

A vibrant orange California poppy is in sharp focus in the foreground, its petals bright and slightly ruffled. The background shows a vineyard with rows of grapevines supported by wooden posts, stretching into the distance under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with the poppy's color contrasting sharply with the green of the vines and the blue of the sky.

Livia

California poppies are colorful signs of spring. But they do more than please the eye at Pisoni Vineyards. Like the negative space in a painting or the music between the notes, what you don't see or hear may be as important as what you notice.

**The Golden State** flower and naturalized grasses hold the earth, prevent erosion and improve soil structure. Native pollinators, such as the yellow-faced bumblebee, need poppies—and lupins, shooting stars and owl's clover—to survive and contribute to the biodiversity of the Santa Lucia Highlands.

Every row of grapevines also benefits from our composting program, which encourages the growth of beneficial microorganisms and the slow release of nutrients throughout the year. *Sustainability* isn't a buzzword but an expression of our family's long-term commitment as custodians of the land.

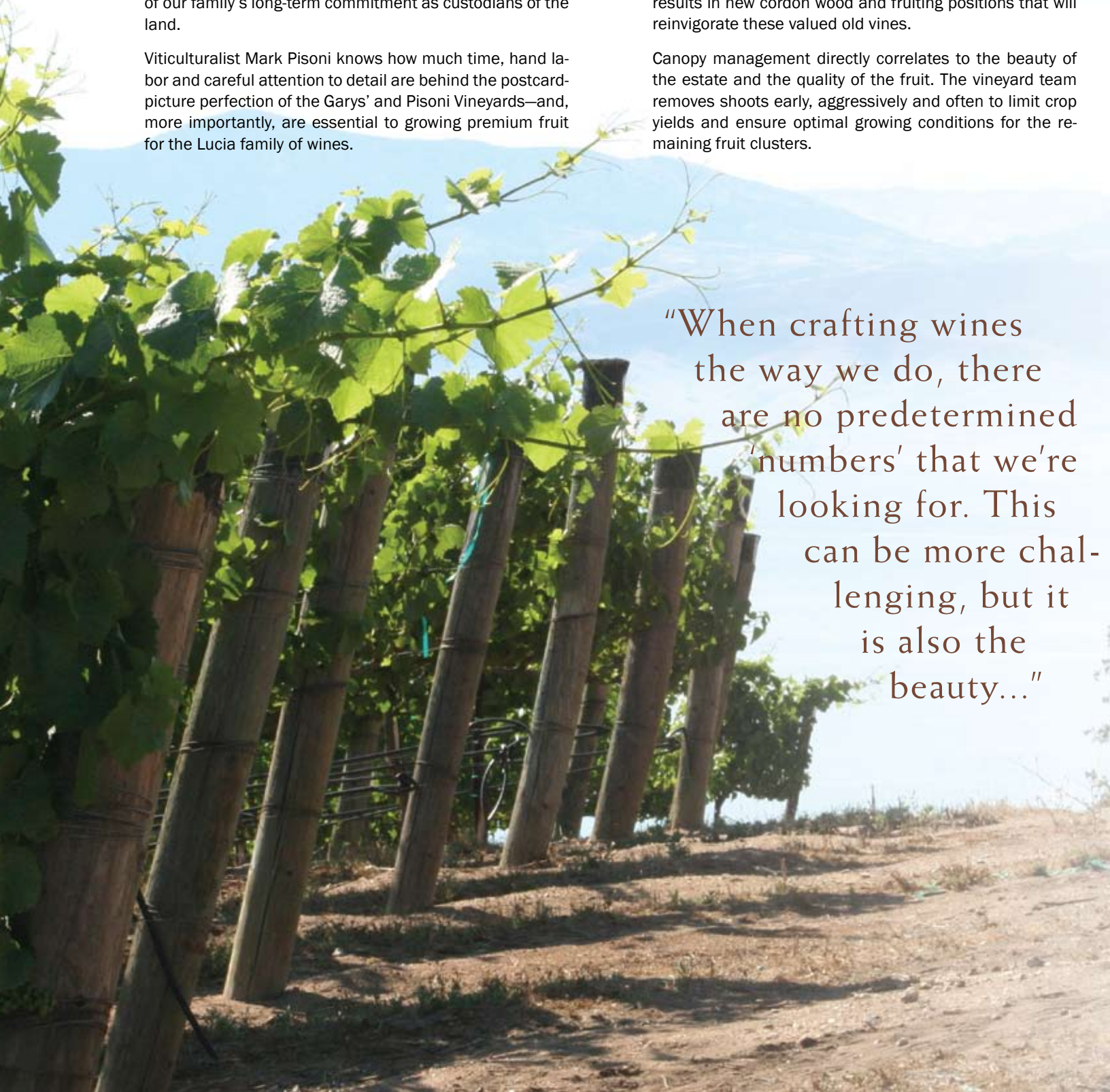
Viticulturalist Mark Pisoni knows how much time, hand labor and careful attention to detail are behind the postcard-picture perfection of the Garys' and Pisoni Vineyards—and, more importantly, are essential to growing premium fruit for the Lucia family of wines.

"There is never any room to cut corners. We know that every extra effort in the vineyards has a direct impact on the quality of our wines," Mark insists.

To ensure the health and longevity of the older vines, three veteran crew members, who have tended the 28-year-old Pinot Noir and Chardonnay blocks since their youth, walk through the dormant rows ahead of the pruning team. They closely examine each vine. Like painters using bold brush strokes, the trio makes major pruning decisions that will affect the shape and balance of the plants for years. This results in new cordon wood and fruiting positions that will reinvigorate these valued old vines.

Canopy management directly correlates to the beauty of the estate and the quality of the fruit. The vineyard team removes shoots early, aggressively and often to limit crop yields and ensure optimal growing conditions for the remaining fruit clusters.

"When crafting wines the way we do, there are no predetermined 'numbers' that we're looking for. This can be more challenging, but it is also the beauty..."



Pulling leaves later in the growing season gives the plants more time to protect their grape clusters from the elements. If the vineyard team leaves an extra leaf or two after the final pass, the foliage will shield the grapes from sunburn. Mother Nature will cast dappled—not direct—sunlight on the clusters. Removing leaves from inside the canopy allows for optimal air circulation.

Jeff Pisoni realizes that good vineyard practices carryover into his winemaking. He has noticed improvements in fermentation due to healthier yeast populations in the grape must—a benefit of the compost program. His role at the winery complements his brother's at the vineyard. Constantly vigilant, they know that their decisions will forever affect the life of the vines and wine.

Jeff's "hands off" approach to winemaking requires much time looking through microscopes, experiments, and daily tastings and evaluations to ensure no intervention is necessary. He considers fermentation an extraction program within a three-week window. In that short but critical time, his decisions will influence the aromatics, flavors and structure of the wine. Jeff prefers setting the fermentation tanks at warmer temperatures to extract more tannins from the skins. Tastings determine when to drain and press the tank. Waiting too long results in lost aromatics and bitter flavors. Balance is always foremost on his mind.

"When crafting wines the way we do, there are no pre-determined 'numbers' that we're looking for. This can be more challenging, but it is also the beauty: when to harvest, how long to macerate, how long to age before bottling. The answers lie in trying to find the perfect balance year after year," Jeff says.

Large-scale wineries tend to crush fruit for maximum juice yield. But years of trials have convinced Jeff to include some whole clusters with mature stems in the fermentation process and to destem the rest of the grapes gently. He favors floral and spicy aromatics resulting from this blend, as well as the additional tannins for the wine's structure.

Long before tasting wine from each lot and barrel, Jeff must make critical decisions about the French oak barrels themselves. The temperature and soil in a given French forest influence the tightness of a tree's wood grain. Tighter oak grains are desirable, because the wood will release its flavors into the wine more slowly. Moreover, if coopers subject the barrel staves made from the harvested trees to open-air drying, the character of the wood will change. The longer the staves dry in this manner—up to four years—the subtler the flavors they will impart to wine.

One of our favorite Italian words is *sprezzatura*, the art that conceals art. The most sumptuous photograph, painting or musical composition—or nature's artistry or artisan-crafted wine—may seem to have materialized effortlessly. But just out of view, beneath the surface or behind the scene, lurks the real story.



## 2008 Lucia Pinot Noir, Garys' Vineyard

The 2008 Lucia Pinot Noir, Garys' Vineyard, is a very seductive wine. The color is deeper than the "SLH" bottling and darker than most of our previous Garys' cuvees—a result of the exceptionally tiny berries from the very windy weather conditions around fruit-set. The aromatics are bright expressions of raspberry, black cherry and forest floor. The palate is broad and leads into a long, silky finish. The tannins are gentle, velvety and supple, allowing this wine to be consumed sooner than more powerful vintages, such as 2007, which needs more cellar time to soften. If opening this Pinot Noir shortly after release, decanting for 30–60 minutes is recommended.

## 2008 Lucia Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands

The 2008 Lucia Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands, is deep ruby in color. This "SLH" bottling displays bold aromatics of ripe strawberry, cherry, plum and spices of clove and sage. The focus of the wine is pure and direct. The palate has a thick texture, brought into balance by a frame of soft tannin and nice acidity (a common trait to this vintage in the Highlands). As always, this Pinot Noir is a blend entirely from Pisoni Vineyards and the Garys' Vineyard. For the blend, we select barrels that are more approachable in their youth than the more age-worthy single-vineyard wines.

## 2008 Lucia Chardonnay, Santa Lucia Highlands

The 2008 Lucia Chardonnay is bright gold with a slight greenish hue. The aromatics have lifted notes of spiced pineapple, white peach and creamy lemon custard. On the palate, the wine is broad with a very viscous character, and the acidity highlights a citrus/mineral backbone. There is also a hint of vanilla towards the finish. This wine is sourced from three blocks, ranging from 10 to almost 30 years of age, at Pisoni Vineyards. Unfiltered, the wine may form the slightest sediment.

## 2009 Lucy Rosé of Pinot Noir, Santa Lucia Highlands

The 2009 Lucy Rosé of Pinot Noir carries a very pretty color reminiscent of a near-ripe strawberry. The nose boasts exuberant watermelon and wild strawberry/raspberry notes. On the palate, the wine is dry but flavorful with a peach character and a crisp, mouth-watering finish. This is one of our most complex rosés to date. The wine was fermented in a combination of neutral barrels for texture and stainless steel for aromatics. Also, we utilized various fermentation techniques for complexity, one of which included fermenting with indigenous yeast. Serve chilled.

—Jeff Pisoni, Winemaker

## Book Notes

Oprah and her book club may have the all-mighty power to boost a book sky-high on the bestseller list and raise authors like John Steinbeck and William Faulkner from the dead. But you won't find a tome even remotely linked to wine on her bookshelf.

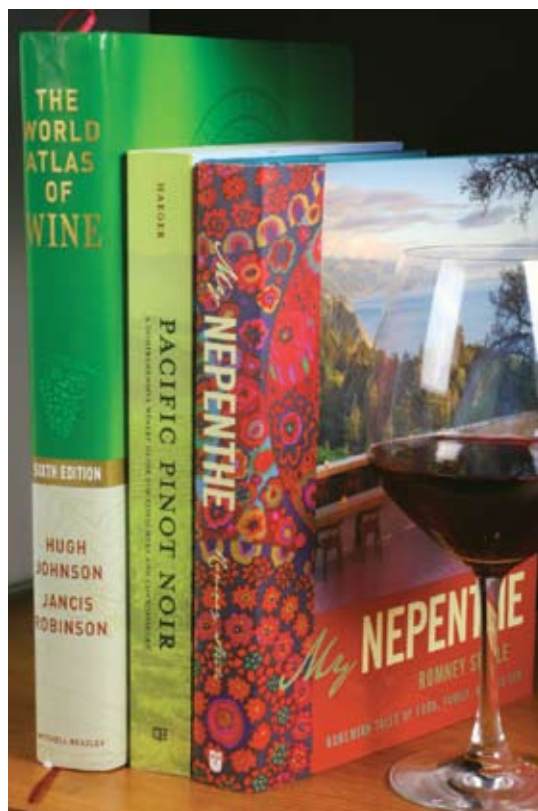
Leaving no page unturned, we have our own list of must-reads to boost your Santa Lucia Highlands literacy: John Winthrop Haeger's *Pacific Pinot Noir: A Comprehensive Winery Guide for Consumers and Connoisseurs*, Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson's *The World Atlas of Wine* and Romney Steele's *My Nepenthe: Bohemian Tales of Food, Family and Big Sur*.

"These are the greatest books that I've read in a long, long, long time. The fact that I'm in them has nothing to do with my endorsement. Well, maybe just a little," laughs Gary Pisoni.

Noted wine scribe Haeger credits Gary for swiveling the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA into the Pinot spotlight—giving the noble grape a push in popularity similar to when Alexander Payne's *Sideways* gave Pinot Noir a starring role in the 2007 hit movie.

"Far from the first person to plant vineyards on the valley's west side, ...Pisoni is significant as the fulcrum on which the area's fortunes were tied to pinot noir and as the magnet that first attracted a phenomenal stream of talented boutique winemakers to Santa Lucia Highlands fruit," pens Haeger.

Brits Johnson and Robinson's *World Atlas of Wine* (6th edition) is an indispensable resource for oenophiles interested in the global geographic study of wine. Geography, climate, preferred vines and



appellations, and so much more are all at your grape-stained fingertips.

The authors feature the Pisoni Estate label among the handful selected to represent the Santa Lucia Highlands and describe the appellation: "On a hot day inland, clammy coastal air comes rushing up the valley with such force that it actually tears off vine shoots. The valley is extremely dry (with irrigation water aplenty from the underground Salinas River) but fiendishly cold. Vines regularly bud two weeks earlier than the California norm and are picked at least two weeks later, giving the Salinas Valley one of the longest growing seasons in the world of wine."

Anyone named Romney Steele should be guaranteed a slot on the bestseller list. But we call her by her nickname, Nani, and she and Nepenthe hold a special place in our hearts. The granddaughter of Lolly and Bill Fassett, creators of the legendary restaurant, lovingly recounts growing up at the bohemian gathering place perched on the breathtaking cliffs of Big Sur.

Beautifully written and illustrated with photographs and recipes, Nani's memoir spins magical tales about her family and the colorful cast of characters who have frequented this special spot during its 60-year history.

We have been honored guests at Nepenthe's table, and Nani has been up to her elbows making Swiss-Italian sausage at ours. *My Nepenthe* shares our passion for food and wine, family and friends, and the places that foster enchantment through a warm embrace and generosity of spirit.

"The Pisoni property, an outcrop edged by ancient oaks and native scrub, shares the land with pigs, bobcats, and other wild animals.... A carpet of well-tended grapes grows on the hilly slopes below, overlooking the vast valley lands, providing a verdant calm amid the rocky terrain. At least once a year, the Pisoni family hosts a barbecue for Nepenthe staff here, and other times they head out for visits on their own," Nani writes.

Robert Louis Stevenson describes wine as "bottled poetry." These authors share the same sentiment, and we encourage you to drink from their pages.



"Wine is made in the vineyard"

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