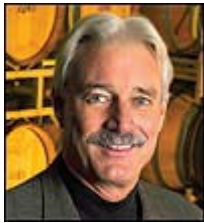


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### A Carneros Pioneer Starts Over, Again

Mike Richmond returns to try to revive Bouchaine



Posted: Tuesday, July 19, 2005

By [James Laube](#)

Mike Richmond knows what it's like to be ahead of your time. He also knows what it's like to be behind the curve.

In 1979, he helped start Acacia, a new winery in Carneros. With a nod to Burgundy, Acacia pioneered single-vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, mostly from grapes grown in this region, which straddles the southernmost reaches of Napa and Sonoma valleys.

With Acacia, Richmond and his partner Jerry Goldstein looked as if they had created the perfect roadmap for the future of California's interpretation of Burgundy—which is precisely what has happened with the development of single-vineyard Pinot Noir.

But along the way Acacia stumbled, and by 1986 it had been sold to the Chalone Wine Group. Richmond worked for CWG at Acacia, at Carneros and then at Acacia again until 2003.

Now, 26 years after Acacia's debut, the 59-year-old vintner is back to making wine, this time at Bouchaine Vineyards, a short distance from Acacia.

Like Acacia, Bouchaine was an early advocate of Carneros-grown Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. But despite lofty ambitions and allusions to Burgundian-style wines—right down to the name "Chateau Bouchaine"—the winery never fulfilled its promise. Its wines were typically crisp and clean but lacked richness and flair. After the bull market of the 1990s, the winery's sales stalled, and suddenly the winery had four vintages to sell.

Richmond is hoping to put Bouchaine back on the radar screen for wine drinkers.

Bouchaine "didn't rise with the rising tide" of the 1990s, says Richmond in his soft mid-Texas drawl. "When the market was real strong, it appeared to work ... but when the market tightened, so did sales."

The winery was overcome by a sense of inertia, Richmond says, and the style of wines—

lean and austere—simply didn't appeal to consumers seeking riper, bolder flavors. By 2000, the owners, Gerrett and Tatiani Copeland of Wilmington, Del. (heirs of the Du Pont fortune and devout Burgundy lovers), realized that the winery needed an overhaul. Worse, they didn't really like the style of wines being made.

In October 2003, after harvest, Richmond joined Bouchaine, and he faces a challenge. Not only does Bouchaine need to make better wines, which are in the works, but it must also recast its image as a quality producer.

Today's market is far more competitive than it's ever been, and while Carneros was once a leader with Pinot Noir, it is now off the pace set by vintners using grapes from Sonoma County, Santa Lucia Highlands in Monterey and Santa Barbara.

That doesn't dissuade Richmond. He's a firm believer in Carneros grapes and believes he can recapture at least part of the spirit that drove Acacia in the early 1980s.

The new Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs he showed me from the 2004 vintage taste richer, with more depth, yet are shy of outstanding. Young Pinots are difficult to evaluate because they can undergo significant changes while still in barrel, and I will be interested in tasting the wines once they're released next year.

In the meantime, Richmond understands that the market wants richer, more expressive Pinots, and that his preference for more acidity and austerity may have to bend to meet consumer approval.