinchero, and if it's an informal signature, I just sign Bob Trinchero. One of the complications of life.

Brothers and Sisters

Trinchero: I was born in New York City, as was my sister and my brother. My sister, Vera, is two years younger than I am. She was born June 27, 1938. My brother, Roger, who is the youngest, was born July 2, 1946. So the three of us were born within six days of each other. My mother always said that she only ovulated once a year, and if my dad missed it, that was it. [laughter]

Hicke: It probably wasn't as much fun to have to celebrate the birthdays all at once.

Trinchero: It wasn't, because being within six days of each other we'd all have to celebrate together. It wasn't too bad, because it was only my sister and I; my brother is ten years younger than I am, so it was sort of detached.

Growing Up in New York City

Hicke: Tell me a little bit about your childhood.

Trinchero: I was born and raised in New York City. I went to PS 94, which no longer exists. All public schools were just P[ublic] S[chool], and then they gave them a number. This one was on the corner of 68th Street and Columbus Avenue. I remember it well. Unfortunately, 68th Street is not there any more between Columbus and West End Avenue; it's a Walgreen Drugstore now.

I went back in 1980 for the first time; we had left in '48, so I hadn't been back in thirty-two years. I wanted to see how the old neighborhood was, and I got in a taxicab and gave the taxi driver the address, 68th Street between Columbus and West End Avenue. He drove for a little ways, and then he said, "Hey, wait a minute. There ain't no street between Columbus and West End Avenue." I said, "There used to be." He said, "Well, there ain't anymore," and sure enough, he got there, and there wasn't. I said, "Jeez, you leave town for thirty-two years, and they change everything." [laughter]

Hicke: Who had a particular influence on you when you were growing up?

Trinchero: Nobody. There was no real influence. Growing up in New York City is a little bit different from growing up here. First of all, there is a constant source of fear. I remembered that very well. If you are walking down a street, and you see three or four kids walking towards you up the street, even if you didn't know them you'd always walk across the street on the other side of the sidewalk, just in case. If they also walked across the street, then you turned around and ran. I can remember that. You had

that sort of street smarts. Not that I got into any real trouble, but you could instantly size up a situation. There was always that threat or that possibility of harm, always. I do remember that quite well.

That was about it. I don't remember a whole lot.

Hicke: You went through grade school there?

Trinchero: Yes, I was halfway through the seventh grade when I moved to California. I had fun, but I don't recall--but I do remember that fear.

Family Gatherings

Hicke: How about family gatherings?

Trinchero: Oh, that's right, family; I was focusing on myself. We lived in a very large apartment, and it had a great big dining room. The one recollection I always do have is that every Sunday at one o'clock--well, everyone would start gathering at eleven; family come from as far as New Jersey and all over--

Hicke: Who is everyone?

Trinchero: Uncles, aunts, cousins, et cetera.

Hicke: From both sides?

Trinchero: Yes, sometimes. My mother's two sisters lived fairly close. We'd have a party. Well, they'd call it lunch, but it would last until six, seven, eight at night. They would eat all day. I had three uncles who were chefs, and my father was an excellent cook. Depending on who would have the kitchen, they would chase everybody else out, and they would cook--you wouldn't believe it. It was kind of interesting, because it always ended up the same way: they'd fight World War I on the tablecloth with their pencils. They'd start scribbling, "We were here--," and it was kind of interesting. For the kids, it wasn't; we'd just eat and then kind of go off into the living room and goof off, but the adults would be there until the evening.

Of course, wine was the choice beverage, and it was always a good time. You felt real close.

Hicke: I was just going to say that it sounds like a close family group.

Trinchero: Oh, very, very close. That doesn't mean they all got along. [laughs] Yes, I remember that very well. Other than that, it was strictly playing in the streets, going to school, or playing football or baseball in Central Park, which was only a couple of blocks away.

II THE EARLY YEARS OF SUTTER HOME WINERY

Getting into the Wine Business in California

Hicke: I guess we're ready to move to California. Your uncle came first?

Trinchero: When the speakeasy broke up, everybody went their own way. Let's go over to my father's family. There was his mother and father, and the oldest child was Diana, who came over here and married the little gangster. The next oldest one was Uncle John. Then came my father, Mario, Uncle Julio, and Uncle Marino. One other child was still in France. What happened was, on the way over they stopped in France for a year or two to work, and then came to New York City. Well, she stayed there because she married a Frenchman. She only passed away about a year ago; she was ninety-four years old. She would have been the second oldest.

So it was a good-sized family. Well, everyone scattered sort of, but my uncle, who was really interested in winemaking and tutored, as the oldest son, under my grandfather, became a winemaker in New Jersey. My father went into the wine and food business in New York City, mainly as a bartender, waiter, chef. They used to have individual chefs who would specialize in different things, like a gar mangé, which my dad was, and he would make the salads. That sort of thing. They were the only two who stayed in the business. My other two uncles--one became an auto mechanic, and the other one became a heavy-duty equipment operator.

In 1945, my Uncle John came to California on a trip to check on some wine that his boss wanted to buy. A winery in New Jersey makes wine from some grapes from New York, but mainly by buying wine from California and blending it, aging it, bottling it, and selling it. I believe it was Healdsburg that he had to go to, to look at some wine that he was going to buy for his boss. He drove right through the Napa Valley, and he loved it. It was just great. So he and a man named Louis Carlesimo bought Sutter Home Winery. That would have been the fall of '46, but escrow closed on the seventh of January, 1947. If you say that ownership doesn't start until escrow closes, then it's '47. But my uncle had been here six months, and he already was in the winery and working there, trying to fix it up while escrow was closing.

Family's Winemaking Background

Hicke: I forgot to ask you what kind of wine your father and your uncle was making and selling during Prohibition. Was it mostly sweet wine?

Trinchero: They made table wine and sparkling wine. Their specialty was sparkling wine, because that was my grandfather's specialty. He used to make a lot of it for the Argentinian market. That was the only product they actually sold outside of the speakeasy; they actually had customers for it. The table wine was consumed in the speakeasy. Occasionally, my father said, they would make some bathtub gin, sort of.

But, you see, during Prohibition--during the speakeasy days--the gangsters controlled beer and spirits. That was their forte, especially spirits, but they didn't care about the wine. They never really got into the wine, so they allowed people to make their own wine. First of all, it's part of the culture and all of that.

But when you started making distilled spirits, then you started cutting into their territory. That's when you got into trouble. So my dad said we did very little of that. As a matter of fact, we usually bought the high-grain alcohol from the bootlegger and kind of mixed it up ourselves, but we never built a still or anything like

that. Not that it was against the law; the law was nothing. It was the gangsters who were going to fill your house full of bullets. But wine, they allowed you to make whatever you wanted. As a matter of fact, some of the biggest names in gangsters were customers of ours. They used to like my grandfather's sparkling wine, and he used to supply them with it.

Hicke: The mafia or the Cosa Nostra?

Trinchero: I don't know what they called it back then. Frankly, all of those are new names. My father would only refer to them as the Black Hand, or the Mano Nero. That's the only way he would refer to them, and he rarely referred to them. I never heard the Cosa Nostra or the mafia; it was always the Black Hand. Of course, at the time I didn't realize whether that was just an actual name of an organization or a kind of occupation, or a part of life that you didn't fool with. When you say "the Black Hand," it sort of meant that's a part of life you don't even fool with. I never asked him whether it was actually the name of an organization. You don't ask a lot of questions. [laughs]

Hicke: He probably wouldn't have wanted to talk about it, either.

Trinchero: No, because he rarely mentioned it.

Hicke: Your uncle was making wine in New Jersey. What was he making?

Trinchero: He was doing a lot of things: table wines, and he even made vermouths and aperitifs. He was a very, very talented winemaker. The only problem was, he didn't have a formal education, so when I came into the business, he would show me how it was done, and then I had to figure out why he did it that way. So it made it a little bit difficult for me at first, but he was a very good winemaker. He could make something out of almost nothing.

Napa Valley in the Late Forties and Fifties

Trinchero: When we came here, the Napa Valley was a really different place from what it is today.

Hicke: What was it like?

Trinchero: It was very, very provincial. There were, I'm sure, more acres in walnuts and prunes and other crops than in grapes. There were a lot of cattle, which now have almost totally disappeared. And there were something like two thousand acres of tomatoes. It was part of the crop report. My understanding--of course, I didn't get here until '48--was that there were a lot of Victory Gardens here, and people grew a lot of vegetables for the Bay Area. Tomatoes do very, very well here. The only problem is that they ripen a little late, so obviously after the war there were other areas of California where they ripen a little quicker and sooner, and they slowly disappeared here.

It was a very diversified agricultural area. There weren't any big wineries, really. There wasn't the kind of varietal pricing or things like that. There were very few varietal vineyards--varietal vineyards, meaning--

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Trinchero: --a block of grapes of one variety for the production of a wine with the name of that varietal, like Cabernet or Chardonnay. Most of the vineyards were field blended. Most of the vineyards were holdovers from the days when they were shipping grapes all over the United States for the home winemaker, so you would have grown grapes that didn't necessarily make the best wines but that shipped best. Soft-skinned grapes didn't ship well, so you needed the heartier grapes and the ones that would create the most sugar and color, because that's what the home winemaker wanted.

Field Blended Vineyards and the Legacy of Home Winemaking

Trinchero: The home winemaker was basically a person who didn't know, really, how wine was made. The way they would compensate for microbiological instability would be to create as much alcohol as possible, and the higher the sugar the more alcohol. So they would try for a wine that was maybe 16 percent alcohol or as high as they could get it.

That's where the name "Dago red" came about, where you have this high-alcohol, very tannic, dark wine with maybe even some 1 or 2 percent residual sugar because it stopped fermenting and still had some sugar left. This wine was always drunk at the table but always mixed with water.

Hicke: Just like the Greeks and so forth.

Trincherro: Sure, because how can you drink a 16 or 17 percent alcohol wine with 2 percent residual sugar that would stain enamel and enjoy it for dinner? You'd mix half or a third with water, and it was much more palatable. At least you wouldn't have it turning to vinegar or some weird-smelling stuff.

So the vineyards were planted in grapes that were more conducive to home winemaking, or they were field blended, because most of the small wineries here would make a white and a red, usually in a jug. To differentiate his wine from his neighbors, he would mix maybe five or six different varieties in the vineyard, so you'd never know what the blend was.

Say you wanted to make a cabernet blend today. You'd take cabernet from this block, maybe a little merlot, some cabernet franc or whatever, and you'd make up your Bordeaux blend. Back then they would actually mix these grapes in one vineyard.

Hicke: Did they dump them all into the same hopper?

Trincherro: Yes. Say he had ten acres of vineyard. He could have five different varieties in that ten acres. What he would do is pick all of the grapes, and they would all go together. But unless he certified every vine, he wouldn't know what grape varieties were actually used in the making of his red or his white wine.

Hicke: How did this differentiate him from his neighbors?

Trincherro: Because their five or six or eight varieties that they used weren't going to be the same as the neighbors.

Hicke: Different proportions or different grapes?

Trincherro: There are a hundred different grapes you could use. That was what some of the wineries did. André Tchelistcheff

did a tremendous service to the wine industry by actually concentrating on the better varieties--on the cabernets, etc. There was B.V. [Beaulieu Vineyard], Inglenook--the Daniel family, and Louis Martini and so forth who actually had recognized the fact that certain varieties produced better wine. The rest of us little wineries were bottling whatever we could in gallon and half-gallon jugs, basically. We were part of the provincial thing. Things really didn't start happening until the sixties, and it stayed that way for quite a while.

Sutter Home Winery Becomes a Family Partnership, 1948

Hicke: Let's go back and find out how you--

Trinchero: You're going to have to steer me, because I have a tendency to jump all over the place.

My uncle, John Trinchero, and this Louis Carlesimo bought Sutter Home Winery. As I said, escrow closed on the seventh of January, 1947. Sutter Home was a barn, an absolute barn. It had no concrete; it was on dirt. It had no electricity. It hadn't been operated since 1918. I once asked my uncle, "Why did you buy Sutter Home?" and he said, "Because it was the only winery we could afford."

Hicke: A fixer-upper.

Trinchero: Yes, a fixer-upper, if you will. Twelve thousand dollars is what we paid for it. Actually, I think they overpaid for it, frankly. [laughter] I mean, an acre of prime vineyard was only three or four hundred dollars.

Hicke: How many acres was with the winery?

Trinchero: Just three and a half acres, and the barn, which is no longer there, and the winery. Well, Louis Carlesimo was in business on the East Coast, and after a few months he wanted out, so my uncle started writing letters to my father. My father, frankly, was the only one in the family who got along with John. John was a really nice guy, but he was very stubborn and strong-willed and strong-minded. He finally convinced my father that New

York City was no place to raise children, so my father said, "Well, I'm going to come out and take a look."

My father drove out here in his brand-new Fraser. It was a 1947 Fraser. It was the first production car after the war. It was a pile of junk! It was probably the worst built car in the world. It was a car that looked like it had been built by a committee. [laughter] It was a fine car when it was new, and it got him out here, but it quickly went down the tubes. It was kind of strange, because during World War II you didn't see any new cars. Thirty-eights, '39s, '40s, and a few '41s were about it, and all of a sudden here was this brand-new design, and it was a radical design, if you remember the Kaiser-Fraser. It caused quite a splash in our neighborhood.

So my father came out, and I guess he kind of liked it. He bought Louis Carlesimo's half of the winery. He came out in August or September of '48, and then he said, "Okay, come on out," and my mother, my sister, my brother, and I came out by train in December of '48. That's when I got here.

Train Trip to California, 1948

Trinchero: The train trip was rather interesting. I'd never taken a really long trip. It's interesting how little of the West Coast they knew on the East Coast. My mother said, "I want a ticket. I'm going to St. Helena, California." Well, they didn't know where it was. They looked on the map and said, "Oh, here it is," and gave her a ticket to San Francisco. The train didn't go to San Francisco; it only went to Oakland. Then they gave her bus tickets to take the bus from Oakland to San Francisco. That's how little they knew about how to get to St. Helena. [laughter] Of course, my father was waiting for us in Oakland, and we just cashed in the bus tickets to San Francisco and drove away.

The one thing that always impressed me about that train ride was how big this country really is. I used to sit all by myself. The last car was the club car, and it had a little observation. This was in the dead of winter. I was sitting there, all bundled up, on the outside, all

by myself because nobody else was crazy enough to get out there with me. But I watched this ribbon of track, because I was looking behind the train, and there was snow as far as the eye could see, and there was absolutely nothing.

I came in, we had dinner, I went to bed, got up the next morning, got dressed, went back out there, and it was exactly the same scene, and we had traveled all night. I said, "How can you travel for twelve hours and still not change the scenery?" It was that ribbon of track, the snow, and nothing. It really gets you--going through the Rockies, and then the Sierras. I was twelve and a half years old, and it was just unbelievable.

Hicke: Do you remember ever studying about the West in school?

Trinchero: No.

Hicke: I don't, either.

Trinchero: The only three cities I knew in California were Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the state capitol of Sacramento.

Hicke: I seem to remember that going West was moving across the Appalachian mountains; that was the westward movement.
[laughs]

Trinchero: Nobody on the East Coast knew anything about the West Coast, except for Hollywood and San Francisco and a few things like that. It's a different life on the East Coast. As a matter of fact, can you explain to me why we call it the Pacific Coast, but we call it the Eastern Seaboard? These are some of the crazy things I think about.

Hicke: That is interesting, because one of the things that interests me is the eastern viewpoint of the West. I've always been interested in that perspective.

Trinchero: I remember a friend of my father coming to dinner on one of those Sundays I was telling you about in New York City. My dad said, "He lives out West," and the guy actually referred to living out West. He was from Chicago.

Hicke: [laughs] He'd gone across the Appalachians.

Trinchero: Right. I said, "Oh, out West," but you don't realize how much country there is between Chicago and the Pacific Ocean.

Hicke: Were you traveling through the Rockies during the day?

Trinchero: Yes. I got to see the Rockies. We were traveling through the tunnels and around the mountains, and then you'd see this little cabin way up somewhere with a little trail of smoke. You'd say, "My God, this guy is just living out in nowhere," which for a kid from mid-town Manhattan was a little weird. [laughter]

Adjusting to Life in California

Trinchero: We got here, and I went to school, which was a little traumatic. In New York City you wore slacks, white shirt, and a tie, so I showed up in slacks, white shirt, and a tie. Of course, no one here wears white shirts or slacks; everyone wears Levis, loafers, and T-shirts. Nobody dressed up here. I came home after the first day, and I said, "Mom, I've got to get a pair of these Levis." I'd never seen a pair of Levis in my life. My mother went down and spent four or five dollars for a pair of Levis, and I was dressed properly. The only thing is that they were brand-new, and I didn't realize you had to wash them about twenty times before you could wear them to school. [laughter]

I had this horrendous New York accent, so for a few months I became sort of the oddball. The girls loved it. They wanted to talk to me just to hear me talk because I had this "Toity-toid Street and Tent' Avenue" kind of reaction to things, and they'd never heard of this kind of talk. After a while I lost it. Well, I don't know; sometimes I'll catch myself going back into it, especially when I go back East. I'm in New York, and I start to talk to some of my sales people, and I start slipping right back into it. It's weird. Every once in a while I'll say "beeah" instead of "beer."

Hicke: Did you make a real conscious effort to lose the accent?

Trinchero: Yes. I tried as hard as a twelve- or thirteen-year-old can try, but mostly it was just that I was young enough that I did lose it. Then, of course, I was kind of a ham anyway. I always tried out for the school play, where I had to memorize lines and things like that, which helped me.

When I was in grammar school I had a real problem with stuttering. I was even put in a special speech impediment class in the sixth grade. One of the ways they broke you of stuttering was to get you up in front of the class, just to talk. Well, you know, it wasn't that bad, as soon as you realized that everybody in the class had a problem, whether they stuttered or whatever the speech impediment. It wasn't a very big class, about twenty. What I learned from there was that I would force myself to get up in front of groups and speak. I was deathly afraid of it, I knew I was going to stutter, and I just kept at it until I lost it. It went from stuttering to hesitation. Instead of repeating it, "de, de, de," I would go, "de (pause) the," and I just kind of blanked it out. Then I went to speaking fairly normally.

I do it now. I'm not comfortable speaking in front of a group, but I force myself to do it.

Hicke: I would think you would have to now.

Trinchero: What I found out was that the better prepared you are, the easier it is. [laughs]

Hicke: And the more you do it, I suppose, it gets easier.

Trinchero: That's right, and that's exactly why I do it.

Hicke: It's pretty amazing that you were able to overcome it in that way.

Trinchero: I really stuttered. It was embarrassing. I had gotten pretty much over it by the time I got here, although I did stutter somewhat, and I hesitated a lot. I was in the seventh grade when I got here.

Division of Responsibilities Between Father and Uncle

Hicke: What did your father start out doing?

Trincherro: First of all, my uncle, as I said, was a good winemaker, but he couldn't speak English very well. He had a very thick accent, and most people had a hard time understanding him. Whereas my father, who had a slight accent, you could understand. Well, he dealt with people, and he was more personable. He was more of a salesman type. The way they worked it was that my uncle would make the wine and deliver it to the bottling machine, and my father would bottle it, sell it, and deliver it. That's how they did it.

Hicke: What kind of a bottling machine did you have?

Trincherro: Six spout, hand operated. My dad put me to work, as a matter of fact, in December. I hadn't been here more than a week. I was twelve years old, and I bottled a whole barrel full of wine, all by myself, all in gallons. It was a sixty-gallon barrel. I bottled it, capped it, and I labeled it. I forget how long it took me to do it. It was on Saturday. So I was helping out right away.

Hicke: You capped it rather than corked it?

Trincherro: Yes. We had very few corked wines. And all gallons and half gallons are screw caps. It was a dollar a gallon, and we serviced mainly the locals.

Hicke: You mean local restaurants, or people coming by?

Trincherro: Local retail outlets and people coming by.

Sales and Tasting Rooms

Trincherro: Our sales room opened up in 1949. My uncle took about a seven-thousand-gallon old redwood tank and just set it out there and cut a door in it.

Hicke: That was still there in the seventies, wasn't it?

Trinchero: He had added three other tanks to it, enlarged it, and connected them up. That was torn out in the seventies sometime, and we built our new tasting room.

Hicke: That's what you called The Barrel?

Trinchero: The Barrels. You saw one, but there was actually another one here and one in the back, and they were connected. And there was a kitchen in the back. The first barrel was the back barrel, and then we built the kitchen. The reason we did that was because we took lunches and dinners there, and we took care of the customers. We couldn't afford for someone to sit there and wait all day for someone to come in for a bottle of wine, so we used it as a combination of offices and kitchen, where we would eat lunches and dinners, and they played cards at night. We'd open at seven in the morning and wouldn't close until seven or eight that night. We caught every bit we could.

After a while, after we expanded it, when I became partners with my dad and we bought my uncle out in 1960, 65 percent of our profit was through that tasting room. So it really developed over the years as a very important profit center for us. But at first it hardly was.

Hicke: It was your uncle's idea to open a tasting room?

Trinchero: I don't remember whose idea it was.

Hicke: Were there other tasting rooms? Is that where he got the idea?

Trinchero: There might have been--not really tasting rooms, but you could go to some of the wineries and taste the wines. But they didn't have any sales, generally, at the wineries. Some of the smaller ones did, but the larger ones didn't because they would be competing with their retailer.

Now, remember that this was during the days of fair trade, where the wineries set the lowest possible price you could sell wine for. You could sell it above that, but not below. I remember Christian Brothers, in their tasting room, finally convincing their retailers to allow them [to sell wine on the premises], because they were well-distributed then, and the retailer was afraid that the winery would be competing with them, which was a little silly, really, but that's the way they felt. So

Christian Brothers sold their wine for more than what the retailer did--I think it was about ten cents a bottle--so the retailers wouldn't get angry with them for doing it. Of course, we had hardly any retailers; nobody really cared what we did.

Hicke: So you were selling it from your tasting room, and you were one of the first ones to do that?

Trincherro: I wouldn't say we were the first one. The worst thing you could possibly do in this business is to say you were the first one to do anything.

Hicke: There probably weren't too many doing it around here.

Trincherro: Not too many, and usually they were the small ones, and just for the locals.

Pricing

Hicke: You also sold to the grocery stores?

Trincherro: Any ones that would buy it, yes. Tripoli Market over here was one of our first customers. That was when Mr. Tripoli was running it, years and years ago.

Hicke: Do you remember how much it was selling for a gallon?

Trincherro: This was in the sixties, and the J & H Burgundy, which was our most inexpensive wine, was \$1.29 a gallon. Our most expensive wine was probably ninety-five cents a bottle, and that was Pinot Noir.

Hicke: You probably don't remember what it was in '48 or '49.

Trincherro: No, but I remember that the most expensive wine we had was Pinot Noir.

Hicke: You were making Pinot Noir?

Trincherro: Yes, we made a little bit, a couple of barrels.

Types of Wines Made

Hicke: Why did your uncle make some of these different kinds of wine?

Trinchero: Well, we had to appeal to the largest audience, or at least we felt we did, so we had fifty-two different wines on our price list. I'm not going to say that the chianti and the burgundy and the claret did not have a thread of similarity. As a matter of fact, they were very similar.

Hicke: I think that was standard.

Trinchero: Of course. If it was a generic, your red generic was the same wine, and your white generic was also. We had a chablis, sauterne, Rhine, hock. I mean, these are all off-the-wall generic names, and it was always the same wine. It was only when you got into the varietals, which we had very few of, that you had to stay within that 51 percent, which has now been changed to 75 percent.

I bought some Gamay from Leo Brendel, which is now the Joe Heitz winery across the street. He had an acre of Gamay, so I would have a little Gamay, and I would buy little bits and pieces of varieties from people. I had a little Pinot Noir here, but I don't think I ever had a Cabernet way back then. It was all generic.

But then we also had dessert wines. We would buy it and bottle it ourselves. We wouldn't fortify it. We had everything from white port, port, sherry, dry sherry, muscatel, tokay--whatever. Then we made our own sparkling wine. We had three or four different sparkling wines, including Muscat Spumanti. We had six or seven vermouths and aperitifs--sweet vermouth, dry vermouth, sweet white vermouth. We had wines called marsala, triple cream sherry, triple cream marsala. We even made a wine called Dubonnoir, which we made for a few years until the Dubonnet Company wrote us a letter saying we'd better quit making that stuff because it sounded too much like Dubonnet. We decided we wouldn't fight them because we didn't have the power.

Hicke: We're in the sixties now?

Trinchero: Yes. Then my uncle made a wine called Marsala al Uovo, which was marsala with eggs, which I still say is the

finest dessert wine or aperitif wine I ever tasted. It was fantastic. But the government wouldn't let us make it--we sent in samples--because we added egg yolks. Marsala uovo--that's sherry with herbs and spices and egg yolks. They wouldn't let you do it unless you had a rectifying plant. The regulations were very, very strict and cumbersome. I have to admit the BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] has done a fantastic job in simplifying the record-keeping over the last decade or two. Really, it's so much easier now.

I remember you couldn't buy alcohol unless you had a gauger on duty and a scale to weigh the tank of alcohol--all these restrictions. Today? All they use is a bill of lading. I call up for a tank truck of high proof, and, boom, it's here. I've got the bill of lading, we pump it in the tank--no tests, nothing. It's great.

Hicke: I'm glad to hear it's going the other way in some areas.

Trincherro: Oh, yes. Ronald Reagan did a lot during his eight years that really simplified things. We had more records--now it's much more simple. Of course, now we're on computers, so it's a whole different ball game.

We also made vinegars and salad dressings. We did everything you possibly could from a grape, except maybe jelly.

Hicke: How did you manage all these different concoctions and labels?

Trincherro: It was very difficult. For instance, I'd be making, say, triple cream sherry, which is a flavored wine. I'd do it once a year, or maybe once every other year, because we only sold very little of everything. In the 1960s we were at maybe six thousand cases, and the majority of that was gallons of burgundy and claret and things like that. There was very little of the other, but we had to do it. Then you'd have to pull out the formula, and you'd have to remember how you did it a year or two ago.

Hicke: And then where did you put it?

Trincherro: We broke it down in barrels, and then we bottled the barrels as we needed it, because of the cost of packaging.

Bottling Operation

Trinchero: As a matter of fact, in the sixties I would go to some of the tasting rooms, especially at Charles Krug, on a Monday and take all their empty bottles that they poured in their tasting room. I'd bring the bottles over here and wash them so we'd have bottles to fill full of wine. Oh, it was tough.

Hicke: I saw your sterilizing machine down at the ranch this morning. What a difference.

Trinchero: It doesn't really sterilize them; it just cleans them. We had to actually sink them in tubs of chlorine and ammonia or whatever we used. What a miserable thing it was.

Hicke: I know that well, because my husband is brewing beer, and he spends 90 percent of his time washing bottles.

Trinchero: And they've got to be clean. But we had to do it, because that was the only way we could get glass.

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Trinchero: We rarely had money ahead to get a truckload of glass, and then when we would, we'd call for a truck full of glass. There were three companies that used to supply rewashed glass, because we could never afford new glass. We wouldn't pay them until we went to all three companies and came back to that third one, and that could be ninety days. [laughs] But they were pretty patient, so they let us slide quite a bit. It was pretty tough.

Muscat Wines

Hicke: Your uncle was making Muscato Amabile in 1949. Was that an old family tradition?

Trinchero: It was just another wine--of course [there was] Asti Spumante, and the muscat was certainly something he was accustomed to and understood, so he just made it. As a matter of fact, it was one of the most popular wines we

had at the time. Before the White Zinfandel came along, it was the number one selling wine that we had.

Hicke: Was anybody else making something similar out of muscats?

Trincherro: You know, I was really not conscious of a lot that was going on in the industry. I don't really recall. It wasn't until the early seventies that I became interested in what other people were doing, which kind of hurt my feelings a little bit because I started tasting other people's wine, and I realized how bad my wine really was. [laughs]

Hicke: You had never tasted other wines?

Trincherro: No! How could you afford to buy somebody else's wine? We drank our own wine from 1949, which I think was our first vintage of actually crushing grapes, until the late sixties. If I had to pick a date when things really started to change here, it would be 1968. That was when I met Darrell Corti; well, I had known Darrell, but that's when I started to work closely with him.

Making Vermouth for Other Wineries

Hicke: I want to get that whole story, but I'm going to stop you here and drag you back first. Do you mind being interrupted?

Trincherro: No, not at all.

Hicke: I have a note here that you made wines for Sebastiani, Cambiaso, and Foppiano.

Trincherro: Now we're back in my uncle's era, in the late forties and fifties.

Hicke: Yes, we haven't talked about the fifties at all.

Trincherro: My uncle was a premier vermouth maker. Some of the other wineries wanted to have vermouth, so we would make vermouth for them. Two of the wineries we did it for were Foppiano and Sebastiani. But they didn't do a big business in it; I don't remember delivering a whole lot to

them. I used to deliver it to them in barrels, and I don't recall what the quantity was, but it wasn't very much.

I don't even know what Sebastiani used it for, but he would label it up, and I think there for a while I think we even labeled it for him. So we would put the Sebastiani name on some of them, and Foppiano on others. Cambiaso winery was another one, which is now called Domaine St. George, owned by the Four Seasons group. Joe Cambiaso was the owner.

Hicke: What's the secret of making vermouth that your uncle had his hands on?

Trincherro: To make really good vermouth you need a good understanding of herbs and spices, and we made it fresh. That is to say, we actually bought the fresh herbs and spices and made the infusions ourselves. Then we would blend whatever base wines, and we'd come out with what I thought was a really good sweet, Italian type vermouth or a dry French type. But my uncle went beyond that. He also made a sweet white vermouth.

Italian Drinking Traditions

Trincherro: First of all, the Europeans, especially the Italians, are into vermouth and aperitifs. They don't drink a lot of beer, they don't drink hard alcohol, as such; maybe a little brandy is about all they'll have. Mainly, their cocktail is a glass of vermouth. If you go to Italy and order a martini, you know what you get: they'll ask you, "Sweet or dry?" and you get vermouth.

As a matter of fact, it was a shock the first time I went to Europe in 1980. Our first stop was Rome, and of course I was pretty spaced out after the trip, so we settled in our room and went downstairs to the bar. I said, "I want a martini." Well, she said, "Seco?" I said, "Yes." Of course I wanted a dry martini. [laughter] And she gave me dry vermouth.

Luckily I speak Italian, so I sat down and explained to her, "I'm going to be here for a week, and we're going

to have to come to grips with the martini." So in Italian, I said, "Get a glass," and she got this tall, skinny glass. I said, "That's perfect. Now ice cubes, all the way." Boy, they're tight with their ice. "Fill it right up to the top," so she filled up this glass. She was very suspicious, and kind of looked at me like [I was crazy].

Then I said, "See the Gordon's gin up there?" The thing hadn't been opened, it had dust on it; I mean, Italians just don't drink this kind of stuff. She dusted it off and broke the seal, and I said, "Okay, now start to pour." She poured about an inch, and I said, "No, no, no." She kept pouring until she got about an inch from the top, and I said, "Basta." Enough. I said, "Now, see the dry vermouth?" She pulled out the dry vermouth, started to pour, and I said, "Basta!" In Italian she said, "But I didn't put anything in it." I said, "That's enough. Basta. That is a dry martini." [laughter] She laughed, and then the next night I came down and she looked at me. I said, "Dry martini?" and she said, "Dry martini" and gave me exactly the same thing.

Hicke: That's a great story.

Trincherro: If you go to an upscale bar, you have to use the word "cocktail" after the word "martini." You don't just say "dry martini," you say "a dry martini cocktail." Then usually they understand what you want. She wouldn't have, because she couldn't understand the word "cocktail." She wasn't a professional bartender; she was just one of the ladies there at the hotel. For the whole week I got to drink what I wanted, anyway.

Hicke: My next question is, what is a California wine man doing drinking martinis?

Trincherro: Oh! Well, I love wine, and I drink wines with meals, but I've always had a hard time drinking wine between meals. To me, wine is almost a food. One of the problems here in this country is that we've never gotten over our puritanical attitudes, and we've never been comfortable with it, but in my house when I grew up, wine was always there. It was never lauded, it was never set apart from life. It was always a part of it. It was no more important or less important than the bread or anything else you were eating, so it was accepted as part of the

meal, rather than being apart. Oh, I can do it, but I would prefer a cocktail if it's in between. With meals, it's always wine.

III EARLY WORK EXPERIENCE AND BEGINNINGS OF WINE CAREER

Jobs During High School, 1950-1953

Hicke: We're going back to the late 1940s again.

Trinchero: I was in high school now. I graduated from high school in 1954.

Hicke: You were working in the winery all through high school?

Trinchero: Yes and no. I started to work in the winery, but they didn't have any money to pay me. I did work after school, on Saturdays sometimes--on Sunday nobody worked, or rarely--and during the summer. But the summer of '50, my mother was a little upset that I wasn't being paid anything, so I got a job at Keller's Market here in town, and I was stocking shelves for fifty cents an hour. I kind of liked the job. The following year, '51, my dad offered me twenty dollars a week, or fifty cents an hour. This was during the summer, and I didn't know at the time that he was taking it out of his paycheck.

My uncle got fifty dollars a week, and my dad got fifty dollars a week, and it didn't make any difference how many in each of the families were working. So my mother was the bookkeeper for nothing, and I was working for nothing. He started at fifty dollars a week--I don't know how much he was making at the time--and he didn't think we should get paid. Of course my aunt worked, too, and she didn't get paid. That's just the way he felt

about things. So my dad said, "I can ask my wife to do it, but I shouldn't ask my son to do it." So I would get other jobs. Whenever my dad could, he'd try to pay me.

When I was a junior in high school I worked for the forestry in Napa that summer, fire fighting. I was stationed at the Napa fire station. I forget what the shifts were.

Hicke: That's pretty rigorous work.

Trinchero: Oh, we had one fire, I thought I'd die. It burned a good part of the Napa hills, and we fought that for a couple of days. That's the hardest I ever worked. [laughs] People don't realize how many fires there are in this valley. We went seven days without a fire, and on the eighth day we had eleven in one day. They weren't big ones, but we ran around, and as soon as we put one out, there was another one.

That was the longest stretch, by far, that we ever went without a fire. We would have anywhere between four or five to eleven a day. Living in the valley, you wouldn't realize there were that many fires, but there are. People set their backyards on fire, or somebody with a cigarette starts the island in the highway on fire and you have to go there in the middle of traffic and try to find the grass fire.

Hicke: Was this in the town of Napa that you were fighting fires?

Trinchero: This was the California forestry. There's Schedule A and Schedule B. We were Schedule B, which means grass fires; at least it did in 1953. Schedule A was structural fires, and these were the more professional types. In Schedule B, the drivers were professional, but the fire fighters were seasonal, and we would fight mainly the grass fires.

But back in '53, there was a lot of open space in Napa. There were some big lots that were open, with grass waist high, so you often fought fires inside the city limits. But most of them were out by Vichy Springs, out by the eastern hills. The big one was out there, and we fought that for two or three days in the summer of '53. We only fought two big ones, and that one was by far the biggest. It was a full summer.

Sunsweet Prune Dehydrator Company, 1954

Trinchero: When I graduated in '54, I went to work for the Sunsweet Prune Dehydrator, which is now Dansk Market. I was really making the big bucks there. I cleared \$103 a week. I couldn't believe it. I never saw a check that big. Of course, it was an eighty-four-hour week; you worked from six in the morning to six at night, seven days a week. But I was eighteen years old; what did I care? I'd even go out and party at night and wouldn't even sleep. I'd sleep maybe every other night. I used to be able to do stuff like that. Now it would kill me.

But I'll always remember that first check was \$103 after deductions--take home! I'd never made that much money.

Hicke: What were you doing?

Trinchero: I was testing the prunes. I would shut the ovens off, go inside, and I'd have to squeeze maybe a dozen of the prunes at different levels to make sure they were properly dehydrated. Then with a big hook I would pull out the trays, which were about eight four-by-four-foot trays. Then I'd close it, turn on the ovens again, go around and push in from the front, because they were all stacked up on rails, and you'd have to push them. That's what you did all day. I forget how many ovens; you just start with one and keep going round and round. It was kind of interesting. It was kind of hot work, too.

Hicke: I was going to say, it must have been very hot in there.

Trinchero: I don't know what the temperature was when the ovens were on, but when I'd go in there they'd be around 160 degrees; that's what the thermometer said. But you weren't in there very long, just a few minutes. What happens is that the ends of your fingers would burn, because the prunes were hot. By the end of the season the tips of my fingers were all black. I think I kind of messed up my fingerprints by burning the edges of my fingers off. But, hey, \$103 a week take-home? Wow! That was a lot of money. I bought my first real car after that.

Hicke: What was that?

Trinchero: It was a '49 Mercury sedan. Great. What a car. Where is it now? [laughs]

Hicke: How long did you continue this job?

Trinchero: Well, it was seasonal; it was only about three and a half months long. Once the prunes were done, then we shut it down and spent about a week cleaning the ovens, and that was it.

Hicke: Then what did you do?

Trinchero: Then I worked for the winery.

Hicke: Quite a cut in pay.

Trinchero: Oh, absolutely.

Air Force Service, 1955-1958

Trinchero: The following February of 1955, I joined the service and was four years in the Air Force. I was about three months short of four years. In December of '58 I was discharged from the service, and I got a job here at the winery--temporarily, I said, and I've been here ever since. I didn't want to go into the wine business. There was no money in it, there was no future in it. I didn't even like the Napa Valley; I thought it was kind of a dead place to live. It was different then. There was really nothing--well, I'm fifty-four years old, and the kids probably say the same thing now: "There's nothing to do here," and there wasn't. I wanted to go somewhere else and have a career doing something. In the wine business, you're just starving to death.

Hicke: Did you see the world when you were in the Air Force?

Trinchero: Yes, I saw Winslow, Arizona. That's where I was shipped, and that's where I stayed until I was discharged. [laughs] Of course, I was married. I came home and married my high school sweetheart. It was just like a job. I had an apartment in town, in Winslow, and I would drive out to the base and put in my eight hours and drive home.

Hicke: What were you doing?

Trinchero: I was an air policeman.

Hicke: What was your motive in joining the Air Force?

Trinchero: I wanted to be a pilot. I took the tests and passed them all, except that I was too young. He said, "You have to wait until you are nineteen and a half. Either you have a college education or you have to be nineteen and a half." Okay. He said, "Why don't you join the Air Force, and when you turn nineteen and a half, you can go to pilot's school." I said, "Fine."

By the time I was nineteen and a half, I was married, and they wouldn't allow you to do it then. I don't know if that's changed. I said the heck with it. By then I was so fed up with the service anyway, I said, "I'll just put in my time." I wish I had volunteered for the draft, like most of my friends did. Then in two years you were out. No, I had to join the Air Force, which is four years. So all my buddies got out of the service in two years, and I still had another two years. But that's all right. I think I grew up in the Air Force. I think it was very, very important. Any of the services would have been important because it teaches you structure and discipline, which I had absolutely none of, and it made you feel real lucky to be out of the service, I guess. [laughter]

Of course, when I was there it was pretty quiet, between '55 and '58. It was after Korea and before Viet Nam, so there was really nothing in the Arizona desert except for an occasional Indian uprising, and there wasn't a whole lot for me to do.

Hicke: You said it did teach you structure and discipline, though.

Trinchero: It did. Basic training did, and being in the air police did, too. You have to be pretty well organized. It wasn't much of a job, because the whole base at its peak only had two hundred people in it. So the actual job wasn't much, but it did teach you real discipline and organization, which helped me because I was totally undisciplined and disorganized.

Wine Business in the Forties

Hicke: I'm going back again to 1946 and asking what happened.

Trinchero: First of all, you have to understand that during the war there was a lot of money to be made in the wine business. You had no imports, people tend to drink more alcohol during wartime, and prices were fixed. I don't know what the price was, but say the government said, "Table wine is fifty cents a gallon in bulk to a bottler." Well, I guarantee you it wasn't fifty cents. Maybe it was fifty cents above the table, but I guarantee you it was another fifty cents under the table. So there was a lot of money to be made for certain people in this business.

In 1946 they anticipated a big influx of consumers, because the boys were coming back, et cetera. If I remember right, the price hit about \$125 or \$150 a ton, which was big money. Well, it never happened. So the following year, in 1947, the price dropped to about \$25 or \$35 a ton. There were a lot of people who had this high-priced wine in their cellars, and now it was low-priced. I don't know any names, or if someone caused it, or whatever, but that was the story that I got, because we went into business in 1947, which was the worst year to go into business probably since Prohibition or in this century. That was the year we picked to go into the wine business. You never pick it right. If we really wanted to make money, we should have gone into the wine business in 1940. Then we would have had the whole war to make a few, shall we say, tax-free dollars. But we didn't think of it.

Becoming a Partner at Sutter Home, 1960

Hicke: When you got out of the service and went back to the Napa Valley, was that because you had a family?

Trinchero: I was married, but we had no children at the time. I needed a job. It was as simple as that. I asked my dad for a job so I could spend some time looking around to see what I really wanted to do. I helped my uncle make wine, and my dad and I decided we would buy my uncle out. In

March of 1960, we bought my uncle's half of the winery, and my dad and I became partners.

Hicke: Had you decided by this time that it was a pretty interesting thing to be doing?

Trinchero: Not really. When I say, "buy my uncle out," I had no money, and my father had no money. What my uncle did was take a mortgage out on the winery, so we were paying my uncle. Since we were paying him together, we became partners that way. My uncle built a home right next door to the winery, which is the little building on the south side of the winery, out here on the highway. Now we've got it filled with marketing personnel. He passed away in March of '63, so he was retired only three years. Then we kept paying my aunt, of course. My aunt, by the way, is still alive. She is ninety-one years old and living with her daughter. She's a very nice lady.

In '64 or '65 we borrowed money to pay off the mortgage and my aunt. Then we owed the bank. [laughs]

Bank of America, Wells Fargo, and the Wine Business

Hicke: I wanted to ask you about the bank's role, not only in your winery but in Napa Valley's growth. Was this Bank of America?

Trinchero: We dealt with Bank of America. They were the only bank in town. Back in the late forties and early fifties, St. Helena had one bank and twelve bars. Today we have twelve banks and one bar. I don't know what that means, but lifestyles have changed quite a bit here. [laughter]

B of A was really the only bank in town, so if you banked, you had to bank with them. In '63 or '64, my father went in to borrow \$5,000, and they refused him. That really hurt him. It really did, because every year he'd been coming in for that \$5,000 to help pay for grapes.

Hicke: Oh, this was nothing new?

Trinchero: Oh, no. We wondered what we were going to do. We came close to losing the winery. We finally decided we'd sell it, and we were asking something like \$120,000. No takers. We finally got a guy interested, and we were at \$100,000 now; he'd pushed my dad down that far. He finally said, "Okay, \$90,000 and I'll take it." My father said, "No. No, I'm not going to go below \$100,000. That's it." So the guy said, "The heck with you," and walked away. So here we were, and we were going to lose the winery. We just owed everyone. Not a whole lot, but if you don't have anything, it is a lot.

There was this new bank in town called Wells Fargo, just opened up. I can't remember what year it was, but it had to be about '65 or '66. I walked in and started talking with them, and for whatever reason, they loaned us \$32,500, which was enough to clear up the mortgage; we paid off my aunt. Of course we switched what little business we had to them, and we've been with them ever since, I should say much to the chagrin of B of A. I think they're sorry they didn't give us that \$5,000. [laughter]

My father was old-world Italian, and when Mastercard came out--remember how B of A had Visa card and Wells Fargo had Mastercard? That was when the banks had their own cards. We convinced my dad to take the card. He didn't trust cards--plastic. Cash! I said, "Dad, this is the new thing," et cetera. Okay, so we took the Mastercard. But he would never take the Visa card because it was B of A.

I remember listening to this guy from B of A. He came in and was trying to convince my dad to take the Visa card.

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Trinchero: My dad said no, and he told the man he no longer did business with B of A because they turned down a \$5,000 loan--you know, he told him what happened. I heard this guy say, "You know, Mr. Trinchero, that was almost twenty years ago. You sure carry a grudge for a long time." My dad said, "I'll carry a grudge as long as I want to carry a grudge." [laughter] That was it.

Finally he took it, but only when we convinced him that B of A had nothing to do with the Visa card any more. Boy, he carried that [grudge] to his grave. That was his one humiliation. You just don't tell a proud man like him that he's not worth \$5,000. He probably wasn't, but that's not the point.

Hicke: I wonder why they turned him down?

Trinchero: I don't know. I have no idea. I wasn't there at the time.

Hicke: It was a mistake on their part, that's for sure.

Trinchero: In retrospect that's easy to say, but at the time maybe we weren't worth it. We weren't worth a whole lot.

Hicke: Well, something convinced Wells Fargo Bank.

Trinchero: You know what I think it was? I like Wells Fargo. They're a great company and everything, but I think Wells Fargo felt bad about the fact that B of A had such a strong foothold in the wine industry. Because B of A was the only bank here, and it wrapped up all the vineyards, wineries, and everything. They still have a great portfolio in wineries and vineyards. Wells Fargo was just the new kid on the block. I guess the manager or somebody told them, "Hey, let's get into the wine business." So they were a little more apt to lend me the money because they wanted to get into the wine business.

Hicke: I think about that time they were trying to expand their branch banking, and a lot of other things, too.

Trinchero: I'm sure there was some politics in it somewhere, but I don't care, as long as they loaned me the money, for whatever reason.

Improvements at Sutter Home in the 1960s

Hicke: What happened at that point, when you and your father paid off the mortgage?

Trinchero: You know, things turned around. Things really turned around and got better.

Hicke: Things don't just turn around by themselves, do they?

Trinchero: I don't know. Maybe we got a little confident. We were able to do things that we weren't able to do before, such as buy glass, upgrade things, get a new truck for deliveries, put on a salesman to help us sell wine--just things that you can do with money to help business. Also one big change was that there was a new manager of the bank, named George Minz. I guess George liked us. We became very, very friendly, and he became a good friend of the family. He would push money at us. He said, "You don't realize your potential." This and that. He made me pave the parking lot in front of our tasting room. He said, "How do you expect people to come in here if you've got dirt out there." Because with all the dirt, especially in the summertime, there would be a cloud of dust every time anybody drove in. He would actually force me to do things, and show me ways. What a go-getter.

So we kept borrowing, and the more we borrowed, the more successful we became because the more improvements we could make. George Minz was a big reason why we became as successful as we were, because he showed us that you need money to make money. You sit back and you don't buy something unless you can afford it--that's dumb. Borrow a dollar and make three dollars from borrowing that dollar. He was right. When we paved that parking lot we doubled our business in the tasting room. We put in a nice sign, et cetera, and people liked it. He was a good friend.

Early Experience as a Winemaker

Hicke: Who was making the wine? By now you were, right?

Trinchero: The vintage of 1960 was my first vintage. I remember just before we struck a deal with my uncle in the spring to buy his half, my father came to me and said, "Bob, do you know how to make wine?" Because my dad wasn't a winemaker. I had helped my uncle with the '59 vintage, so I said, "Oh, yes, no problem." Well, the first thing I found out was

that I wasn't a winemaker. [laughs] Oh, boy, what terrible wine.

But, you know, it's like when actors lament the fact that they don't have B movies any more where people can learn their craft; now either you're a star or you just don't play it. Back then, at a dollar a gallon, people didn't expect a whole lot from wine. It was in a jug, they drank it, and they weren't as critical about it and they didn't talk about it as much as they do now. A young winemaker could learn his craft. Believe me, if I had to start out today with what I had then, I would have never made it past the first harvest season, because the stuff I made wasn't that good. I mean, it was drinkable, but it certainly wouldn't be commercially acceptable today.

Hicke: What did you make?

Trinchero: I made everything my uncle made, because I helped him with the vermouths and so forth. The vermouths were pretty good, because that's a formula kind of thing, but the actual crushing of the grapes and making wine--it just wasn't that good.

Learning How to Make Wine

Hicke: How did you learn?

Trinchero: You learn. You ask questions. I went to Davis for a two-week symposium. This was in June of 1960. I still have my class picture. There were only about twenty of us, and I learned quite a bit there. I asked questions and just made a pest of myself. I remember when Joe Heitz bought the little winery across Highway 29 here, I'd go over there and pester him and ask him how to run an analysis, just being a pest.

Hicke: Do you recall who taught that symposium?

Trinchero: It was all the teachers. [A. Dinsmoor] Webb was there, [Vernon L.] Singleton, [Maynard A.] Amerine, George Cooke. As a matter of fact, I met Walter Schug there. He was still with Gallo at the time. I met several people who are now still in the business.

Hicke: These were people that you could ask questions of?

Trinchero: Oh, sure. They knew a lot more than I did. This was a refresher course for them, and for me it was just learning. I didn't understand half of it, but over lunch or something I'd start asking them questions. Slowly, as the years went by, you learned.

Hicke: You had to pick up the chemistry and that kind of thing?

Trinchero: That's right. I picked it all up. My uncle couldn't explain things to me in a technical way. For instance, there's a condition called H_2S --hydrogen sulfide--when wine begins to smell like rotten eggs. I remember seeing my uncle taking a sheet of copper, maybe two feet wide and eight feet long, that he bought at some metal works. He'd put it under the valve, and he would run the wine into a wooden tub. He turned the valve on and let the wine go across this copper sheet, and then he pumped it from the tub back into the tank.

I said, "Why are you doing that?" He said, "Because it's beginning to smell a little like rotten eggs, and this is what you do." But he couldn't tell me that it was developing H_2S , and the fact that copper binds with the H_2S and creates copper sulfate, which precipitates out--I mean, he just couldn't explain this to me. Plus the aeration removed a lot of the volatile components of the H_2S . Yes, you learn it over the years, but he couldn't explain that to me. So I had to watch him do something, ask him why, and he'd tell it to me in a simple way: "When it starts smelling like this, this is what you do." Oh, okay, so you have to remember that smell and remember what he did. "When it smells like rotten eggs," you put in your book, "you take the copper sheet--." [laughter]

Hicke: This is the way he learned it, obviously.

Trinchero: That's right, just by doing it. Maybe that's how his father did it. As the years went by, you start learning your craft. You start asking questions, you read books, and you keep re-reading them and re-reading them until they start making sense to you.

Hicke: What books did you read?

Trincherro: The first one was *Wine* by--

Hicke: Not this one [holds up book]?

Trincherro: No. I had this one, but it came out later. The original one was Cruess. Then I had the blue one [reaches up for volume I], *Technology of Winemaking* by Amerine, Berg, and Cruess. Which edition is that?

Hicke: Third edition.

Trincherro: Well, I got the first edition, and I think they're up to about four or five editions now. That was my bible--that and the one by Cruess. I just kept reading them over and over again until it made sense.

Hicke: It looks a little technical.

Trincherro: It was, and without a chemistry background or a background in microbiology, it was like reading Greek there for a while. But, you know what happened? After about five years it started falling together very, very quickly. It was like I was stumbling along in the dark for five years, and then all of a sudden somebody opened the door and a shaft of light hit me. All these little pieces that seemed detached, that I couldn't quite put together, began falling into place, and I finally understood how to make wine.

Winemaking at Sutter Home in the 1960s

Hicke: These were the years you were making all those fifty-two varieties, right?

Trincherro: Well, fifty-two labels. There's a little difference there. The chianti and the burgundy did taste a little similar. [laughs]

Hicke: All this time you were just learning how to make wine?

Trincherro: That's right.

Hicke: I'm nonplussed as to how you were able to do this.

Trinchero: The wines were cheap, they were drinkable. Occasionally somebody would come into the tasting room and tell me it wasn't very good, but that's part of the business. We weren't selling a lot of wine; we were selling six thousand cases or so total.

Hicke: Were you getting encouraged or discouraged throughout the sixties?

Trinchero: I was pretty discouraged. It didn't seem like I'd ever be successful at this. Why I continued it, I have absolutely no idea. Of course, I was in business with my dad, and I did it for him and my mother as much as I did it for myself. What were we going to do? We tried to sell it once and nobody wanted it. But business was getting a little bit better, a little bit each year. You could see some changes.

I remember the year we finally had to pay income tax. That had to be in the mid- or late sixties. Now, here we'd been in business since '47 and never paid income tax. You have to make money to pay income tax [laughs], and we never did. Our first [income tax] bill was eight hundred dollars. Walter Fox, who is still in business in Calistoga, was our bookkeeper at the time, and he said, "I've got bad news for you. You've got to pay income tax." My father couldn't believe it. Eight hundred dollars!

Hicke: That was one problem he hadn't faced before.

Trinchero: Never faced it before.

Grape Sources

Hicke: Where were you getting your grapes, and who was buying them in the sixties?

Trinchero: I was buying them, and I was getting them wherever I could as cheaply as I possibly could. A lot of them came from Sacramento. I had a grower up there who would sell them to me quite inexpensively.

Hicke: How did you find him? Did you go out driving around, looking at vineyards?

Trincherro: Back then they used to come to the wineries: "You want to buy my grapes?" I can remember probably the saddest case, in 1949, this truck from Lodi--of course, back then everyone hauled their boxes. He must have had twenty tons of grapes on that truck, a big truck and trailer full of boxes. He had gone up and down the valley, trying to sell them--giving them away. I remember at the time his telling my uncle, "Just take them. It'll save the gas getting back to Lodi." My uncle said, "I ain't got the room." It killed my uncle to say no, because he was giving us the grapes. What I understood is that this man went somewhere and just dumped them along the roadside so he wouldn't have to use up the gasoline to get the grapes back to Lodi. It was terrible. There were some pretty hard times with the growers, and for wineries, for that matter.

The growers would come in and say, "I'm a grower here or there." There was a lot of that. Growers came from outside the Napa Valley--well, after all, the Napa Valley had a lot of wineries. Back then there wasn't a big distinction between Napa, Sonoma, Lodi, or whatever; grapes were grapes. It wasn't until the sixties that Napa Valley and Napa Valley Cabernet--varietal designations and appellations--began to really develop.

I remember in 1947, when the bottom dropped out, red grapes were about thirty-five dollars a ton, and white grapes were twenty-five dollars a ton. They didn't specify varieties or that they were grown in Lodi or Napa Valley. This whole thing of appellations and protecting microclimates and things like that have only been in the last couple or three decades.

Hicke: Would growers often drive up with their grapes, or would they come ahead of time?

Trincherro: Usually they would come up ahead of time, but if a person can't sell the grapes, they would just load up the trucks and stop at every winery and work the price--do whatever you had to. I wouldn't say they did that every year, and they certainly don't do it now. [laughs] But this was 1947, and things were a little bit different.

IV SUTTER HOME WINERY: THE HOUSE OF ZINFANDEL

Getting into the Zinfandel Business, 1968

Hicke: Talking about getting and buying grapes, I think we're just about up to the dramatic year of 1968. Let's get that story.

Trinchero: I was having dinner with Darrell Corti, who is a wine merchant in Sacramento. I met Darrell in about 1964. He and his father and uncle and brother stopped into the winery, and they were looking for somebody to make their jug house wine for the Corti Brothers store. It was called Tosca brand. My dad and I said, "Certainly." I mean, we were looking for business. They became a very important part of our business. I would take a trip up there at least every two weeks with a hundred or more cases, and that was a big piece of our business.

I brought up a load of wine, and he invited me over to dinner. We started to talk, and I was lamenting at the time--this would have been the spring of '68--that growers in the Napa Valley were talking two hundred dollars a ton for Cabernet. Wow! We had no vineyards at all at the time. I said, "Gee, Darrell, I can't make gallon jug wines and sell them at a buck-and-a-half a gallon when I'm paying two hundred dollars a ton." Darrell said, "Have you ever heard of Amador County?" I said no, and he said, "Wait a minute." He went down into the basement and brought up a bottle of 1965 Amador County Zinfandel that then-home winemaker Charlie Myers had made. Charlie is an English professor at Sacramento City College, who is now a

professional. The name of his winery is Harbor Winery, on Harbor Boulevard in South Sacramento.

I tasted the wine, and it was a really nice wine. It was robust and had all the character of a fine wine. You have to remember that Zinfandel at this time was considered a low varietal. It wasn't held in particularly high regard. It was the jug variety, mainly because most of it was grown in the Central Valley, which doesn't have the same kind of character that you would get on the North Coast. But I thought this was really unusual, like nothing I'd ever tasted before.

Two weeks later Darrell, Charlie, and myself went up, and I was introduced to Ken Deaver. We've been buying grapes from the Deaver family ever since.

Hicke: Can you tell me some more details of the meeting?

Trinchero: First of all, Ken Deaver reminded me of Gary Cooper. He was about 6'6", slender, and he actually looked a little like Gary Cooper. He was like a gentle giant. Well, I'm short; I'm 5'9". He was very interested in what you were saying, and we just sat around and talked. We talked price. He treated me very, very nicely. He was a real gentleman. We settled on a price of \$115 a ton. Actually, I wanted to pay him \$60 a ton. He said he could probably get \$65 a ton down in Lodi. You see, there were only three hundred acres in the entire county of Amador at this time. Before Prohibition there were over three thousand acres.

Hicke: How many acres did he have?

Trinchero: He had, including non-producing acres, probably sixty. Anyway, he brought out a bottle of homemade wine, and we started drinking it. By the time I left, I offered him \$115 a ton.

Hicke: It must have been good wine.

Trinchero: He was quite a negotiator. Let's put it that way. We both had a good working relationship. Ken passed away a little over a year ago, and his son, Ken, Jr., is now running the family business, so I'm dealing with him. I've known Kenny since he was in high school. We've been dealing with them for twenty-two years.

The Ken Deaver Family and Amador County Grapes

Hicke: Tell me about Ken Deaver's background, and also something about the history of Amador County grapes.

Trinchero: Ken Deaver's family pioneered the area. His great-great-granduncle, who's name was Davis, planted the vines in 1859. Some of the vines are still there; they're Mission varieties. He left about four acres. I don't know what he does with those grapes any more. He used to make a dessert wine from them. [The property] was just handed down.

Amador County, before Prohibition, had over three thousand acres of vineyards, and it had some thirty or forty wineries. The Mother Lode, which would include El Dorado, Amador, and Calaveras counties, had over a hundred wineries and thousands of acres of vineyards before Prohibition. But after Repeal it just never came back. It was very diversified. Ken Deaver, Sr., had walnuts, cattle, sheep, pigs, the vineyard.

Hicke: It was real ranching.

Trinchero: Yes, it was a ranch. You never counted on any one crop. Of course, over the years the money came with the grapes, so the walnuts were [eliminated], and the cattle were reduced. The sheep are gone now, the pigs are gone, et cetera, although Kenny likes a few head of cattle and a few head of sheep, and he plays at it. I keep kidding him about the fact that he's not making any money at it, and he said, "I know, but I enjoy it." Well, that's all right. You've got to have a hobby.

Ken, Sr., was just part of the pioneer family. He would tell me about how Amador County was, and it was really frontier. His brother was shot in a gunfight right on the main street in Plymouth, and that was only in 1946. He was telling me about having to hunt for meat, just to put food on the table--deer, rabbit. It was really a tough way to make a living. But he was born and raised there; he was one of the pioneering families.

I bought a book that this woman had taken years in printing, about all the families of the Shenandoah Valley of Amador County who were there before the turn of the

century. So I have the whole genealogy of the Deaver family.

Hicke: Were they people who settled there after the Gold Rush?

Trincherro: That's right. They originally went up there for the Gold Rush, and when that played out, they just settled the land and were there ever since.

Hicke: And they tried everything, I guess.

Trincherro: Oh, sure. Hey, you want to survive. You don't run away; you fight it out where your roots are.

Hicke: When you first met Mr. Deaver, was he growing mostly Zinfandels?

Trincherro: He had Zinfandels, a little Mission--the vines that his great granduncle had planted--and then he would have some Muscats out at the edges, mainly for the deer; they loved muscat and would leave the Zinfandel alone. He never had any Muscat grapes, because they would eat them all, but it saved him putting up fencing. Now there are fifteen hundred acres of grapes in Amador County.

Hicke: Did you contract only for the Zinfandel?

Trincherro: Yes, for the Zinfandel. Then he sort of asked me in a nice way to take some of the Mission also, so I took some of it.

Hicke: What did you do with that?

Trincherro: I blended it in with some of my jug wines. It makes kind of a neutral tasting wine. It's kind of low in acid, so you have to learn how to make wine from the Mission.

Evolution of the Chateau Concept at Sutter Home

Trincherro: Darrell was part of this, and when I made the '68 [Amador County Zinfandel], two things happened. First of all, I felt I had really come of age as a winemaker. I felt like I really knew how to make wine now, so it took me about eight years.

Hicke: Could you tell from that year, without waiting two or three years?

Trincherro: Oh, you knew right away. Then I knew this was the best wine I'd ever made by far. Also I felt it headed me in the right direction, because I'd been reading these books, and the one thing that kind of intrigued me was the chateau concept.

Hicke: I wanted to ask you about that.

Trincherro: One winery, one wine. Of course, I'm going crazy trying to make all these different things. I said, "Can you believe it, making one wine? It's got to be a piece of cake. You can concentrate on just one wine." Some people may consider that--

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Trincherro: When I made the '68 Amador County Zinfandel, I knew I had the wine that could maybe make the chateau concept for Sutter Home possible. Of course, when I brought it up to my father, he was a little less than pleased. Being old-world, he wasn't going to chuck what he was doing, even if it was maybe not as profitable as it should be, for some idea that his young kid had. But he was a pretty reasonable guy, and when he saw how well it sold--we were between six and eight thousand cases of sales at this time, in January '71; that was when we released the '68--he said, "I'll tell you what. As long as the total cases aren't reduced, you can concentrate more and more on the Zinfandel."

The first year, '68, I only crushed twenty tons of Amador County--or Deaver Vineyard--grapes. The following year it was thirty tons, and then in '70 I crushed forty tons. Well, by that time the '68 came out, everyone thought it was great, and it was selling like hotcakes. So in '71 I bought the entire vineyard, which came close to a hundred tons. It just kept going.

As we were selling more and more of the reds, I was making less and less and actually discontinuing [other wines]. We discontinued gallons and then half gallons, and then the sparkling wines went--all the ones that were

either too difficult, too time-consuming, or too low in profit.

My dad noticed this, and by about '73 we only had red Zinfandel, White Zinfandel, and Muscat. Those were the only wines we were making at the time, from fifty-two labels; within four years it just went the other way.

Hicke: And your life got a little bit simpler, if a little more rushed?

Trinchero: It didn't get simpler; it got more focused, but it was just as hectic.

Promotion of the 1968 Amador County Zinfandel

Hicke: When the '68 Zinfandel was released in '71, did you have a special promotion, or what happened?

Trinchero: Enter Darrell Corti again. Darrell had all the connections. The wine-tasting groups--in other words, the important people who judged the wines, talked about, and wrote about it. He helped me get the wine into tastings that would really help it. One I remember very vividly was at the home of Robin and Jon Lail. Robin Lail is John Daniel's daughter. Jon Lail was an architect in Marin County. It was the San Francisco Wine Sampling Club, which was sort of part of the Berkeley Wine and Food Society. Bill Dickerson was there--I mean, people who really have discerning palates, and when they say something is good, it's good.

My '68 Zinfandel, Lot One and Lot Two, took first and second in a blind tasting, and we had some heavy hitters there--Ridge, Mayacamas, all of those. The funny part of it was--I was sitting across from Bill Dickerson, and he couldn't believe his score. Up until then, what was Sutter Home? It was a jug wine family kind of operation. He kept going back and smelling it and tasting it, and he said, "That's it. There's nothing else I can say. It's outstanding wine."

I went back and told my dad, and I said, "Dad, we're going to make some money on this one. I want to sell it

for \$2.75 a bottle." He said, "You're crazy. Nobody's going to spend \$2.75 for a bottle of wine." We went back and forth, and finally he said, "Okay, \$2.50." I said, "All right." After the first month, we sold off over half of it. I mean, it just flew out. We only had about a thousand cases. People were going crazy, buying it by the case, everybody. My dad came to me and said, "You know, Bob, I think you're right. Let's raise the price to \$2.75." [laughter]

We had a good time with that. The Amador County red Zinfandel just kept going. The '69 was even better than the '68. It was just fantastic.

Hicke: Did you save some bottles of it for your kids?

Trinchero: My kids? Let them get their own! I still have about five magnums of the '69 and four magnums of the '68 left. I have maybe a couple of fifths, but I'll just keep them. The magnums are drinking very well right now.

Division of Responsibilities at the Winery

Hicke: What part was your dad playing in the winery operation by now?

Trinchero: By this time we had an employee. I remember in 1960, when we bought my uncle out, my dad moved from vice president to president--because my uncle had been the president--and I became vice president. Of course, we had no employees, so I wasn't quite sure what I was vice president of. And there was my mother and my wife; there were just the four of us. By '68 we had an employee. As a matter of fact, he's still with us, Steve Bertolucci.

Hicke: He's your winemaker, isn't he?

Trinchero: He's director of winemaking, yes. We did most of the work. My dad took care of the office, the tasting room, the bookkeeping--he and my mom. He'd help us bottle sometimes. My dad was now close to seventy; he was born in 1899, so in 1968 he was sixty-nine years old. He started to slow up in his seventies, but he was always at work, always taking care of his books, record-keeping. He

took care of the money; he never allowed me to do it. Then in probably the mid-seventies he allowed my wife, Evelyn, to take over the books from my mother and him. She had to be married to me at least fifteen years before they would trust her, you know. [laughs] As a matter of fact, we've been married thirty-five years.

Hicke: Who was doing the selling--you, I suppose?

Trinchero: We had a salesman who took care of Napa, Sonoma, and Solano counties. Steve or I would make the deliveries. In the early sixties, my dad said, "It's about time you started to sell," so I started to sell Berkeley in the East Bay. Then I'd go across the bay to Palo Alto and down to San Jose and that area. San Francisco was too difficult to sell then because of hard parking and so forth. I did some selling there, but I was just high-spotting once a month. Then we took on a distributor.

Distributors

Hicke: Who was your first distributor?

Trinchero: We had a local one called Paneagua Brothers. He was in Napa. Then we had some little ones who would take the wine, but our first real distributor was Grape Empire.

Hicke: When was this?

Trinchero: This would have been 1970 or '71.

Hicke: You were getting ready to introduce your Zinfandel.

Trinchero: Yes. Actually, we didn't sell the Zinfandel through our distributor. We sold it all out of that front door. We couldn't stop it; people were crazy. We sold maybe three quarters of it right out the front door.

Hicke: Word got around fast.

Trinchero: Oh, the Berkeley Food and Wine Society--all of them wanted it.

Grape Empire was a good help.

Hicke: Where were their offices?

Trincherro: Their offices were on Hegenberger Loop Road in Oakland.

Hicke: Did they cover the Bay Area?

Trincherro: Correct. Now they've sold, and they're called Southern Wines and Spirits, which we're still with. Southern Wines and Spirits distributes our wine in Southern California and in the San Francisco area-- northern California.

Hicke: You seem to have a history of long relationships.

Trincherro: Yes.

Hicke: Your '68 turned out well, and your '69, and you just kept going?

Trincherro: Correct.

Hicke: You were down to three wines. What was happening to the Muscat?

Trincherro: It was [then] our number one seller.

Hicke: How much of that did you make?

Trincherro: I don't know, but it had to be almost half of our total sales. It was a wine that we just couldn't discontinue, literally.

The Development of White Zinfandel, 1972

Trincherro: The next turning point was in 1972. During '68 to '72, you had some wineries basically trying to out-Zinfandel each other: "My Zinfandel can beat up your Zinfandel." We were producing big, alcoholic, tannic wines to almost the point of absurdity. We produced one in '77 that was 17 percent alcohol, and it was just unbelievable. It stained enamel. What do you do with a wine like that, other than taste it and talk about it?

Hicke: Mix it with water?

Trinchero: Yes. [laughter] As you know, most red grapes are white on the inside, and 100 percent of the color is in the skins. If you crush the grape and separate the juice immediately, you get a clear or white juice. I thought, in '72, that if I could take some of it off initially, I would concentrate what was there, because you still have same amount of skins but less juice during the fermentation. The resulting wine would be higher in color, higher in tannin, and just a more robust wine.

Well, it worked. I'd take about twenty-five or thirty gallons per ton of this clear juice off to the side, and that made less juice to be fermented. I ended up with this big, robust wine. Our '72 is really a nice wine. It's still drinking good.

Hicke: The red Zin?

Trinchero: The red Zin. The only problem was, at the end of the year I had about 550 gallons of this white stuff. What do you call it? I had it in a tank, and I'm kind of scratching my head. I didn't know what to do with it, so I thought, "What the heck, I'm just going to dump it into the gallon-jug chablis and lose it in the white blend." Enter Darrell Corti. He said, "Well, it's kind of a curiosity, kind of an interesting wine. I'll tell you what. If you bottle it up, I'll buy half of it." We're talking 220 cases, so he would have bought 100 cases or so.

Well, that's what I'm in the business for, right? So I bottled it up, he commits to half of it, and I have the other half to sell.

Hicke: What did you call it?

Trinchero: That's step two. I thought it sounded like a good plan, but what am I going to call this wine? Darrell, being very traveled--he speaks I don't know how many languages; the guy's almost embarrassing how many languages he can speak--said, "Why don't we call it 'Oeil de Perdrix'--Eye of the Partridge?" I said, "Oh, okay." I can't pronounce it, but anyway I make up the label and send it in to BATF. They sent it back: "You can't use that without an English translation." I'm going, "Well, it's white, and it's Zinfandel," so under "Oeil de Perdrix" I wrote, "White Zinfandel." If anybody asks who came up with the term

"White Zinfandel," it was the BATF, because I was going to call it "Oeil de Perdrix," and I'm sure that would be a household word today. [laughter]

It's kind of ironic, because the BATF a few years ago was going through and culling out the varietal names and getting rid of some of them that were either redundant or didn't make sense, like "White Riesling" as opposed to "Johannisberg Riesling." They were trying to straighten out the nomenclature of varietal names. There was a movement to get rid of the term "White Zinfandel."

Hicke: Why?

Trincherro: It's not a variety. They wanted you to put, "Zinfandel, a white wine," or "a white wine made from Zinfandel," or something like that. But the term "White Zinfandel" doesn't really exist. The only problem is, they're the ones who initiated it in the first place, and they're the ones who insisted on my calling this wine White Zinfandel. I think it would be a little embarrassing if they said it's not a wine.

Hicke: It would be ridiculous, in view of the market and so forth.

Trincherro: Anyway, it was White Zinfandel, and Darrell committed to half. I went out and tried to sell the other half, and most of the reaction was, "What? There's no such thing as a White Zinfandel." But a few of the retailers said, "Hmm, that's kind of interesting." I'd tell them the whole story of taking the juice off before the fermentation, et cetera, and it slowly built from there. Each year it doubled, and it doubled and doubled and doubled.

By 1980, we sold a total of 34,000 cases of wine, 24,000 of which was White Zinfandel. The release date was spring of '73, so in seven years it went from 220 cases to 24,000 cases. And then it really took off. From 34,000 cases it went up to 60,000, then 120,000, 500,000. That year we tripled; we went from 500,000 to 1,500,000.

Hicke: Was that last year?

Trincherro: I think it was '85. Oh, last year we sold over 3,000,000 cases. It's leveled off now; we're only growing at 3 or 4 or 5 percent a year, but, boy, it just went crazy.

The Trade's Response to White Zinfandel

Trincherro: A lot of people don't like to recognize White Zinfandel, but it is the largest selling varietal wine in the country.

Hicke: Are you talking about dollar amount or volume?

Trincherro: Either one. Chardonnay is second, and it's not even a close second. Everyone ignores it, but it is still number one. I keep reading, "It's dying," or, "Now that White Zinfandel is not selling--." Why, that's idiotic. It's wishful thinking on the part of these cork-sniffers who write about wine.

Hicke: Jealousy.

Trincherro: You know what it is? Everyone missed the boat on this one, not only the wine writers but a lot of people in the industry. Look, we're not that good here. How can we possibly have such a strong hold on White Zinfandel? You know the reason why? Everybody else was asleep. We kept selling 100,000, 300,000, 500,000 cases, and everybody else thought it was a flash in the pan, it would never go anywhere. The wine writers said it, the industry said it. I talked to one vintner, and I'm trying to convince him to make White Zinfandel. He said, "Aw, does the stuff really sell?" I said, "I just sold 500,000 cases of it." "Well, do you really think it's going to last?" I said, "Give me a break!" People aren't wrong; this is what they want.

Green Bottles for Sutter Home White Zinfandel

Trincherro: By the time they came on board, which was in the early eighties--'83, '84, '85 was when the other wineries started to say, "Hey, maybe this isn't [a fad]"--I had a ten-year head start on them. Then it was too late. We

were in a green bottle, and they had to come out in a clear bottle. No one else can have White Zinfandel in a green bottle.

Hicke: Why is that?

Trincherro: Because we were the first ones out there; we were the ones who made the impact.

Hicke: You mean the market wouldn't put up with it?

Trincherro: They would never put up with it now. We couldn't do it. There's a major winery that came out with a green bottled White Zinfandel, and 60,000 cases didn't sell. I don't know what they did with it. We couldn't do it again, because we came out with a sparkling White Zinfandel in a green bottle about four or five years ago, and it bombed. We had to come back out with a clear bottle.

Hicke: Why did you pick the green bottle for the White Zinfandel in the first place?

Trincherro: Because it was the only thing we had. We were washing our own bottles, remember? It was in hock green bottles, actually, because that's what we had the most of. It didn't go into the claret style bottle until '75. Then, once it became popular, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I mean, My God, I don't want to change that package.

Evolution of White Zinfandel Styles at Sutter Home

Hicke: The first year it was somewhat dry, I've read. What was the residual sugar?

Trincherro: Zero. I was thinking Chardonnay when I was making it. It was dry, oak-aged, and it sold because it was a curiosity. It really started taking off with the '75. What happened was, I had a twelve-hundred gallon tank, and I had only a thousand gallons of White Zinfandel. I had to do something with this two-hundred-gallon head space, because the wine was getting close to stopping fermenting, and you can't leave it with a head space for very long. I had this Mission juice, and I decided I would just put it in

there and let it ferment, I put a fermenting bung in it, and it will be fine. Mistake.

First of all, I should have known better, because Mission sometimes just stops fermenting on you for no apparent reason. And I had added a little too much sulfur to this juice, and hadn't allowed it to oxidize to where you could tell what the color was. Up until now it was not only dry, but it was white. Well, this juice looked white, so I pumped it in, tapped it up, and put a fermentation bung in it, and it fermented for a little bit. Then it stopped at about 2 percent residual sugar--the whole twelve hundred gallons--and the color came back to it, so the wine was light pink.

Now I took a sample out and said, "Oh, my God, it's got a pink tinge to it, and it's too sweet." Two percent--that's not really too sweet, but it's sweet to the taste. My first thought was, "What am I going to do now, because my customer is used to the dry, white one." Then I said, "The heck with it. I'm going to bottle it anyway." Well, I had to. I couldn't do anything with four hundred cases; that was too much wine for me at the time.

White Zinfandel Labels

Trincherro: The retailers had been after me to drop the term "Oeil de Perdrix." They thought it was clumsy, people don't use it; they call it White Zinfandel. So I dropped the "Oeil de Perdrix," came out with White Zinfandel only, and now it's pink and a little sweet, and I've never looked back from there. It just went bananas. I've got a label right here [refers to label]. This is a '78, but it's just like the '76. Are you reading the bottom copy?

Hicke: "This wine is made from 100 percent Zinfandel grapes. At harvest time the grapes are crushed, and the juice is separated from the skins immediately, hence a White Zinfandel with just a blush of the grape. It has a hint of sweetness and can be served chilled at any time."

Trincherro: Do you see a word in there that is interesting? The word "blush." There's a certain wine writer who insists that he came up with the word "blush" in 1980, and suggested it

to a winery which made a trademark of the word "blush." Here it is on my '78 label, and it's the same label as on my '76. So the word "blush" was on here three or four years before. I didn't even realize it. I said, "Oh, so he invented the term 'blush'." Then I read this label, and I said, "Wait a minute. I came up with it."

Hicke: Did you write this yourself?

Trincherro: Oh, yes. My brother and I did. He's more articulate than I am, so he probably did the correct grammar, but we did it together. We were the graphics department at the time. [laughter] This is our label; as ugly as it is, it's our's. Roger and I would sit down and draw up the labels. The first label we ever had designed for us was our 1980. That's the label format we're using now. The 1980 Red Zinfandel was the first one. Then for the White Zinfandel, all we did was reverse the colors.

The young lady who did it, it was her first label. We liked it very much, and she charged us six hundred dollars. We thought it was a little high, but we thought, "What the heck." How little we knew. Boy, we design them now, and it's really expensive. Her husband is part owner of a small winery. We were pouring, and we were at side-by-side tables. I said, "How are you? How are you doing?" They said, "Fine." By this time we were up to a couple million cases. You know, Sutter Home and White Zinfandel was the talk of the industry. My brother is sharp, and she was talking to my brother. She said, "You know, I should have charged you more for designing that label, because your sales just took off after that." He looked at her and said, "Paul Newman only got fifty dollars for his first acting job." [laughter]

Hicke: I suspect that what was in the bottle had something more to do with it than the label.

Trincherro: Who knows, but she had to rib us just a little bit about such a deal we got with that first label. I have to admit, it was quite an improvement over this earlier format.

Employees

Hicke: You were doing everything, I guess, up to a certain point, including the graphics.

Trinchero: Let's take 1980, which is only a decade away. Besides the family--me, my brother, my wife, my mother, and my dad--we had three employees. Actually, we had four employees, three of which are still with us.

Hicke: Who are the three that are still with you?

Trinchero: Steve Bertolucci, Hal Huffsmith, who's vice president of our vineyards, and Greg Godwin-Austin, who's in charge of our quality control. Hal came to work for us in the cellar, and Greg started out in our tasting room. Up until Greg got here, the family--

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Trinchero: --handled the tasting room from 1949 until about 1975 or '76, and I'm talking about seven days a week. My mother would take care of it during the week. The kitchen was still there, so she took lunches and what have you. On the weekends they would work the morning shift, and my wife and I would spell them at noon and work until seven. Not a day off. We went five years without a full day off. We would have Saturday and Sunday mornings off. [laughs] But you had to do those sorts of things. That's one thing a lot of the kids today don't realize.

Changes in the Work Ethic

Trinchero: When I was going to school, which was a little different for me, because I was raised in a big city, I showed up for school--this would have been the fall of '49--and there weren't any boys there. There were just girls and me and maybe three other boys. They had the junior high school and the high school on the same campus, so there were six grades on one campus. I said, "Where are the guys?" They said, "They're out picking grapes." They were out picking whatever the fruit was. The curriculum of the school--I said, "This is a piece of cake; what easy work"--was designed with the knowledge that the boys

wouldn't be up to full capacity until after all the crops were picked. The boys would start coming in in late October, and starting November the curriculum got tough. So the last half of September and most of October was real easy, and then in November, after the crops were in, it got tough. The boys would show up, and they would have new shoes, and they would buy their own clothes.

Today the kids in high school--picking grapes? You've got to be kidding. But you did it, although I didn't, because my father insisted that I go to school. My dad never finished school; he quit when he was twelve years old, and he always felt that going to school was very important. He wouldn't allow me to have an extra job where I would miss school. I kind of liked it, because I had all the girls to myself. There were very few guys, at least for a month. [laughs]

Hicke: And not much homework.

Trinchero: Not much homework. It was great. I said, "Hey, I love California!" [laughter] But today they don't do that. That's how we bought our clothes, our school supplies, our car. My dad was pretty typical of everyone else here, I'd say. I turned sixteen, "Hey, Dad, I'd like a car." He said, "Sure." "Can I have one?" "Absolutely." Guess what? "You can buy one. You have the permission." But he never tried to figure out how I was going to afford one. "You buy a car, you pay the insurance, it's yours."

But not today. Today the kids want you to subsidize them constantly. And we do it. I don't know. Things happen in cycles. By the sixties it was too late; it was gone. All the kids were given everything because, I guess, we were denied. I spoiled both my kids. They're great kids, and I love them dearly, but they don't have the same work ethic that we had. In reality, why should they? Different times, different ways. But we worked all the time. There was none of this goofing around. First of all, we didn't have television. Television finally showed up here at our house in late 1952, so we had all of the forties and at least a couple of years of the fifties without a television.

Hicke: There wasn't that much to watch.

Trinchero: Yes, you had maybe two channels. It was kind of cute at first, and my mother and father enjoyed it in the evening, but I never watched television. I'd be out. I'd get through with work, and after dinner I was out--in my car and out.

I kind of digressed. Where were we?

Hicke: One of the things I want to do is talk about the Zinfandel grape. Tomorrow maybe we can talk about that and what happened in the eighties.

V GRAPES AND VINEYARDS

Mysterious Origins of the Zinfandel Grape

[Interview 2: April 4, 1991]##

Hicke: I wanted to ask you about the mystery of the original Zinfandel grape. What do you know about it?

Trinchero: I've never done a study, mainly because I'm more interested in the future of Zinfandel rather than its past. However, every time somebody would come out with something, I would read it and see what the latest research was. Frankly, I don't think anybody knows where it came from. It could have been brought in by Count Haraszthy from somewhere in Europe, or it could have been a drop-seed propagation, as some think. They say it was in a catalogue in a nursery on the East Coast somewhere, back in the 1830s. Who knows?

The latest one was that it came from the primativo in the Barri region of Italy. Then they decided we didn't really know, because they brought in a lot of vines from California when they were replanting after the phylloxera had devastated the vineyards. The question was, did Zinfandel come from there or did it come from California to there? No one really knows.

I just like to think it's unique to California. You know it's not indigenous to California. I'll leave it up to the scholars. As I say, I'm more interested in its future than I am in its past.

Interest Shown by Other Countries in Zinfandel Grapes

Hicke: Speaking of the future, I just read an article this morning on where it came from, and it said it's going to be a moot question pretty soon because it's now being planted all over Europe. When somebody comes upon a vine ten years from now--

Trincherro: You say it's being planted all over Europe? I haven't read that. There has been some interest, but in many areas of Europe they have classifications, and you can only plant certain varieties. For instance, you couldn't plant Zinfandel in Bordeaux or Burgundy.

Hicke: I think perhaps I misspoke. It said it was being planted in some places in Europe.

Trincherro: It could, in the areas that make, shall we say, the house wine or the everyday drinking wine--the Midi and places like that--perhaps, but I haven't read anything about that.

Hicke: What about Australia? Is it moving there?

Trincherro: I haven't read a thing about it moving anywhere, although I have read there's a lot of interest in it. I've had some Europeans visit our winery and think Zinfandel is the future of California because it's unique to California, and they think it's probably the best red wine we make. Here we are, trying to copy the French, and the French are saying, "What are you doing this for? You should be concentrating on Zinfandel." I don't know.

Hicke: Let me correct my statement. What it says here is that "while no foreign producer is commercially growing Zinfandel, cuttings are being cultivated in Europe for study." That's a totally different thing, and I'm sorry.

Trincherro: That's okay. Just because I didn't read about it doesn't mean it isn't happening.

Hicke: I guess it will eventually be planted elsewhere.

Origins of White Zinfandel

Hicke: I also wanted to ask you about some of the early references to White Zinfandel. In the 1870s and so forth it was mentioned as an entry in the viticultural commission's show.

Trincherro: It was?

Hicke: I think Wetmore's ampelography mentions the fact that the Zinfandel makes a good white wine or something like that.

Trincherro: You know, in the industry today we tend to be a little more formal, more traditional--meaning more French--and follow stricter guidelines than our ancestors did. The fact of the matter is, our ancestors were a lot more practical when it came to making wine. Often they would plant grapes that could go either way--could make an acceptable white wine as well as an acceptable red wine--the reason being that you never knew where the vogue was and where the high prices were. One year, maybe white wine was short, so you turned your red grapes into white wine. Or maybe it was red wine, so you turned to red wine.

I'm sure the first White Zinfandel was made soon after the Zinfandel grapes were cultivated, because our ancestors didn't have that stigma of saying "Zinfandel is red, and it can't be white" kind of b.s. that we get today. They were much more practical. They had a grape, they knew they could make a white wine out of it, a rosé out of it, or a red wine out of it. It was whatever they needed, and nobody put them down for doing it. Today, I know the kinds of barbs I got from not only the wine writers but from my own peers about, "How can you bastardize the Zinfandel grape by making it into anything other than a red wine?" I said, "Hey, wait a minute. People want it this way. Why don't you just give it to the consumer this way?"

Wine Snobbery

Trinchero: There's always been this feeling, at least in the last two or three decades, that we're not really making wine for people; we're making wine to perpetuate a tradition that was created in a foreign country. So we say to the consumer, "Look, this is a great wine. If you don't like it, that's not our fault. That's your fault." Well, you know what Americans do; they say, "Oh, yeah? Give me a Bud Light. The hell with you."

I have never seen, and I don't know of, any industry other than the wine industry that has spent so much time perpetuating a wall of intimidation to the consumer. If you look at wine, we don't make it for American taste, first of all. We make it to a taste that was created over centuries in France. I was going to say Europe, but let's face it: France is what we're trying to copy.

We also put it in a package that is contrary to Americans' lifestyle. Where other beverage companies spend millions of dollars trying to make their produce user friendly and make it easy to get into the box or can or whatever it is, we go the other way. We force our consumer to go out and spend five dollars for a tool to open our package. I've seen people trying to open this package, and pulling a cork is not that easy. Instead of saying, "Why don't we put it in flip-top cans or whatever," no, my God, that's not traditional. No research is being done, no dollars are being spent in this industry to ever say "Let's find an alternative to cork." It's really too bad. Yet the beer industry spends millions just figuring out how to make it easier to get into that can of beer.

Hicke: Not only that, they do make those flip-top bottles, where you can almost recap the bottle.

Trinchero: But we won't do that, because anything else besides a cork means--like a screw cap: "Oh, my God, you can't put a screw cap in it. After all, that tells you it's an inferior wine."

Screw Caps vs. Corks

Trincherro: Well, I can tell you right now that we have run tests. We haven't publicized them, although obviously I'm doing so now. We've only run it for two and a half years, so I can't go beyond the two and a half years from the date it was bottled. We find that a screw cap is superior to a cork. At best, the wines were the same. At worst, we found variations in the wines that were corked. We found no variations in the wines that had screw caps. Screw cap technology has come a long way since the old days, and they do have sealers on the inside that do a better job sealing wine. Corks do a lousy job in sealing wine.

Hicke: Are you going to start another revolution?

Trincherro: I'm not ready to come out with screw caps because I don't think the consumers are ready for it. But as far as we're concerned, if you consume the product within two and a half years from the time it was bottled, which is 99 percent of all the wine produced, you would find less variation and just as high a quality in a screw cap as you would in a cork. But I'm not about ready to come out with a screw cap.

The old-timers didn't do that. They would put it in anything you wanted it in. Of course, back then they had no screw caps--I'm talking about 120 or 130 years ago--so they were forced to use corks; corks were used because people were forced to use them. Now, when we're not forced to use them, we use them anyway because of "tradition." Because of that, we have created intimidation. We have created a language, a foreign-type package, a foreign taste.

The average American is raised on KoolAid and Coca Cola. How can they jump directly into Cabernet Sauvignon? They just can't. You need an entrance vehicle, and that doesn't mean that just because they like the entrance vehicle they're going to go to Cabernet; they may stay with the entrance vehicle. The idea is to get Americans to drink wine, not to intimidate them, because Americans are easily intimidated by things like that.

I remember years ago--oh, twenty-five years ago--I was with my wife, a friend, and his wife. We went to

dinner in San Francisco to a nice restaurant. He kind of whispered to me, "Bob, let me order the wine." I said, "Oh, okay, fine." He told the wine steward, "I will have a bottle of So-and-So's Cabernet Sauvignon." The steward said, "Fine," and walked off. Then my friend leaned over and said to me, "You know, I practiced that for six months, to get down 'Cabernet Sauvignon' properly." I started to laugh, but you know what it did? I said, "Why do we use French terms? Why do we make a product that's so difficult and intimidating?" I have talked to more people who say they tighten up and get so tense when they are faced with the necessity of saying "Pinot Noir," or "Cabernet Sauvignon." It's just condescending.

The people who are into wine and what have you have spent the time, done the study to learn the wine language, and they think it adds to their lifestyle, which it probably does, but how many people want to go to that length? Most people don't want a Ph.D. in wine appreciation; they just want something that's not going to mess up their hamburger or meatloaf. But we don't do that.

Wine Pricing

Trincherro: Then, of course, the pricing. I cannot believe a beverage that costs twenty dollars a bottle. The average American sits down to meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and string beans. The whole meal for four is probably a dollar a head, or a dollar fifty; the whole meal couldn't cost more than four to six dollars. Yet we expect them to spend ten dollars for a bottle of wine for those four people. Why do you have to spend more for the wine than you do for the entire meal? It's really crazy.

Hicke: Does this philosophy come from your street-smart years in New York?

Trincherro: Yes, it comes from my dad, because in New York my dad used to buy his wine--I always remember it was called Fior d'Italia--in a gallon jug. He'd bring it home and pour it into five bottles and screw-cap them, and then he and my mother and whoever was eating dinner would drink a bottle a day. He knew about decanting it into these bottles so

that it would go over a week, and that was his week's wine. He never bought bottles; they were too expensive. He didn't mind getting a screw cap and pouring it into other screw caps. The average Italian has a more practical way of looking at things than most of the people in the industry do.

Hicke: Besides having more pronounceable wines.

Trinchero: Correct. I don't know, we want to perpetuate the romance and the nectar of the gods and all that b.s. I've never understood that. You've almost brought it above reality and out of reach to the average person. Certainly that's not the way it grew in Europe; it was always available to the average person. That's why the consumption rate is so high. Here, it's never been available to the average person in a vehicle that they can understand. We've always made it tough for them.

Our ancestors were a lot more practical than we are. I remember reading in the 1880 or 1890 St. Helena Star, which is the local paper here in St. Helena. I used to spend a lot of time looking at microfilm, and they had put all the St. Helena Stars on microfilm. I remember the editor was suggesting a variety called Malvasoise, which is one I'm really not sure how to spell. The reason he suggested that grape was because it made as good a white wine as it did a red wine, so that way you could go either way. Here's the editor of the paper suggesting it be planted.

But here now, if it's a red grape, it's got to make a red wine. Which is kind of funny, because when the White Zinfandel was developing and beginning to sell a lot--we were half a million cases--a lot of people would ask, "Why do you call it White Zinfandel? It's not white; it's pink," and they used to get angry at me. I would say, "Why do you call White Riesling white? It ain't white; it's yellow." They'd look at me and not know what to say. Chardonnay is always referred to as a white wine, but let's face it; it's yellow. The reason it's called a white wine is because in France it's called vin blanc, "white wine," so we just translate it strictly. And why do we call it red wine? It's not really red. Have you ever looked at red wine?

Hicke: It varies from light pink to--

Trincherro: --to purple to garnet to all kinds of colors. Red, to me, is a fire engine; that's red, and I have never seen a really red wine. They're giving me this hard time for calling White Zinfandel white when it really isn't. Well, it's just as white as Chardonnay is white.

Vineyard Acquisitions

Hicke: Let's talk a little bit about your vineyards that you started to acquire.

Trincherro: I told you earlier that we had no vineyards. The main reason was because we were struggling and we couldn't afford it. As we became more and more successful, we began realizing that we were at the mercy, if you will, of the market. Whenever the price would go up, we would have to pay full dollar for the grapes; we had no grapes of our own to help defray the cost. So a few years ago we bought our first vineyard.

Hicke: Was that the one in Lake County in 1984?

Trincherro: Yes, although actually a couple of years before that we bought fifteen acres in Calistoga, which we've since replanted to Cabernet. It was kind of a friend of mine, and he wanted to get rid of it. He gave me such a good price I couldn't turn it down; it was \$8,000 an acre, and that was ten years ago.

But the first real vineyard was in Lake County that I bought from my good friend, Justin Meyer from Silver Oak. Justin had two hundred acres on Grant Road, just outside of Middletown, and a hundred acres on Highland Springs Road, just down from the airport in Lakeport. We have since replanted almost all of it. The hundred acres near Lakeport we planted all to Chardonnay, and the two hundred acres that were just outside Middletown we replanted in a combination of Cabernet, Zinfandel, and some Chardonnay.

Hicke: What was there when you bought them?

Trincherro: Oh, it had Zinfandel, some Cabernet, Canelian, Gamay. What we did basically was take out what we didn't want and

add more of what we wanted. That was three hundred acres, so that was a substantial investment for us.

Since our White Zinfandel was increasing so much in sales, we knew we had to grow our own Zinfandel. In Lake County, although it's a good area for Zinfandel, we couldn't get the quantities of production that we wanted. What we had to do was find inexpensive land and plant a clone of Zinfandel that would give us the biggest possible production. I ran across a vineyard in Glenn County which was a section, or 640 acres. It was planted in some real winners: Petite Sirah, Grenache, Napa Gamay, and Barbera. Over the years we've replanted it all to Zinfandel. There is some Petite Sirah still there, but not very much.

Our next [vineyard purchase] was Arbuckle. It was 1,400 acres of land, of which we planted about 1,100 acres of actual vines. This is all Zinfandel, with the exception of 35 acres of Cabernet and 35 acres of Chardonnay. The reason we planted Chardonnay and Cabernet--now, we're talking of the upper Sacramento Valley, flat as a pancake, hot in the summertime. You'd think Zinfandel might do well there, but Cabernet and Chardonnay certainly wouldn't. Well, we just thought we'd try it and see what kind of a quality fruit we could attain from that area.

Hicke: Was that about 1987?

Trinchero: Something like that. Between Arbuckle and Artois (the locals call it "artois"), which is the one in Glenn County, it gives us about 1,700 or 1,800 acres of grapes of a clone that will give us twelve to fifteen tons an acre.

Hicke: What clone is it?

Trinchero: I think it's [Davis] clone #6. You'd have to talk to my vineyard man about that. It's a high-producing clone.

Criteria for Selecting Grapes for White Zinfandel

Trinchero: The whole theory of winemaking is turned upside down when you make a White Zinfandel. A lot of people don't

understand about White Zinfandel and how it's produced. I remember somebody telling me that you can't grow good Zinfandel in the Central Valley, and why are you planting in the Central Valley if you're looking at quality? But the numbers get completely turned around when you're producing a White Zinfandel. Let me explain that.

The reason they will say the Central Valley--meaning San Joaquin Valley, upper Sacramento Valley, et cetera--is not good for Cabernet or Zinfandel or Pinot Noir is because you are making a red wine from it. A red wine dictates that the sugar levels must be up in the 22° to 23°, maybe even the 24° range. By that time, because of the heat days, the grapes become quite soft and are greatly reduced in acid. In other words, they're out of balance. Whereas in the North Coast, Cabernet does better because it's cooler, so when the grapes do reach that 22° or 23° or 24° sugar, they still have an acceptable level of acid, which creates the balance and the flavor and what have you of the wine.

But White Zinfandel isn't a red wine. It doesn't have 13 percent alcohol, you see. You don't pick it by sugar; you pick it by acid and pH. We never look at the sugar--well, we look at the sugar, obviously, as part of it, but that's not the criterion we use to pick the grapes. We can pick grapes as low in sugar as 14° or 15°. By the time it gets to 18°, 19°, or 20°, it has all been picked. So what do you end up with? You end up with good acid, because you're not trying for 23° or 24° sugar.

I mean, you pick a 14° or a 15°, and you still have a lot of acid, even in the Central Valley. You have light color. You want to retain the freshness and the fruitiness, so you crush it immediately, you cold ferment it, and you end up with a wine that's about 8.5 percent alcohol, but with about .8 total acid, and a pH of around 3 or 3.1, which gives you a nice, crisp flavor and a nice, bright color. So you're not producing a red wine, and all the numbers are turned completely the other way.

That's why I once told someone, and I was taken to task for it, that the Central Valley produced better White Zinfandel than the North Coast. In the North Coast, if you tried picking at 14° or 15° sugar, you'd have an acid of 2.0, and you'd have something that was so tart that you couldn't drink it.

Wine Styles Suited to the Central Valley

Trinchero: The Central Valley really missed the boat when they tried to emulate the European wines and the North Coast. They should develop a wine style of their own, one with less alcohol. It's no use; if you try for 13 or 13.5 percent alcohol in the central Valley, you're going to get a flabby wine. That's the nature of it. If they say, "No, I don't care if it's 10 or even 9 percent alcohol, let's get a good balance," the wines in the Central Valley would greatly improve, I think. The Chardonnays, the Cabernets--you just pick them early. Well, Cabernet--if you're going for red wine, you may not have enough color, but white wines can be greatly improved.

Hicke: What does that extra 4 or 5 percent of alcohol add?

Trinchero: They say it adds body, and it does. It's certainly a flavor enhancer. But wait a minute. I'm not saying you're going to produce a great wine; I'm saying you're going to produce a very palatable wine, and you should find the kinds of wines that the Central Valley produces best. Just like Napa Valley became famous and came into its own when it quit saying, "Our wines are as good as any French wines." Now we're saying, "We make the best Napa Valley wines in the world. We make the best wines in California." My God, don't say that our wines are better than the French, because what are you trying to do? You're trying to copy the French. Make your own wine.

About fifteen or twenty years ago when we started talking that way, we got ahead of the game. I think that's why in the United States the Napa Valley is considered the mecca of fine wines, not because the wines are great. The wines are great, but there are other great areas. We just have the people who went out and convinced everyone that we made the best Napa Valley wines in the world, and we quit trying to be French.

Hicke: So the Central Valley should try for that same attitude?

Trinchero: Yes. Make the style of wine that best typifies your growing area. Plant the right varieties, produce the proper wine that those varieties can produce in that area. Don't try to say, "Well, we're making a Cabernet or a Merlot or whatever, and it's got to be 13 percent alcohol--." It doesn't have to be anything; just make the

best wine possible. I think especially the white wines like Chardonnay can greatly improve in the Central Valley if they wouldn't be a slave to what they believe is the traditional Chardonnay, because they will never make or make anyone believe they're making a Chardonnay as good as the North Coast. Make it the best Central Valley Chardonnay in the world. [laughs]

More on Vineyard Acquisitions

Hicke: Since we're still in the vineyards, let me ask you about harvesting and pruning and that kind of mechanical equipment.

Trincherro: We still have more vineyards! We bought six hundred acres in the delta, and we just planted that to Chardonnay and Cabernet. Also, you know, we bought the Montevina Winery, and we've expanded the vineyards up there. So totally we've got well over three thousand acres of vines scattered all over the northern part of the state. Here in Napa Valley we have about forty acres, because we have twenty-five acres next to the ranch--

Montevina: An Italian-Style Winery##

Trincherro: I don't know if you want to get into it, but the interesting thing is the mix of the grapes up in Amador County.

Hicke: Oh, yes. Let's do it now.

Trincherro: We bought Montevina in December of '88, and we're slowly transforming it into an Italian winery. We have planted already varieties like Refosco, Aleatico, Aleanico, Barbera, Nebbiolo, and Sangiovese grosso. We also went to the University of California at Davis, and in their library vineyard we chose fifty-eight varieties of Italian grapes, some of which no longer exist in Italy. They came here a hundred years ago and were planted. We took these fifty-eight varieties and planted them in the delta vineyard; we have about a three-acre block of experimental

vines. Then we'll choose from that and plant five-acre parcels of all those grapes in Amador County.

So this is a long-term, ten- or twenty-year kind of thing, to turn Montevina into an Italian winery of whichever varieties finally develop. It's a real fun thing, and it has added a lot of interest for me.

Hicke: Which Rufosco did you plant?

Trincherro: I didn't know there was more than one.

Hicke: Somebody told me to be sure and ask you.

Trincherro: If you want to break here, I can look it up for you. [break] Rufosco ID[entification] #930, and that is the only thing they say is Rifosco. The wood source is JNL. There are a couple of Nebbiolos and Sangiovese grosso.

Hicke: And you have both kinds in your experimental plantings?

Trincherro: Yes. Nebbiolo, Nebbiolo borugu, Nebbiolo fino, Nebbiolo tronero. So there are four Nebbiolos. But there is only one Rufosco. There are fifty-eight of these babies, and some of them no longer exist in Italy.

Proprietary Blends Planned for Montevina

Hicke: You're also thinking about making some of the proprietary blends at Montevina?

Trincherro: Yes.

Hicke: That should be interesting, too. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Trincherro: Right now, not very much, although we have a montinaro that we are going to bottle, which is a blend of Barbera and Zinfandel. That's the only one we have right now, because the Barbera makes an absolutely superb wine up there one year out of three or five. The rest of the time it's a nice wine, but it lacks--either too high an acid or whatever. Mainly it's too high in acid, very tart, and it goes very well with the Zinfandel, which is usually low in acid. You blend them together--it's 60/40 or something

like that--and it produces a lovely wine. In those off-years for the Barbera, this is the way we use the Barbera. When it's good, it'll just be called Barbera.

Hicke: I also read you're thinking about blending Sangiovese and Cabernet.

Trincherro: Yes. That's like Antinori's Tignanello in Italy.

Vineyard Acquisitions Policy

Hicke: Have we covered all the vineyards now? Except you've also leased some, you said.

Trincherro: Yes, we lease 450 acres from what is called the Rosalia Ranch. That's about it. Everything else we buy. That's about 30 to 40 percent of our total needs when they're all producing; they're not all fully producing right now. Oh, we are also buying--it's in escrow now--1,500 acres in Santa Maria, of which I believe about 600 or 700 acres of it is plantable. That's where we're going to plant Chardonnay over the next four or five years. We're not in a big hurry.

I think we're going to stop buying land; I think we have enough land. When the Santa Maria property is planted, that means we'll have about four thousand acres of vineyard, and I think that's enough.

Hicke: How do you decide when enough is enough?

Trincherro: We have a very conservative policy here which is part of the sage advice from my father. My brother and sister and I decided we wouldn't grow more than 40 percent of our own grapes, and 50 percent max. That way, in case business went bad, we could lose 50 percent of our business and still not be in the grape-selling business. What you never want to do is overextend yourself and end up with more grapes than you can use, because, boy--

Hicke: You find yourself driving up and down with a truckload of grapes--

Trinchero: That's right, trying to sell grapes, and you don't want to do that. Also, the size of the winery will never be more than 50 percent of our needs. For instance, last year, in 1990, we sold about ten million gallons of wine. A winery is usually about twice the size of it's yearly sales or production--whichever one you want to use. Our winery is only five million gallons, so it's only half the capacity of what we sell, and it's only a fourth of the size that we should be at.

So although we do need some capacity, it will never get over the amount that we sell. Then what happens is that if business goes bad and you lose half your business--which would be almost an impossibility; you don't lose half your business overnight--we would then have a winery that was too big for what we needed, and what do you do with it? Having equipment that you don't use means you're losing money.

Hicke: You can't truck that up and down.

Trinchero: What you could do is lease it or rent it and things like that. But our tanks are too big for that sort of thing. We've got tanks that are 100,000, up to 300,000 gallons. Who's going to use a 300,000 gallon tank?

Hicke: If you can't, obviously nobody can.

Mechanical Harveting and Pruning

Hicke: What about the mechanical harvesting and pruning?

Trinchero: The less we have to rely on hand-picking, the better I like it, mainly because machines don't go on strike, and they work at night. Working at night, when it's nice and cool, is very important. You save just tons and tons of refrigeration if the grapes come in at 50 degrees or 60 degrees rather than at midday at 100 degrees, because you've got to cool them down, and it's very, very expensive. What we do is start picking in the evening, and we finish at dawn, when it starts warming up again. I don't know what time we start--probably at ten or eleven o'clock at night and go for maybe eight hours. Then it arrives at the winery, nice and cool, during the day.

We do like machines. We have eight mechanical harvesters, and they pick two acres an hour. That's why all our vineyards are laser-leveled; they're about as flat as you can get. They go two acres an hour, just like clockwork. Except, of course, for Montevina, because the land up in Amador County is somewhat rolling. Those are all hand-picked.

Hicke: Do you move your machines around to your different vineyards?

Trinchero: Yes. Almost all the machines are either at Arbuckle or at Artois.

Hicke: Do you worry about county management?

Trinchero: I don't, but I'm sure my vineyard man does. [laughter] We also prune by machine, which is something I hadn't heard of. We experimented with it, and what we do is just drag this thing right down the rows. It's got all these buzz saws on it, and it makes the vines look like a little hedge, but it doesn't affect the production at all. As a matter of fact, the production was a little higher than we would expect.

Hicke: Are all the vines pruned so that they all look alike, then?

Trinchero: Yes.

Hicke: Nobody comes along and says, "Move the machine a foot to the right for this vine," and things like that?

Trinchero: I don't know. I've been there after they've pruned, and they look like a little hedge. If you stop and think about it, after all, grape vines are a vine; they enjoy being pruned and almost butchered. They've got long roots, and they're a tough plant. I think every two or three years, though, or every four or five years, we go through and by hand kind of clean it up, because it does get a little cluttered after a while. But it works great. I'm not sure if we do all of our vineyards that way, but I know Artois and Arbuckle we do that way.

VI SUTTER HOME WINERY, 1977-1991

Late Harvest Zinfandel, 1977

Hicke: Let's go back to the wines, then. I wanted to ask you about several things. You made one Late Harvest Zinfandel in '78.

Trincherro: That was in '77.

Hicke: Was that a drought year, and did that have something to do with it?

Trincherro: I don't think it had anything to do with it. It was just that we wanted to make a late harvest. It could have been made the year before or whatever; we just thought we'd try it. It was about 16 or 17 percent alcohol, and it was just a very, very difficult wine to drink. But it was a very interesting wine, and certainly one you could talk a lot about. That was the only year we made it. What happened was, right about the end of the seventies, and certainly by 1980, the vogue for these big, monster Zinfandels was dead--thank God, frankly, because they were kind of undrinkable.

Sparkler White Zinfandel, 1985

Hicke: Going up to '85, I show that you added Sparkler, but what you did was re-add the Sparkler. You had been making Sparkler before.

Trinchero: No. I forget what year we came out with it.

Hicke: I show '85, but way back when, your dad made a sparkler.

Trinchero: Oh, Sparkler was White Zinfandel, which we did make. We made a sparkling wine, called Sparkler, by the way-- Sparkler White Zinfandel. But, yes, back in the old days we made champagne, sparkling burgundy, sparkling rosé. Actually, we called the sparkling burgundy "champagne rouge." Oh, fancy, let me tell you!

Hicke: What was the motivation for making the Sparkler?

Trinchero: We just thought that we would see if the White Zinfandel would work as a sparkling wine, and it did very nicely. But we're sort of processing it out now, because it just cost us too much to sell the product, so the profits just weren't there. Within the first year we had it up to sixty or seventy thousand, and finally we hit almost a hundred thousand cases the second year. But when we started adding it up, it just cost too much to sell it to hit the kind of price points that we wanted, so we're phasing it out.

Hicke: Did you market it to White Zinfandel drinkers?

Trinchero: No, just sparkling wine drinkers. You want a sparkling White Zinfandel? Here it is. It sold very nicely. Retail here would be probably \$5.99, which was the price point we thought we had to hit. But at that price point we just weren't making anything, especially with the ridiculous federal tax that's on it. The federal tax was \$8.10 a case.

Hicke: Because it's sparkling?

Trinchero: Yes, because it contains carbonation. Of course, they don't tax Pepsi Cola. It's got gas in it.

Excise Taxes and Government Regulations

Trinchero: Some of these laws are just incredible. I don't know how they even got off the ground. It seems like excise taxes are a God-given right, and there's nothing in the

Constitution that says anything about excise taxes. Yet we just decided that alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and things like that which are considered vices, are going to be taxed. It's just incredible. These things pay an inordinate amount of tax. Alcohol is just unbelievable.

You know, most countries, like Italy, France, Spain--the people I talk to say, "You Americans are really something. You're a great country, but you have some weird ideas." Like the warning labels now. They say, "What is this?" As a matter of fact, [the European Community?] will not allow American wines in Europe with a warning label. Oh, no. We sell wine to Europe, and you have to take off the "contains sulfites" and the warning label or they won't allow it in the country. "Why do you want to tell somebody something he doesn't want to hear?" That's their attitude. If anybody doesn't know that if you drink too much you shouldn't be driving--.

Here we have to explain every little thing or you're open for a lawsuit: "You didn't tell me that drinking five bottles of your wine means that I couldn't drive my car." You have to tell somebody that? Like, where have you been for the last thirty years? Of course if you're drunk you shouldn't drive. We've got a big brother [attitude?]; we can't allow people to be responsible for their own actions, basically, so we've got to blame it on somebody else. Somebody shoots somebody, it's the gun's fault, so let's do this. Somebody kills somebody while being drunk, well, it's the alcohol's fault. Why don't you grab the idiot and throw him in jail because it's his fault? But we don't think of things that way, so we have to deal with things like excise tax.

Renaming Moscato Amabile, 1986

Hicke: In 1986 the BATF required that you change Moscato Amabile to Muscat Alexandria, is that right?

Trinchero: Yes. After using [laughs] the term for maybe twenty years. The BATF was trying in their own way to clear up confusion on the label. Moscato Amabile is Italian, and they say, "This is not an Italian wine, so you have to either write it in English or put the variety it's made

from." Well, it's made from Muscat Alexandria, so in lieu of saying, "Amiable Muscat," which is [the English translation of] Moscato Amabile, we put the variety of grape. I don't know.

Hicke: This was part of their effort to rationalize the nomenclature?

Trincherro: Right.

Varieties of Sparkling Wine Corks

Trincherro: I've got to tell you a funny story. We were talking about sparkling wine. This was back in about '50 or '51. A salesman came by and sold my uncle on rubber corks for the champagne. It was really neat. They were made of rubber and actually went in the bottle, and then you put the wire hood around it. He guaranteed my uncle that they were coated with something which created a great seal and didn't taint the sparkling wine flavor. There were a number of wineries that bought these rubber corks.

A couple or three months after we bottled it, we started opening up the bottles to taste it, and it tasted just like rubber--just a strong flavor of rubber. My uncle just flipped out. He tried to find this guy, who had long skipped. [laughs] There were a number of wineries looking for him. That was funny--rubber corks.

Then I remember when the plastic corks came out. Everyone was a little hesitant, because it didn't look quite right. But now, of course, they're used in all of the inexpensive sparkling wines. I remember they came out in the mid fifties.

Hicke: So people are interested in finding a substitute for real cork?

Trincherro: Well, a real champagne cork will run you almost a dollar; it's like seventy-five or eighty-five cents. They're extremely expensive. Also, champagne isn't quite as bad, unless you put a crown cap on it. That would probably be the easiest thing to do, but people want to pop the cork. In this case it's not so much that you want to get rid of the cork as that you want something that's cheaper. Plastic corks are very inexpensive compared to cork corks.

If you've ever looked at a champagne cork, you can tell it's been made. If you look down the side of a cork you can see the different layers of corks. To create that seal so that the gas doesn't go out, they slice cork, and then they turn it and glue them together so that there's no channel that goes completely through. So, yes, they're expensive. Wine corks are expensive. They'll run as much as fifteen cents a cork.

Hicke: If I were buying a bottle of champagne, I'd rather not have to pay an extra dollar for the cork if there were some other way to go.

Trincherro: Crown cap, just like a regular soda bottle.

Hicke: I can do without popping the cork.

Trincherro: You've got to remember also that if it's a dollar more to the producer, it equates to almost two dollars to the consumer. Because of the three-tier system, each tier adds a percentage, not a fixed number. If the distributor adds a dollar and ups his percentage, and the retailer ups it his percentage, by the time you get it, it's close to two dollars. So would you like to save two dollars a bottle and have just a regular crown cap instead of a cork? [laughter]

Diversification into Other Varietals

Hicke: Since we're on wines, let's talk about going to Chardonnay. Your first vintage Chardonnay was '89?

Trincherro: Correct. Let me back up a little bit from there. We were pretty much a Zinfandel house, as I explained to you earlier; White Zinfandel, Red Zinfandel, and our Muscat was really all that we were making. Oh, we'd experiment. We made a Zinfandel port and just fooled around with Zinfandel. As we became a branded item--what White Zinfandel did for us, besides make us a lot of money, was make us a brand. We had shelf space, we had recognition, it opened all kinds of doors, we were on all the shelves, et cetera. A name brand; we were a branded item.

Then we started thinking, "Is there life after White Zinfandel?" We knew this growth couldn't continue on

Then we started thinking, "Is there life after White Zinfandel?" We knew this growth couldn't continue on forever; nothing continues on forever. "Now that we have a real branded item, why don't we add to it?" So we added Cabernet, Chenin Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc. Since we were a recognized brand, we got the shelf space, so we got more presentation in the stores. And they all sold beautifully.

Entering the Chardonnay Market

Trincherro: Of course, the natural one would have been Chardonnay, but the problem was--I'm talking 1986, '87--that Chardonnay was extremely expensive, and it was tight; you couldn't get it if you wanted it.

Hicke: The grapes?

Trincherro: The grapes or the bulk wines. We just had to put it on hold. But in 1989 we saw the trend--you know, there are more and more acres of Chardonnay coming in every year, production is increasing. We had some good years of production as far as per acre production, so we felt that by 1990 we could really get into it in a big way. We said, "Let's start in '89 and see what we can get going, so that in '90--" because once you start this, you've got to continue it. You can't just say, "Well, I'm sorry, we had the wine in '89, but we don't have it in '90." That just ruins your market. Once you start, you'd better continue.

So that's what we did. In '89 we made 380,000 cases, and in the '90 vintage I think we made around 800,000 cases. So now we're well on our way, now that the grapes have loosened up. They're at a reasonable price where we can hit our price points on the shelf and make our necessary profit. Chardonnay isn't something new. We didn't say, "Okay, let's start making it now." We always wanted to make it, but the time just wasn't right. After all, it is the second most popular variety behind White Zinfandel. A lot of people keep forgetting that White Zinfandel is still the number one varietal wine.

Bottle Types and Sizes

Hicke: Let's talk about the bottles, and especially the bottle sizes.

Trinchero: We're only in two sizes.

Hicke: When did you start making the smaller 187s?

Trinchero: The 187s started in '84 or '85, but they were the grenade shape. You know, the old airline package--the little squat bottles with the plasti-shield on the outside. What we were trying to do initially was get some airline business. Well, the airlines then wanted you to give them the wine, basically. Not give it, but certainly at a much reduced price where you don't make a profit, their rationale being that you were getting exposure, people go home and buy it, et cetera. That's baloney. We're not in the business not to make a profit, so we said "Thank you very much," and we went off.

We started to develop on-premise business--restaurants and what have you. Off-premise wasn't very, very big. We sold some, of course, but it wasn't very attractive packaging. My brother kept yelling and screaming at Owens-Illinois [Glass Company], saying, "Why don't you guys produce a 187 that looks like a bottle of wine?" Actually it's California Glass that deals with Owens-Illinois; they're the brokers for Owens. My brother finally said, "Look, I'll tell you what. I'll pay for the mold, I'll guarantee you half a million cases, and let's go with it." They said it would be costly, and he said, "I don't care. Let's do it." So we had the mold made, and they started making it for us.

Well, gee, other wineries all of a sudden got wind of it. It was supposed to be a big secret, see. The representative of Cal Glass said, "Do you mind if I sell them some bottles?" We said "Hell, no. That's our mold." Actually, in reality, that means they have to get their own mold and make a slight change in the bottle, and that's fine. But we felt it gave us 120 extra days on the market. By that time they would be chasing us.

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Trinchero: Then we came out with our classic singles. You've seen them haven't you?

Hicke: Oh, yes.

Trinchero: They look like a wine bottle. That brings up another thing: how come they won't accept a 750 with a screw cap, but they will accept a 187 with a screw cap? Have you ever wondered about that? [laughter] Nobody says, "I won't drink that because it doesn't have a cork in it." That's one of those unanswerable questions I often think about.

Magnums

Trinchero: So we had the 750s and the 187s. Of course, the big question is, "Why don't you have a 1.5?" This is what we used to call the magnum. But the 1.5 is now a jug wine, which means it sells for less--considerably less than two 750s. Well, the reason why we don't have one is because our philosophy is that you don't take the easy way out; you use your imagination to overcome any problems, and you always look at the bottom line profit. Obviously, a 1.5 costs just as much as two 750s to produce. It's the same amount of wine, the bottle cost is the same. You save one cork and one capsule and one label; that may be ten cents. But that's it, so why should you sell it for considerably less than two? If you remember the magnums in the old days, they were twice the cost of a 750, and they were usually sold to collectors who liked to put wine away, because a magnum ages slower than a 750. That's why it wasn't a big deal, but now it's a jug wine.

If your 750 sells for three dollars, you can't sell the magnum for six dollars; you've got to sell it for four dollars. Well, figure that out! That's why we say, "Let's solve the problem some other way." What I mean by solving the problem--let me give you a "for instance". Cosco, Price Club--all of these warehouse accounts--said, "We want to increase our rings, so we want 1.5s." Well, of course. If you have 1.5s, even though it's only a dollar or two more than a 750, you've increased your ring; you pick up the 1.5.

We said, "What if we can increase your ring without giving you 1.5s?" They said, "Great." So what we did was take three 750s and shrink-wrapped them. You have to pick up three bottles. The Costco guy said that the first month it increased Sutter Home business by 70 percent. [laughter] We shrink-wrap them in two and three bottles. He said, "What a great thing." It went like gangbusters. But, see, use your imagination; don't take the easy way out. Everyone in this business takes the easy way out--conventional wisdom or whatever. Baloney! Try to think of a way.

Bottles for Restaurants and Airlines

Trinchero: And the 187s in the restaurants; there's more pressure: "We want 1.5s." First of all, there's only one cork to pull. I guess it's a big deal, because they don't like pulling corks. And, of course, the per ounce cost is less. How do you solve that problem? I mean, the restaurants were really pushing at us. How do you solve it? You solve it with 187s. How do you do that? Look at it this way: there's no cork to pull. You have an exact pour--six ounces. You have inventory control; you pour one bottle, and you have one bottle less.

And you have presence, meaning that instead of just bringing people a glass of wine and they don't have the faintest idea who's wine it is, or maybe if it was on a chalkboard they say, "Okay, I'll take ABC Chardonnay," and then once it's served they've forgotten who's it was, here they bring you the bottle, pour half of it in the glass, and set both down. The person feels like he got more wine because they have a glass of wine, and the bottle is still half full, and you've got a table-talker that sits on the table. It's cute, you fondle it, and you remember Sutter Home and tend to ask for it again.

Then the restaurant always comes back and says, "Yes, but the per ounce cost is the same as a 750." We priced it so that the 187s and the 750s are the same per ounce cost. So we said, "Okay, let's do it this way: you charge what for a glass of house wine?" "Well, we charge \$3.00." "Okay, charge \$3.50." "Oh, \$3.50? No, they won't buy it." "No, no, you're not listening. We

guarantee you that people will pay, when they're out at a restaurant, \$3.50 for a glass of wine they want, more than they would pay \$3.00 for a glass of wine they don't want. If your customers look at that chalkboard and there's not a wine up there that they want, they'll order a beer or iced tea."

They say, "Well, okay, let's try it." So "House wine--Sutter Home Chardonnay, \$3.50"--or White Zin or whatever. Sales would double, because you're giving them what they want. Do you really care, if you're in a restaurant, to save fifty cents on a glass of the house wine? Of course not. And, of course, fifty cents a glass, they're making a lot more than they would have made on the per ounce exchange in the 1.5.

That worked with the airlines also, because the airlines wanted \$2.00 for a 187. I said, "Tell you what you do. Charge \$2.50." "Oh, we couldn't do that." "Charge \$2.50. Trust us." Sales skyrocketed. You're on a plane: "What's your house white wine?" "It's So-and-So's Whatever"--Chardonnay or Riesling or whatever. "No, thank you." Because maybe you've tasted the wine and didn't like it. "I'll have a Coors"--or a Budweiser or whatever. You drink something else, and you go on with your life; you don't sit there and agonize over it. But if you can say, "Oh, Sutter Home White Zinfandel, yeah, that's my favorite wine." So it's \$2.50; who cares?

You're in a restaurant, you're in an airplane; you're a captive audience. You're not there to save money. You want to save money, you don't fly. You want to save money eating, you don't go to a restaurant; you stay home. Who's going to ruin a restaurant or airplane experience for a lousy fifty cents?

It's worked. We have, oh, at least a half a dozen airlines.

Hicke: I was going to ask you what airlines you supply.

Trinchero: You'll have to talk to sales. I know United, Alaska, Continental. I think there are eight. Then we're on some in first class.

Hicke: That's just about all the airlines there are.

- Trinchero: Yes, I think we're on just about all of them except Eddie's [?] airline, but that's another story. [laughs]
- Hicke: The BATF just made the 500 bottles legal. What is that going to mean?
- Trinchero: I'm not sure yet. I think the restaurants might like it. Off-premise, I don't think so, mainly because you're trading your customer down, meaning down in size.
- Hicke: The opposite of what they--
- Trinchero: Also, consumers are smart. It's hard to get stuff past them. If the 750 milliliter bottle sold for four dollars, how much less do you think the 500 milliliter bottle would sell for? Probably not much less, if less at all. So the consumer starts checking ounces. Restaurants, yes, because of the mark-up of a restaurant package. A three-dollar bottle of wine in a discount store could cost twenty dollars in a restaurant. Yes, it might work there, because two people just simply can't drink an entire 750. So I think it's an intelligent thing for restaurants, but for off-premise, no. I know we're not really considering doing it.

Wine Sales in Supermarkets

- Hicke: I know that supermarkets are important points of sale for you.
- Trinchero: Oh, absolutely.
- Hicke: Can you tell me how that developed? Did you particularly try for supermarkets?
- Trinchero: Oh, yes. Years ago I learned that you could waste a lot of time selling independent supermarkets, because you've got to deal with so many different people, and you've got to prove to them this and that. But all you have to do is sell one person at Safeway [Stores, Inc.] and you're in all the Safeways. [laughs] Sure, it's harder to sell that individual, but if you do, you've hit the jackpot.

It's just like restaurants. I used to sell to restaurants, and you'd have to call on each one of them and get to know the wine buyer. Each one was different. Now you go to Grace Brothers or chains like TGI Friday, the Rusty Pelican--oh, God, how many are there? There are tons and tons of them--and if you sell one person, you're in four hundred restaurants.

We started really going after the chains, both on- and off-premises, simply because it was better use of your time, not that we had given up on individuals. No, we still sell to the individual ones, but not as aggressively as we do the chains, obviously, because that's where the business is. If you can be in every Safeway store, I guarantee you're going to sell some product, and that goes for Von's, Ralphs, Raleys, Lucky's or any of the chains. They're extremely important.

Cross-Merchandizing

Trincherro: Also the demographics are important. Eighty percent of the wine purchased in a supermarket is purchased by the housewife--or by a woman.

Hicke: Is that right?

Trincherro: Yes. [laughs] Now, either she picked it out on her own or the husband said, "When you go to the supermarket, pick up a bottle of Sutter Home White Zinfandel." I don't know, but she's the one who physically picks it up, checks it out, and pays for it. Also, 90 percent of all the people walking into a supermarket don't go through the wine section. The wine section is usually over in a corner somewhere. That means only 10 percent walk through the wine section.

That's why cross-merchandising is so important. Most of the people--I'd say half--when they go into a supermarket don't know what they're going to have for dinner that night, and they're looking for ideas. So if you take, in the pasta section, Sutter Home pasta sauce, which we have--

Hicke: Do you?

Trincherro: Oh, yes. We don't make it; it's made by Schilling-McCormick Company, but they use our Zinfandel to make it. They buy it in bulk and can it with the Sutter Home label. Then we have a rack of Sutter Home Cabernet and a great, big back card that says, "How about spaghetti and Sutter Home tonight?" All of a sudden, click! "That's what I'll have; I'll have some--" and she grabs the spaghetti, grabs a bottle of Sutter Home, a bottle of the Sutter Home pasta sauce, puts in the cart, and goes home, happy as a clam, knowing what she's going to eat.

Hicke: Did you start the pasta sauce with that in mind?

Trincherro: No, but it's worked out beautifully that way as cross-merchandising. You have to have real talent to do it. You see, all these departments in a supermarket are usually run by an individual manager. You'd have the meat department manager, the produce manager, the dry goods manager. How can you convince this guy that you're going to use part of his floor space to sell wine? He says, "Hey, I'm not interested in wine; I'm here to sell steak."

"But what if we can help you sell steak?" Ah, that's different. You put up a five-case stack of Red Zinfandel and a big back card with a sizzling steak and a glass of wine and "How about a steak tonight?" People will walk by and say, "Damn, I'll have steak tonight." They go in there and say, "Give me two steaks and a bottle of wine," and off they go. We even did a poinsettia display. You know how Safeways have these big displays of poinsettias? We have our Sparkler there: "How about a bottle of Sparkler and a poinsettia for your favorite person?" So the customer says to herself, "Oh, a poinsettia and a bottle of wine," and off she goes. [laughs]

Hicke: Boy, that's an art, isn't it?

Trincherro: It really is, and the important thing is that you're convincing the manager of that department that he's actually selling more of his product if he sells wine.

Other Merchandizing Techniques

Trinchero: Also, fighting for end-aisle displays or places where people see you--the retailer has to be educated in dollars. That's one of our real talents at Sutter Home. For instance, [the retailer] puts up a great, big display of toilet paper--great price, big display in a place where you can't miss it. Well, what does that do? Is the consumer going to use more toilet paper because they bought it on special? No. That display could be anywhere. The idea is to make money--I don't know what the mark-up on toilet paper is, but it can't be very much--and increase the volume. Volume x money = greater profit. So we say, leave that over in a corner someplace.

But what about if you put wine on a special? Are you going to tell me that a guy's not going to drink more wine? Of course he is. If it's in the refrigerator or in a cupboard, he's going to drink more wine, but he's not going to use more toilet paper. There's a lot of this changing of the philosophy.

Space to sales is another one we've been very, very successful with. Gallo, for instance, who's probably the finest marketer in the wine business, wrote the book on marketing and merchandising wine. They have always come in with space to sales: we're 40 percent of the market, we should have 40 percent of your shelf space. Of course, if 40 percent of all the wine sold is Gallo, why shouldn't they have 40 percent of the shelf space? It makes sense. In reality, they're not going to get 40 percent, but they certainly get the lion's share.

We came in and said, "Space to sales to dollars." "What does that mean?" We say, "Do you own part of Gallo Winery?" "Well, no." "Then why are you so interested in moving volume? I thought you were here to make money." "Well, yes." "Okay, let's do a little math. You have a thousand cases of Carlo Rossi four-liter on the floor, which is Gallo. It's around \$4 a jug. That's \$16 a case, which is \$16,000. You go through it in a month, say, so you made \$16,000 on this square footage in thirty days. If you put a thousand cases of Sutter Home, it's \$3 a bottle, but there are twelve bottles to a case. That's \$36 a case, which is \$36,000 for the same area, and it

will be gone within a month. Now, you want to do some math? You know what the difference between \$16,000 and \$36,000 is?" All of a sudden they go, "Yeah!"

We did this in Charleston, South Carolina. We measured how many feet of shelf space the best-selling wines had. Then we took the dollar volume out the front door and divided that, so you knew that Sutter Home Winery in thirty days was \$50,000 a linear foot, or whatever the number was. Sutter Home was so far ahead of anyone else. These are the tools you use to convince the retailer to give you more shelf space.

Hicke: That is really fascinating.

Trinchero: You go to dollars--profit. That's what keeps a person in business. Now they're doing it with a vengeance. They're really drawing schematics up and saying, "Okay, we're only going to handle wines that sell." For a long time there--for a whole decade--even the chains got into the habit of buying almost anything, because wine was the big thing, right? They'd have thirty or forty Chardonnays, twenty Cabernets, and so forth. A lot of them just collected dust, so now they're saying, "Our shelf space is way too valuable for that." What they've done is concentrate on the ones that sell. Oh, sure, they'll have a section for the more exotic ones, but the room is getting smaller for them. Now they're being handled by the hands-on wine shops more and more. The big supermarkets just can't give up that space.

Hicke: What about K & L and Liquor Barn?

Trinchero: Those are supermarkets, but they're supermarkets of alcoholic beverages.

Hicke: So it's the same principle?

Trinchero: Well, they can handle more wines, but the ones that they really feature are the ones that sell. Of course, a Liquor Barn can be the size of a Safeway, but they don't have to handle toilet paper or soap or anything else; it's all alcohol, so they do have the room to handle a larger selection of wines. But still you see the ones that are featured, the ones that have more shelf space, the ones that have the end aisles and things like that, are the ones that sell.

Distribution of Sutter Home Wines

Hicke: I can tell you that Sutter Home has a huge display in our Safeway, and it's right on the end of an aisle or next to the check-out counter and highly visible.

Trinchero: We do very well at Safeway. We're very well distributed, too. We have a network of over 180 distributors in the fifty states. If you can't find us, I want to hear about it. If you walk into a wine shop or a supermarket--well, in some states you can't sell wine in supermarkets.

I always remember my dear friend, Gino Zepponi, one of the founders of ZD Winery, who unfortunately was killed in an automobile accident. He came back after a fishing trip to Alaska. I guess he and his son went way out in the boonies somewhere, and they were on their way back. He came to this little wide spot in the road, and there was this one building, which was a combination post office, cafe, and mercantile store. He walked in, just hoping to get a hamburger or something. He ordered a hamburger, and just jokingly he said, "Do you have a wine list?" The waiter said, "Sure, we have a wine list." He gave him this little card, which was a little greasy. In the whole place there were only about two eskimos sitting over in a corner. The three wines on the list were Sutter Home White Zinfandel, Sutter Home Red Zinfandel, and Mums champagne. I said, "What a list." [raucous laughter] The two Eskimos in the corner were drinking the Mum's champagne. He had a bottle of Red Zinfandel with his hamburger and said it went great. He walked in here and said, "Who distributes your wine in Alaska?" I said, "Oh, K & L Distributors. Why?" He said, "Boy, are they good." [laughter]

Hicke: That's a great story.

Acquisition of Lambert Egg Ranch, 1983

Hicke: One thing we haven't gotten to is when you acquired the Lambert Egg Ranch. Can you tell me that story?

Trincherro: Oh, sure. From '47 to '83 we were here at Sutter Home on Highway 29. We were landlocked. Actually, it was before '83; it started around '81, when we realized we would have to get more property someplace else where we could expand the winery. I began looking around, and there was the Lambert Egg Ranch. Mr. Lambert, who was actually a prince of a man, really a wonderful guy, operated the Lambert Egg Ranch for about twenty years at that spot.

He decided, because of his workers wanted to turn union--this is the story I got--that he just couldn't handle it. He was eighty years old by this time, and his children didn't want the place, so he said in his reclining years, why did he have to deal with unions and all of this. He just closed the place down in about '82, got rid of all the chickens--and we're talking about a big ranch, now. There were over 400,000 square feet of chicken coops with a million and a half chickens there, producing fourteen thousand pounds of manure a day and six million eggs.

I'm just full of information, aren't I? [laughter] Mr. Lambert told me himself that the eggs paid all the bills, but the profit was in the manure. They actually dried it and bagged it. Oh, after we bought the place, my office was over there because I was running the construction and all of that. All day long people would drive up and either want to buy eggs or manure. I said, "No, sorry, no eggs or manure." They'd say, "Oh, that's too bad. He had the best stuff."

Anyway, three months after he puts the ranch up for sale, he dies. So now it's in the estate. A friend of mine was the executor of the estate, so I asked him about it, because I thought it was a pretty nice property, perfectly located on Zinfandel Lane. I mean, where else? They wanted quite a bit for it, and I said, "Oh, I can't afford that." The weeks and months would go by, and every time I would see him, he'd say, "Well, no, we still haven't sold it." He was getting a little fed up with it. I guess there was some friction between Mr. Lambert's kids and Mrs. Lambert, who was the second Mrs. Lambert, not the mother of the children.

One day he said, "Why don't you make me an offer?" So I made him an offer. He came back and said, "No, it's a little too low. Up it to this price," and I did. They

accepted it. It was quite a little bit less than they were asking, but it had been on the market almost a year and no takers. The main reason it didn't sell--because I talked to quite a few people who went around and kicked the tires and were thinking about turning it into a winery and what have you--was what did you do with the chicken coops? You had eleven chicken coops that were over 36,000 square feet each.

Hicke: These were buildings, not wire cages?

Trinchero: Oh, no, these were aluminum buildings. What do you do with them? How do you tear them down? They are huge. Nobody wanted to take that on. It was pretty expensive, actually, converting it. That's why you just couldn't pay top dollar for it.

Anyway, we bought it, and I moved into Mr. Lambert's office, actually, cleaned up the place, and just slowly started transforming it into a winery. Now, of course, there are no more chicken coops left. It took us about four years to get rid of all of them. More than that; actually, the last one was only torn down last year. Escrow closed in August of '83--August 5, 1983--and the last chicken coop, out of the eleven, was torn down last year, 1990, to make way for the waste pond that we put in. It was quite a place, but I'm sure glad we got it.

Green Island Warehouse

Hicke: You have some of your gigantic tanks there, and you have some new equipment. That's another thing--the Green Island warehouse.

Trinchero: What happened here was [laughs], after we bought the Zinfandel property, the old Lambert Egg Ranch, we started to expand. This was about the time when there was a strong feeling throughout the valley about a winery definition. It was brought about when a winery along Highway 29 submitted for a use permit to--

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Trinchero: --open up a tasting room and build a winery, which looked obviously like a retail outlet, basically, as an excuse for a winery. So they said, "No, you can't do that. You want four thousand square feet of tasting room for only a four-thousand-gallon winery. That doesn't make sense." You can't have a retail outlet in an agricultural zone. They do allow wineries to have retail rooms if they want to sell their own product.

He said, "The heck with you," and he sued the county. The judge said--making a long story short--"How can you tell him he's not a winery when you don't have a definition for a winery?" There was no ordinance, really, so that started the whole winery ordinance thing. It took about three years, and finally we got a winery ordinance. I'm not going to go through all of that, because there were a lot of ups and downs.

The winery ordinance pretty much precluded us ever expanding on Zinfandel Lane, and our business was still going gangbusters. We built that 115,000 square foot warehouse at the ranch, and that was the last thing we could do. But it started getting too small for all of our shipping. Finally we did a whole EIR [Environmental Impact Report] and went through the use permit process and what have you. After a year and a half, after jumping through all these hoops with the county, I finally got frustrated. I said, "Look, obviously you don't want us to build this warehouse here. Give me a hint: what do you want me to do?" He said, "I can't tell you what to do, but it sure would be nice if you built that warehouse in the industrial zone down in American Canyon." [laughs] I said, "It's too bad you didn't tell me that a year and a half ago; I could have saved some time."

One thing led to another, and we bought the property on Green Island Road and built the first phase, which is 150,000-square-foot warehouse. The second phase is finished now, which brings the entire building to 260,000 square feet. We're going to do our bottling there and our shipping.

Hicke: Including two Italian bottling lines?

Trinchero: We're putting two in, and then the fast line that you saw at the ranch is going to be moved down there, so there will be three bottling lines. The one you saw on

Zinfandel Lane will be the slowest one, by the way. That does 365 bottles a minute; the new line does 400 a minute.

Hicke: Those are Italian, right?

Trinchero: It's all Italian machinery.

Italian Bottling Equipment

Hicke: Are they ahead of the crowd in designing in these kinds of machines?

Trinchero: Not only ahead of the crowd, but they're very practical and reasonably priced. The Italians actually got a bad reputation about twenty years ago, when this very inexpensive Italian equipment came in. It was really flimsy, and everyone thought that was Italian equipment. It broke down and had all kinds of problems.

Well, in November of '85, I took a trip to the equipment show in Milan. It's called SEMI, and the SEMI show is every other year in Milan; the other times it's in Paris. I went to Milan, and I was amazed at the equipment the Italians had. And this was a huge show; it was the biggest equipment show I had ever been to.

They did have the little flimsy stuff, all the way to this gigantic, beautiful [equipment]. I couldn't understand why they would produce this flimsy stuff, and the guy explained to me, "They were never meant for a real winery where it's constantly being pounded, day in and day out. You in America have what you call 'house wine'. We have it here, too, at the restaurants, but it's real house wine; it's made in the basement." So all of these restaurants would have this little, flimsy equipment. Well, how many bottles did they produce? And they did it very slowly.

Of course, when Americans saw it, they said, "Oh, this is winery equipment," but it was never meant to go eight or ten hours a day, five days a week, every week in the year, because it starts falling apart. It just did the house wine for these little restaurants, or it would be a very, very small producer making the wine for a few

restaurants. It was never meant to be run in a commercial winery. However, I will admit that the sales people who brought it over here led us to believe it was.

Anyway, I saw what real Italian equipment looked like, and it was fantastic. And it was very practical. The Germans produce really fine winery equipment, but they have a tendency--I don't know if it's because of their nature--to make the things so complicated that you need a Ph.D. in engineering to understand how it works. The Italians don't. They have equipment that's just as good, but it's much simpler in design and more practical, so that somebody doesn't need a Ph.D. in engineering to run it.

Hicke: The one I saw is all run by computers.

Trinchero: Correct. Of course, today everything is run by computer. We sent our mechanics to school to update with the computer. Actually, because it is all electronic, you need a PC to run down the problems if there are any. You'd never find them mechanically. You'd have to plug in the PC and within ten or fifteen minutes you can usually find what the problem is and go right to it. If you had to take a screwdriver and a pair of pliers and go look for it, you'd be in bad shape.

We're also looking to expand some more. Maybe we can expand a little bit at the ranch as far as tanks go, but it looks like any real future expansion will be down at the industrial zone in American Canyon.

Relative Importance of Climate and Soil

Hicke: One of the things I want to be sure and ask you about is the importance of climate versus the importance of soil. I'm sure you must have thought about this when you were looking at vineyards.

Trinchero: I disagree with a lot of people in the wine business. I personally don't think soil is that important. I think it has to have certain nutrients, but the main thing is, does it drain. Drainage is the most important thing in soil, as far as I'm concerned, and as long as it doesn't have

chemicals in it like boron. Grapes are a vine; they'll grow just about anywhere. I've seen some of the vineyards in Germany where they actually grow out of rock, or in the Central Valley where they have deep loam that they're growing in. They will grow just about anywhere.

Now, I think weather has a lot more to do with it than soil. If the soil has the proper nutrients--and, believe me, vines have a wide window here as far as their needs--and as long as there isn't something detrimental in the soil, beyond that, as long as it drains well, I think one soil is just as good as any other. They'll say, "Soils high in iron will do this," or "Those high in calcium will do that." They may be right, but I doubt it.

Weather, yes. You have to have so many degree days. Hot days, cool nights tend to produce slightly different fruit than hot days and hot nights--that sort of thing. That's why Amador County is such a fine area for Zinfandel and maybe the Italian varieties, because it is hot during the day but very cool at night. Napa Valley tends to be fairly warm during the day but quite cool at night, whereas the Carneros region tends to be cool all the time and very cool at night because of the influence of the bay, so you'd plant your Chardonnay, Rieslings, and what have you there. Yes, I think weather has more to do with what you would plant and the quality of the fruit.

Running a Family Winery

Hicke: Another thing I wanted to ask you about was the importance and implications of maintaining your family traditions and your family winery, as opposed to being bought by somebody else.

Trinchero: First of all, you have to understand that to the family, the family is the most important thing, not the winery. Decisions are made not for what's good for the winery, but what's good for the family. If it's good for both, fine, but we never make decisions that we think are good for the winery but not good for the family. There's no secret; there have been some family feuds in this industry. The family feuds usually come about when you have two members

of the family who have differing views on what's best for the winery. We don't have that problem.

I will get up in the morning sometimes and think, "My God, I've got the best idea since sliced bread." I come in here all raring to go, and I say, "Roger, do I have an idea." I tell him my idea, and he looks at me and says, "Nah, I think it stinks." That throws it back into my court, and then I start bringing out graphs and developing the idea. He'll listen to me and say, "No, I still think it stinks."

So what do you do at that point? Do you get mad? Do you start throwing a tantrum? Do you start swearing? Do you start vengeance? No. It gets put in a drawer. It's not totally dead, mind you, if I think it's really good, and it may come up later, but as far as I'm concerned it's a non-issue. That way we never have that situation where somebody has to give. Unless all three of us--that's my brother, my sister, and myself--agree, there's no two to one; it's three to zero.

Hicke: Anyone has a veto power.

Trinchero: If it's vetoed by any one of us, that's it. So we don't run into problems, and we have developed a feeling of love and respect that doesn't create animosity if our idea is rejected. If my brother doesn't like my idea, well, that's it. Or my sister--that's it, and I go on with life. We have a good relationship, and we never have a problem here because the family always comes first.

Selling the winery--well, hey, I don't mind selling the winery. My brother says, "I don't mind selling the winery." My sister says, "I don't mind selling the winery,"--except for one thing: the next generation wants the winery. If the third generation didn't want the winery, it might be for sale, but right now it's not for sale because we can't sell something we don't own.

Hicke: In the sense that the next generation--

Trinchero: In the sense that we're holding it in trust for the next generation. If the kids said, "We don't want the business. Go ahead and sell it. Let's take the money and run," it's not an issue; we'll do it. Of course, the only problem with selling Sutter Home is that I'd open up

another winery somewhere else and be right back in the wine business. [laughter] I enjoy the wine business very much, but if the third generation [wasn't interested in it], then it would be our decision.

The Third Generation at Sutter Home

Trinchero: Of the six in the third generation there are four in the business; the other two are ages six and three, so we'll have to wait for them for a little bit. The four oldest ones are in the business, and they want it, so we can't sell it.

Hicke: Can you tell me what they are all doing?

Trinchero: Sure. The oldest is Tony--Anthony--who is my sister's oldest. He's thirty-one, and he's vice president of administration. The next oldest is his brother, Bob, who is thirty. He is in charge of operations; he's vice president of operations. He's our architect. Tony is a graduate of Chico State in business administration and computers, and Bobby graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with an architectural degree. Tony and Bobby are both married. Tony has two children, a boy and a girl. Bobby has only been married a couple of years; he and Michelle don't have children yet.

My two are a little younger. My daughter, Gina, is twenty-seven, and she graduated from Stanford [University] and went back to school. Unfortunately she graduated in English and Italian literature, which doesn't do a whole lot for the winery, but she saw the light and went back to school at Davis and got her degree in enology and viticulture, so she's our assistant winemaker now. She's Steve Bertolucci's assistant, and also Gary Branham's, who is our other winemaker. My daughter will be married July 27 of this year [1991].

My son, David, who is twenty-five, was married a little over a year ago, and his wife is expecting in August, so I'm going to be a grandfather for the first time. David is in our quality control. So everyone's got a job and going great guns.

Hicke: That's amazing that they're all interested in it. It says a lot for you and your wife, I think.

Trincherro: We never pressured them, never tried forcing them. Well, my father never tried forcing me. First of all, he always thought, "Look, don't go into the wine business. Get yourself a real life with some money, will you, because there's no money in this business." [laughter]

My brother, Roger, is ten years younger than I am, but he wasn't married until he was thirty-seven, so he got started late in life. His oldest son is Mario, who is six, and Carlo, who is three. His wife is pregnant again with little Gino. So Mario, Carlo, and Gino are coming up. [laughs]

Division of Responsibilities Among the Second Generation

Hicke: Your sister is also in the business?

Trincherro: Vera is secretary-treasurer. She takes care of all the paralegal stuff. She was a legal secretary for twenty-three years before coming here and joining us at the winery. She does things like profit sharing, 401K plans, and all that stuff that I don't understand. My brother, Roger, is president, and he takes care of the day-to-day operations. I'm chairman of the board, and I'm the one people come to interview. [laughter]

James Conaway's Napa

Hicke: Just a couple more quick questions. Did you read James Conaway's *Napa*? If so, what was your reaction?

Trincherro: I didn't read it cover to cover. I looked in the index [laughs], so I read maybe five chapters of the book. I can't really say what it would be like to start from cover to cover.

Hicke: I just wondered if you thought he reflected accurately at least your parts of it.

Trinchero: The parts I knew personally about, yes, fairly accurately. I just felt it was an unfortunate book, frankly. It had some unfortunate chapters where he would have had to have somehow endeared himself to the individuals, because these things are not general knowledge. Actually, he was here a year before anyone would even talk to him. You know, people around here don't talk to wine writers about their personal affairs. We'll talk to wine writers about wine, what our business is doing, what the industry is doing, but nothing personal. He was around for a year, and finally, I guess, people got used to him and started talking casually and what have you.

I'm not sure how he got some of this information, other than right from the horse's mouth, because some of it I didn't even know about. I think it was just a little unfortunate, dragging up some of the stuff. But, hey, if I were a guy in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, or Monk's Crossing, Louisiana, maybe I'd be interested. It reads a little bit like *Peyton Place* or something like that, but being part of it, most of it was old hat. I'll tell you one thing, I'd hate to be a wine writer coming in today to write a book about the Napa Valley. I don't think anybody would ever talk to him. You have to be very, very careful.

At one time I used to be interviewed quite a bit, until I realized that what I would read wasn't what I said or certainly not what I meant. What you're doing here is a little bit different. I'll have a chance to review it, and you have a tape recorder. I have been interviewed, believe it or not, not only without a tape recorder, but the individual never took any notes. So I shy away from that as much as possible, unless it's a specific thing and I have it written and say exactly that. Speaking off the cuff, I don't do that any more, because often you will say something, thinking it won't go any further, and it does.

Hicke: Someone who comes in and doesn't take notes is only going to hear what he or she wants to hear.

Trinchero: Mr. Conaway didn't take any notes. I belong to my little group known as the Gastronomic Order of Nonsensical Dissipatory Segregation--hah, I got it out--and he never took notes. He was here and spent a half hour with me one day after that meeting with my men's club. We just talked

casually, and he never took notes, no tape recorder, nothing. I didn't know he was writing a book about it.

Hicke: He didn't tell you?

Trinchero: If he did, I certainly don't remember it. But these things happen. It's no big thing. We'll go on. Well, I was treated wonderfully. I can't say he said anything that I would have objected to. I just felt a little bad for some of the people he wrote about, because I know them personally. We all have things squirreled away that we don't want anybody to know. Anyway, life goes on.

Origins of the Sutter Home Chateau

Hicke: Life particularly arose in this house. I wanted to hear a little bit about the chateau.

Trinchero: To do that, you'd have to start with the winery to begin with. We'd have to start with John Thomann, who came to California in 1853. He was born in 1836, which is exactly a hundred years before I was born, which is kind of interesting; that's why I remembered the date. He came here in 1853 to join his Uncle Henry in the wine business in Sacramento.

Henry came over in 1843, about the same time the Donner Party came over, so he was a real pioneer. I also heard that John Thomann came here because he was kind of side-stepping the draft. He came from the northern part of Switzerland near the Swiss-German border, where they were having all kinds of little wars in the 1850s. I don't know that much about European history, but anyway he didn't want to get pulled into the war, so as a young man he came to California to join his uncle.

John and Henry operated a winery in Sacramento for about nineteen years. His uncle passed away, and he moved here to the Napa Valley in 1874, building the John Thomann Winery and Distillery. I guess business was good. There was a little house on this property, behind where the Victorian now stands, and he lived there. In 1884 he built this Victorian. So it was really quite an estate. In 1880--I've got his production records--he produced over

200,000 gallons of wine and over 20,000 gallons of brandy. That's quite a production for a little building like that.

They were very practical in the way they did things, which I think is a source of a whole new book on how they made wine back in those days, because it was really extremely practical. We've lost all that practicality. They used to take the tops off of the tanks and use them as fermenters. Then, after the fermenting season was over, they'd head them up again and use them as storage tanks. We wouldn't think of doing that; a fermenting tank is a fermenting tank, and a wooden tank is a wooden tank.

He had four daughters. As a matter of fact, my secretary, Judy Parady, whose maiden name was Stice, is the granddaughter of John Thomann's granddaughter. So John Thomann is my secretary's great, great, grandfather. Do you notice the road right here, Stice Lane--just before you get to Zinfandel Lane? Her grandmother lived at the end of that road.

In the year 1900 he went to Zurich, Switzerland, for some world fair thing, and he died there. You know, I never did find out if he was buried there, or if they shipped the body back and he's buried in the cemetery. One of these days I'm going to go to the old part of the St. Helena cemetery and just look at some of the tombstones, because I've got all the names of the people involved in this area. I did a lot of research about twenty years ago, finding the origin of this winery. I've got enough for almost a book, really, but there are some dead spaces that are driving me crazy.

So now he dies in April of 1900. Seven months later, his daughters sold all the equipment at the winery--cause I have the entire list of things and who they sold to--and all the contents of this house. Then I don't know what happened, but in 1906 this entire estate--the winery, the house, the distillery, the whole thing--was sold for ten dollars gold on the courthouse steps in Napa at a sheriffs' sale to Mr. and Mrs. Leuenberger. The Leuenbergers changed the name to the Sutter Home Winery. She was a Sutter. They had originally had a winery that was established in 1880 in the foothills of Howell Mountain, which is now called the Deer Park Winery. But they wanted a larger facility and one with railroad access. There was a spur line that ran right in front of

the winery, so you could load barrels of wine for shipment to San Francisco.

Back in those days, they didn't bottle wine here. They would produce the wine and then ship it by rail, either in barrels, puncheons, or in tank trucks to San Francisco, where it was bottled. San Francisco was really the area where they had the merchants--the negotiants. They would have the wineries there, and they would make their blends, age the wine, and bottle it and ship it. Of course, that changed after the roads got better and trucks could make it up here. Then wineries started bottling up here, but that didn't happen until after Prohibition--a little bit before Prohibition, but mainly after Prohibition.

The Leuenbergers settled in here and started to make wine, and they were quite successful. It was also in the year 1906 that their winery in San Francisco was destroyed. You see, they made the wine up here and then shipped it to their winery in San Francisco, called the Sutter Home Winery, where they would age it and bottle it. They lost everything; the whole building collapsed and all the wine was lost. So they moved the bottling plant to Richmond, bought this winery--the John Thomann Winery--changed its name, and started shipping the bulk wines to Richmond by rail, where they would bottle it and ship it. Everyone was afraid to start up in business again in San Francisco after the earthquake.

Then World War I started in Europe in 1914, and we entered the war in 1916 or '17. The Prohibitionists somehow convinced the patriots that we shouldn't be making alcohol out of foodstuff; it should be going to the army. Beer and distilled spirits are made from grains, and somehow wines got sucked into this because it was an alcoholic beverage. No one can argue that grapes are used for armies; they don't ship very well. But they couldn't save it, so in 1918 we got Prohibition, and it affected wine. The lucky thing was that--

Blush Wines and Consumer Preferences##

Hicke: What kind of changes have you seen?

Trincherro: Not only did it introduce a whole new category of wine--up until White Zinfandel we had the white, the red, and the rosé. Now we have a blush category, which is not going to go away. It's a real category. I don't know how big it's ultimately going to get, but I can remember when there was no rosé category, either.

In 1951 there was only one national brand of rosé that I can remember, and that was Almaden's Grenache Rosé. It wasn't until the late fifties, after some tests and surveys, that they found out that pink was the perfect color for wine, and a little sweetness went a long way. That's when Gallo said, "Put a rose in your glass," and the rosé thing was going. From nowhere it came to 10 to 15 percent of the total wine sold.

So White Zinfandel is a category. It's just another way of expressing the grape. In that sense it did change the wine industry, but I think it did something else, too. It convinced some wineries--I wish it had been more--that to really succeed in this business, you have to give the consumer what he or she wants. You can't be satisfied in producing what you think the consumer wants because it's traditional and then blame the consumer because he's not buying it.

It seems very simple: give the consumer what he or she wants. Every other business does, but not the wine business. We've always been a little bit aloof as far as the consumer is concerned, because we felt we were doing the right thing; we are perpetuating this tradition of centuries, so it's the consumer that's wrong. As they say, "The American consumer isn't ready, isn't sophisticated enough for this." That's baloney. Give them something good to drink, price it right, and it will sell.

That is basically what the White Zinfandel and the whole "fighting varietal" class of wines did. It gave good value and gave it in a flavor that the consumer enjoyed.

Hicke: And it's still going very strong?

Trincherro: Oh, absolutely; still the number one varietal category is White Zinfandel. There's no other variety that sells as many gallons or cases or bottles.

Expansion into Other Varietals

Hicke: You've been telling me that Sutter Home is going into other varietals.

Trincherro: Well, you can't hang your hat on just one wine, now that Sutter Home is a recognized brand in the marketplace. And to continue the growth of the winery, of course you have to do other things. You can't continue to grow White Zinfandel indefinitely. That's just not reasonable. So we're expanding the family of wines, increasing our market share and our shelf space and our recognition. The more recognition you have, the more you are going to sell of your wines. I think as long as we produce a good, sound product that's representative of the varietal sampling and at a reasonable price, that's our success: perceived value, quality.

Impact of New Taxes on Wine Industry

Hicke: Let me also ask you a little bit about the effect the new taxes are going to have on you.

Trincherro: We really don't know yet. About the only nice thing you can say about the new tax is that it applies to everyone, so it's not like one winery is going to get an advantage over another one. There is a small winery exemption, but small wineries generally sell their wine for a rather substantial price, so it's not going to affect a small winery. A twenty-dollar Chardonnay, whether it's exempt or not--it isn't going to affect the price that much. What's an extra fifty cents or seventy-five cents?

In our category, where we sell our wines every day from around \$3.99, yes, it impacts it somewhat. But it impacts everyone, so we'll see. Of course, I'm vehemently against the excise tax on wine. I don't think it's fair, but that's the way it is. I live in a country that has yet to come to grips with alcoholic beverages and really doesn't know what to do with them.

Test Marketing

Hicke: I haven't asked you yet about test marketing.

Trincherro: How do we test market? [laughs] Boy, that's a tough one. Because the White Zinfandel was so popular, and it seemed like we would go, "What's the next most popular variety?" Let's say Cabernet. Since we didn't have a Chardonnay at the time, we came out with Cabernet, and it was an instant success. We really didn't do any market surveying. However, we do have some plans in the future to market wines that are not readily available in the market because they're proprietary wines, meaning that they have no varietal name, so we can't compare them with anything.

What we do there is talk to people; we talk to retailers, consumers, we look for needs in the marketplace, and we formulate a certain kind of wine that might meet those needs. But the bottom line is that you make it available in five or six markets, and you do all the support stuff and see what the feedback is. We've never done that before, but we will be doing it later this spring, so I can let you know later how it works. The idea is that if the feedback is positive, then to slowly expand it into a dozen markets, then twenty or thirty markets.

Teiser: May I interrupt with a question? Do you learn anything from your tasting room?

Trincherro: Oh, sure, that's part of it. We talk to our people there and ask for input as to what they hear: what are consumers asking about? What do they say about the wines? We have meetings once a month. As a matter of fact, I missed the meeting today; it was at nine o'clock this morning. [laughs] They talk about things like that--what works, what doesn't work, and any ideas. There are lots of ideas, and then it's a matter of how many numbers; if fifty people say the same thing, it means more than if one person says it.

Hicke: Can you think of some examples where you've come up with an idea from something you heard in the tasting room?

Trincherro: Not in the tasting room. In the retail market we did; we switched from advertising to point of sale. In other

words, the budget was switched from advertising on radio to increasing the point of sale on the floor.

Hicke: That was from some feedback you got?

Trincherro: The retailers were telling us, "Yes, the radio commercials are fun and nice and everyone seems to like them, but I think you'd better pay more attention to the store." You see, you only have so much in the budget, and the advertising budget was quite big; it was very ambitious. We took that money and put it into point of sale--racks, whatever--to get into the store. The kind of racks are quite expensive, like a hundred dollars each, and there must have been tens of thousands of them. But they were the kind of racks that weren't cardboard and could be broken down; they were permanent--or at least hopefully they would be permanent. That helped a lot.

Gee, I can't really think of anything specifically, other than vinegar. We used to make our own wine vinegar, and we discontinued that. They started screaming for it, so we have somebody else making it for us now, but we still have it.

Hicke: People in the tasting room wanted the vinegar?

Trincherro: Yes. Not on any grand scale, just small things like that.

Exports

Hicke: I know you've expanded exports also. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Trincherro: You're always looking for more business, even though we pretty much had a tiger by the tail with this White Zinfandel doubling and tripling. We had feelers; people were writing to us from Japan, Hong Kong, Europe, etc.: "We'd like to handle your wine." We didn't feel we should have an export manager or anything, it was just so small; we didn't sell anything and hadn't gotten into it. So we split the world up. I took the Pacific Rim, my brother took Europe, and Jim Miller, who is vice president of sales and marketing, took everything else--Canada, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and that sort of thing.

I was successful. I started selling about nine thousand cases a year in Japan, and we were doing very well. The other two guys weren't selling anything, and of course they heard from me. Finally we came to the realization that we didn't have time for this, so we hired an export manager. We said, "You've got two years. See what you can do." He's doing quite well.

We now have our own offices in London. I'm going over there in June to kick off our wines to the London market. We have a broker who is using our offices. This way we can deal in pounds. There are a lot of problems switching pounds to dollars, and here we have our own offices, our own secretarial staff, an individual who works for us, and then our own bank account, and everything is done through the banks. When we rebill, we ship direct to these big chains--or we're going to; we kick it off in June. So it's kind of exciting.

Then we're going to Bordeaux for a big expo, so it's going to be kind of exciting.

Hicke: Puerto Rico is also becoming important?

Trinchero: Yes. We haven't shipped a whole lot there, but I know my brother, Roger, wanted me to take a trip there, and I wanted him to. I don't know which one of us is going to go there to kick off the Sutter Home brand.

Hicke: How did you pick out Puerto Rico?

Trinchero: Because Puerto Rico wanted our wines. Canada could be a good market if the Canadian government would ever come into the twentieth century.

Hicke: What do you mean?

Trinchero: Their liquor laws are extremely antiquated, and each province is a whole different set of rules. Of course, there's Eastern Canada and Western Canada, and I don't even think they speak to each other. [laughs] It's a very, very difficult market, getting listed and things like that. Then again, you can say the same thing in the United States, where you have what we think of as fifty states, but they're actually fifty principalities, and they all have a different set of rules. It's just unbelievable.

It's easier to ship to England than it is to ship to some states.

The Legacy of Prohibition in the United States

Trinchero: The United States has never really come to grips with alcohol. When Repeal came in 1933, instead of the federal government showing some backbone and saying, "Okay, we will regulate alcoholic beverages," the Supreme Court or Congress (whoever did it) said each municipality or government entities had the right to regulate its own, meaning city, county, and state. So you have dry cities, dry counties, and dry states. Do you know which was the last state to go wet and what was the year?

Hicke: No.

Trinchero: Prohibition was over in 1933, but that doesn't mean all the states went wet. That's a good trivia question!

Hicke: Do you know, Ruth?

Teiser: It was a Midwest state, wasn't it? Planes flying over it had to stop serving liquor at some point.

Trinchero: Oh, that was Utah, I think. The last one was Oklahoma. You want to guess what year? It was '59.

Hicke: They still have state-owned liquor stores there, I think.

Trinchero: There are a number of states with state-owned liquor. To look at the absurdity of it, Jack Daniels is the largest distillery in the world, and it's in a dry county. They can make it, but they can't drink it. Now, does that make any sense? That would be like the Napa Valley being dry, and we make wine but it all is shipped outside the county because we can't consume it here. I mean, how absurd!

History of the Sutter Home Chateau After Prohibition

Hicke: We're going to take up now the story of the winery, which we left at Prohibition.

Trinchero: The Leuenbergers, in 1918 when Prohibition pretty much shut the entire industry down with the exception of grape growing, retired here in this house. In 1936 Mr. Leuenberger died, which was the year I was born, and it was a hundred years since Mr. Thomann was born. Then Mrs. Leuenberger lived here, and she separated the winery from the estate--these grounds around the Victorian.

In 1945 she sold it to two gentlemen. One was a grape grower named Freddie Barolo. I don't remember what the other guy's first name was, but his last name was Ceccato. They didn't get along, and they couldn't quite come to grips with things, so they sold it to us in January of 1947.

When I got here in 1948, Mrs. Leuenberger was still here. She was a very nice old lady, and she passed away in 1949. Then her nephew, Louis Sutter, who was chairman of the board of Crocker-Anglo Bank, didn't want the house, so he offered it to us for twelve thousand dollars. In those days it might as well have been twelve million, because if you ain't got it, you ain't got it. So it was sold to Mrs. Oviatt, who was sort of a realtor-entrepreneur, and she split the property. It was about 2.4 acres, and she split the back one acre and sold it to Leroy Martin. Leroy built a home there, and that was his property. She sold it for \$10,000, so this house and the grounds around it that we have now cost her \$2,500.

Then it was rented out and finally sold to Bob E. Houchin, who now lives in Napa. He used to own part of Bridgeport Flying Service in Napa. He was a retired colonel in the air force, and he lived here until about 1970. Then he sold it to Mrs. Yaeger, and she loved it because it reminded her of her home in San Jose, where she was born and raised. The Yaegers still live here. Bill Yaeger, her son, is part owner of Rutherford Hill winery and Freemark Abbey. He also owns that big vineyard there at Oak Knoll Avenue and the one in Carneros at the old basalt plant--the real old one as you go towards Vallejo,

on the left-hand side of Highway 29, where it looks like big silos in that vineyard. That's all his property.

Mrs. Yaeger never moved in. She had carpenters working here all the time, and after about a year she died. Bill then turned around and sold the place to Jack Doty. This had to be about '71 or '72. Jack turned the six rooms upstairs into a bed and breakfast, and the downstairs was an antique shop and art gallery. Over the years he developed the water tower, which he built first, and a few years later he built the carriage house. Now it was a fifteen-room inn, because there are four rooms in the tower and five rooms in the carriage house. You can't call it a bed and breakfast anymore, so it was a fifteen-room inn, and we operated it as an inn after we bought it.

I told him, "Look, Jack, anytime you want to sell, please come and see me." I had told that to everybody who owned it before, them, but I could never afford it. Finally he came to me in the summer or fall of '85 and said, "I think it's time I retired and did some of the things I've always wanted to do." So we settled on the price, and in January of '86 escrow closed.

Hicke: But it didn't look then like it looks now?

Trinchero: No. We kept it for a few months, wondering what the heck we were going to do with this place. Finally my brother and sister and I convinced my wife that she should take it on as a project, because we really needed a Sutter home. There was no Sutter home; this is Sutter home, and we had never owned a Sutter home. She got an exterior and interior designer, an architect, a contractor, and an unlimited budget, and she exceeded that after six months. Just kidding. [laughter]

She took a year and a half and had as many as forty people working on this place at any one time. The place was gutted. Roughly 20 percent of this building is brand-new; we had to replace what was there. It's also been expanded somewhat. The grounds were totally ripped up. The only things that are original out there are the palm trees, this big pine, and the old oak over there. All the [other] plants [were replaced].

There was so much dry rot. After all, the building was built in 1884. But after a year and a half, it's

really been worth it, I think. We use it in all of our point of sales stuff.

One thing I want to go back to is Mrs. Leuenberger, who was a Sutter. She came from a very prominent family, and she was a modiste. Do you know what a modiste is? (I had to look it up) It's a person who designs and makes clothes but of the elite type.

Hicke: Haute couture?

Trinchero: Right. She had about twenty or thirty people working for her, and twice a year she would go to Paris to see the latest designs. She made clothes for the elite of San Francisco. As a matter of fact, Sutter Street in San Francisco is named after her family, not after John Sutter of gold fame. She also had an uncle who was named Oscar Hock. He was a supervisor in San Francisco. All big names. Her nephew was chairman of the board of Crocker-Anglo Bank; he was the one who sold the house. I mean, they were really into banking and all of the elite of San Francisco.

She was a really interesting person. She was very short, less than five feet tall. I remember that she used to dress just like they dressed back at the turn of the century--the high-neck collars. She was a very kindly lady, as I remember. She had to be about ninety when she died in 1949. Imagine traveling to Paris twice a year at the turn of the century.

Hicke: Slow boat or something.

Trinchero: I guess you'd go by train to the East Coast and then take a boat. Wow.

Hicke: So there we have the story of the winery and the chateau and Bob Trinchero. I really think this is a marvelous story, and it's a great part of the wine industry. Thank you very much for telling us the story.

Trinchero: My pleasure, Carole.

Transcriber and final typist: Judy Smith

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