

Heitz Martha's Vineyard 1974

It is often compared to Château Mouton-Rothschild's most prestigious vintage 1945. Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Heitz comes from a small vineyard in a location that was long kept a secret. So secret was the spot, that the owners chose not to have their addresses in the phone book or on their mail box. In short, it is the best wine ever made in America, 38th on the list of the world's finest wines of all times.

Unlike today, in the early 1970s there was still plenty of vacant land for winegrowing in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys. During that time, the hills were covered with lush orchards, olive groves and vast forests, which were later forced to make way for more productive vineyards.

From the days of the prohibition, the wine market was dominated by the "four greats": Inglenook, Charles Krug, Louis Martini, and Beaulieu. It was not until the 1960s that these giants had to fear for competition, when a new generation of winegrowers with determined visions of making the best Cabernet Sauvignon wines in the world made their way to Napa and new wineries sprung up. The most famous of these newcomers were Robert Mondavi, Joseph Helps, Paul Draper, Warren Winiarski and Joe Heitz.

Their first years in the business were not easy, as the growth of the wine market which had begun in the early 1960s came to an abrupt halt in 1974.

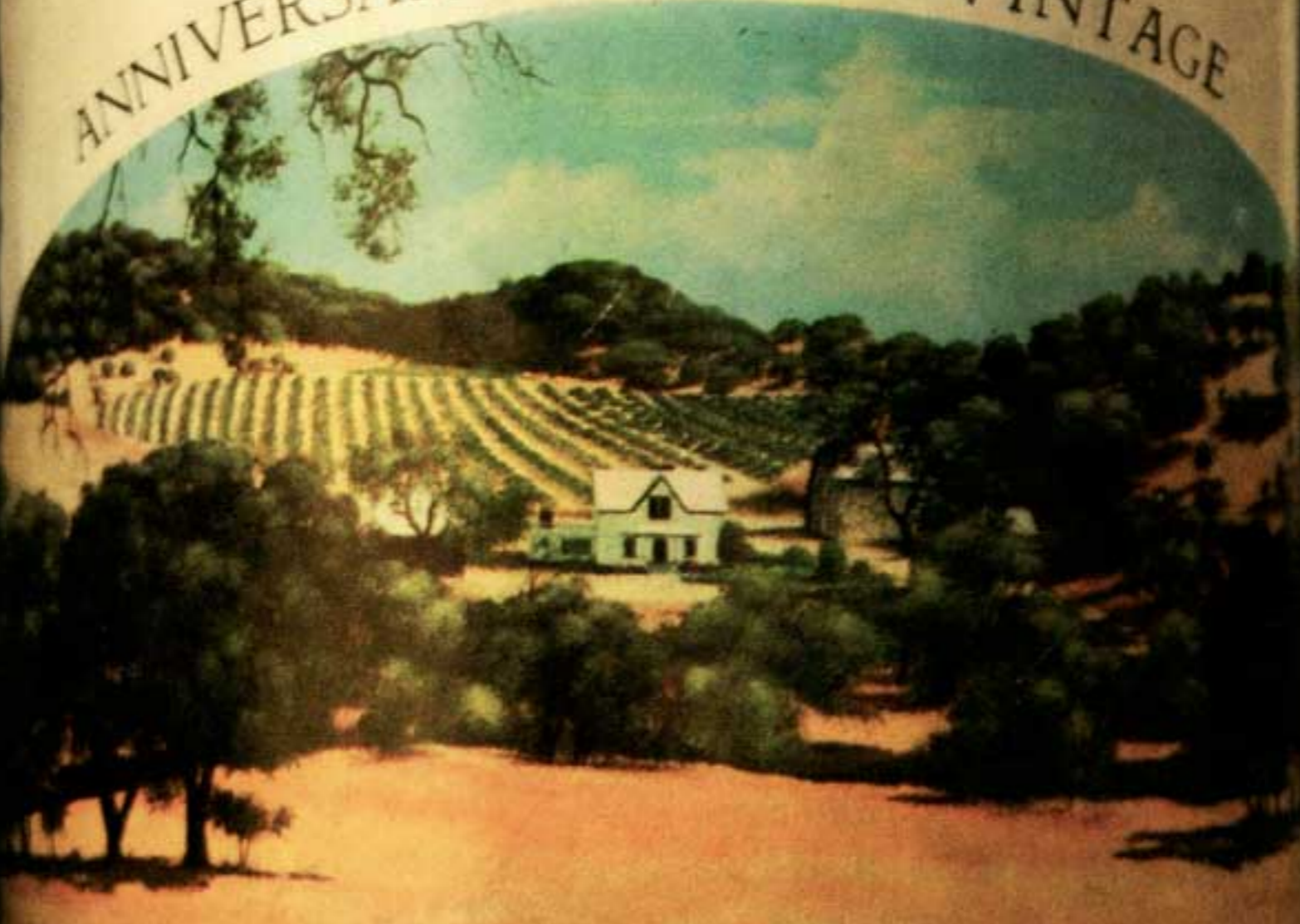
President Nixon's resignation and the oil crisis took their toll on the U.S. stock market, and the depression was a trying time for winegrowers.

The weather in 1974 was considerably favourable for winegrowers. The early part of the year was dry and mild in the Napa Valley. The spring saw fairly little rain and it was hotter than usual, the average temperature staying at roughly 24 degrees Celsius. It was a most opportune time for plants to bloom. During the summer, the temperature kept at a nearly perfect level and there was still little rain. Only twice did the mercury rise over 32 degrees Celsius. In October, the crops were harvested in absolutely ideal conditions.

When the 1974 vintage became available in 1978, the California wine market had gone through yet another surprising change which, this time, was a positive one and, rather surprisingly, brought about by the French. The correspondent of the Decanter magazine, Steven Spurrier, held a revolutionary tasting in Paris in the autumn of 1976. In that tasting, the new California wines were pitted against the best French wines, and, surprisingly, the Cabernet Sauvignons from California swept the board. The attention of the wine world and the press suddenly

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ANNIVERSARY 1974 VINTAGE



Heitz Cellar

NAPA VALLEY
CABERNET SAUVIGNON

ALCOHOL 13% BY VOLUME
 PRODUCED AND BOTTLED IN OUR CELLAR BY
HEITZ WINE CELLARS
 ST. HELENA, CALIFORNIA

MARtha'S VINEYARD

Bottle No. 32740 of a total of 52,125 Bottles
 Magnum of a total of 1,200 Magnums

NO 38

The 1000 Finest Wines ever Made

turned to the Napa Valley and its new winegrowers. When the superb 1974 vintage came out later in the decade, all doubts about the quality of the Napa Valley wines were quickly dissolved.

Year 1974 also gave birth to the wine which in my opinion is the finest and most well known California wine of all time. The credit for the achievement must be given to the Heitz Cellar and Martha's Vineyard. In 1968, when Heitz Wine Cellars brought out their first vintage of Martha's Vineyard wine from 1966, the wine garnered deserved attention. Since then, Heitz Wine Cellars has been one of the leading wineries in California.

Joe Heitz began his career in wine in the Napa Valley in the late 50s by initially working as a wine packer. Early on in his career, Heitz worked in various jobs at different wineries. The most decisive period for him proved to be the time he spent at the Beaulieu Vineyard with the most prestigious winemaker of the time, André Tchelistcheff. In 1961, Joe Heitz was set to establish a vineyard of his own, Heitz Wine Cellars. He invited his acquaintances, Tom and Martha May, to be his partners in the venture, which gave him exclusive rights to the 10-hectare Martha's Vineyard they owned. The first vintage of the wine made from Martha's Vineyard grapes was produced in 1968. For a long time, the location of the vineyards was known only to a select few and the general public was kept in the dark. Joe Heitz wanted to protect Tom and Martha from the public eye and removed their names from the phone book and the mail box. He also refused to divulge what kind of vines were planted on the vineyards. The lack of available information served to give the winery a mystical quality, which in turn helped make its wines more desirable.

Joe Heitz himself was a colourful person and a first-rate salesman. Among tales of his exploits, his disputes with critic Robert Parker have become legendary. Once, Parker criticised the fragrance of his wines for lack of aroma. Vexed by the critic's comment, Heitz decided to deliver "a truckload" of tissues to Parker. The purpose of the gesture was to help Parker clear his "stuffy" nose.

It may come as a surprise to many that the legendary Martha's Vineyard vintage of 1974 was not produced by Joe Heitz but his son David.

David had helped his father on the vineyards and in the cellar since he was a small boy and discovered he enjoyed the work. In 1974, David graduated in enology and started work immediately. His father had been in an accident and was hospitalised due to severe back pains. For the first time, David took care of the harvesting and wine manufacturing process on his own. The rest, as they say, is history.

Today, the 1974 vintage of Heitz Martha's Vineyard wine is extremely difficult to find, even if you have lavish amounts of money to spare. I myself have only tasted it four times in the last decade. One reason for the wine's rarity is its small production volume. In the days of its production, few Californian vineyards produced more than 200 to 5,000 cases of wine a season when, at the same time, the best vineyards in Bordeaux had an output of 20,000 to 50,000 cases. The modern wine enthusiast has to pay exponentially more for the wine. In 1978, the initial market prices among the best winegrowers were between 7 and 12 U.S. dollars a bottle and the Heitz wine cost 25 U.S. dollars a bottle. Now, the auction prices of the 1974 Martha's Vineyard wine start at \$1,000 and may climb to \$2,100 a bottle depending on the condition of the bottle and the location of sale.

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98 p | 1974 *Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Heitz*
(Napa Valley) **2008/2010 x 18** | **D 1 h / G 3 h**

1974 was to California what 1961 was to Bordeaux. A great vintage all over, but the real star and probably the most legendary of all American wines is none other than Martha's Vineyard. It is to us like a caricature of the incredible Mouton 1945. Great eucalyptus nose, fantastically extravagant fruit and so much class. A truly great wine! Brilliant looking bottle with a beautiful, artistic label.

Decanted two hours. Dark brick red with slight signs of oxidation in the colour. Open, clean and wonderful nose of cedar, eucalyptus and mild red fruits. The palate is very attractive and fat-textured, showing soft, lush tobacco, coffee and cedar notes and just enough acidity to provide a charming balance. Seems astonishingly Bordeaux-like. Indeed very well balanced with near-perfect structure. Very smooth and polished with extremely fine tannins. Exquisite, long and lingering finish. Breathtaking and surely destined for legendary status.