



# Hourglass Press Kit 2016

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## Backgrounder

*“Hourglass is two vineyards, a winery, and a compilation of estate wines:  
A vision unfolding.”*

There was something about a particular six-acre parcel, two miles north of St. Helena that captured Ned Smith’s attention in 1974. A bedrock outcropping of the Maycamas Mountains jutted eastward, pinching the valley floor into a near figure eight, and this alluring patch of hillside lay precisely at the narrowest point. Ned had an uncanny intuition about land. As one of the first realtors in the germinal Napa Valley of the mid 1960s, he introduced many iconic Napa vintners to the fallow acres where they ultimately cultivated their dreams. He had an innate gift for that, an ability to uncover the precious and envision the possible.

This six-acre parcel, however, Ned didn’t share with his clients. Instead, Ned bought the land for his family with the ambition of opening an inn with his wife Marge, planting a grove of fruit trees, and building a home. When the inn thrived and the fruit trees didn’t, Ned took note of his neighbor Dan Duckhorn’s success with grapes and planted his own favorite varietal: Zinfandel. This time his planting took hold and the four-acre vineyard produced excellent fruit for nearly fifteen years. Then, everything fell apart: Ned succumbed to cancer and his vineyard fell to the phylloxera epidemic of the early 1990s.

Fortunately, Jeff Smith inherited his father’s natural vision. When he got the call from his mother that she planned to sell the family’s vineyard, he had an unshakable feeling that their land was too special to let go. It was at this same moment in time that Napa Valley shifted its focus to terroir-driven winemaking, and Jeff saw the devastation to their vineyard as an opportunity to replant and realize the full potential of this inimitable place. Hopeful to preserve his father’s dream, Jeff consulted an expert viticulturist, Dr. Mark Kliewer, to confirm his hunch and, hopefully, persuade his mother to keep the land and replant.

As Dr. Kliewer crouched to inspect the soil on the family parcel, he looked more like a miner than the Dean of Viticulture at UC Davis. He scooped up a handful of dusty red-brown dirt declaring it Hambright soil, indeed, a viticulturist’s gold. Composed of fractured bedrock, this land formed some two million years ago when explosive volcanic activity created the Mayacamas Mountains. “This soil isn’t good for much,” Dr. Kliewer explained to Jeff, “but nestled in this valley, with this ideal sun aspect and the cool winds that funnel through it, they could make this property one of the signature Cabernet sites in Napa Valley.”

## The Vineyards

### Hourglass Vineyard

In 1992 Jeff eagerly followed Dr. Kliewer's prescription and replanted four acres to Cabernet Sauvignon, naming the vineyard Hourglass in a nod to the geography that would underpin the property's success. As the vines matured, the Hambright Soil yielded small berries with incredible complexity, just as Dr. Kliewer had predicted and by the fifth leaf, they were ready to become wine. Now all Jeff needed, was a winemaker.

It wasn't long before Jeff recruited his friend, the esteemed Bob Foley, as his winemaker and the pair found the same wonderful synergy in the vineyard and cellar, as they did on their guitars. Wine became the medium through which these musicians sought balance, found harmony, and brought people together—much like they did in their respective rock bands. In testament to their efforts, each successive 500 case vintage continued to sell out, however it was their debut 1997 vintage that put Hourglass on the map. It gained instant renown when, on a whim, it was included in a high profile “cult tasting” alongside luminaries such as Screaming Eagle, Harlan Estate, and Bryant Family. To the astonishment of the judges, the fledgling label held its own and though it was not yet for sale, the wine sold out in a few days.

### Blueline Vineyard

After the fairytale launch of Hourglass and **11 vintages** of uninterrupted success, Jeff and his wife Carolyn sought an additional world-class vineyard that would align with their terroir-driven wines. But the valley was no longer the blank canvas of the 60s and 70s, and most land was accounted for. At the brink of giving up his search, a casual Sunday drive took Jeff up Silverado Trail where a “For Sale” sign caught his eye just south of Calistoga. It was posted on a dramatic parcel of land at the mouth of the Dutch Henry Canyon, adjacent to the celebrated Switchback Ridge and across from Duckhorn's Three Palms Vineyard. Abruptly pulling over to survey the site, he was immediately struck by the large piles of river rock scattered among the vines, deposited by two meandering “blue-line” streams that frame the property.

Unquestionably, this was the land that Jeff and Carolyn were looking for, a site that would eventually bear the name of its unusual terroir, Blueline Vineyard. Over three million years, these canyons had collapsed to form this section of the Vaca range, scattering shattered bedrock throughout the alluvial soils that underpin the site and define its singularity. The Smiths purchased the 41-acre property in 2006, in partnership with their friends Richard and Maureen Chilton, and Michael and Pam

Clark, and strategically replanted the majority of the 20-acre vineyard with all five classic Bordeaux varieties. Each of these varieties is vinified separately to explore the full potential of each vineyard block, and evoke every aspect of the terroir.

## The Winery

In the desire to become a fully self-sufficient estate, Jeff and Carolyn commissioned notable San Francisco architect Olle Lundberg to design a winery. A “nature-inspired modernist,” Lundberg turned the winery “inside out,” displaying the building’s inner workings prominently at the fore and simultaneously designed the building to dissolve into the mountain. The building’s sleek lines and sparse design echo and embellish the hills above it in an architectural manifestation of the Smiths’ naturalistic approach to winemaking.

Once the Blueline’s vines came of age in 2012, with 24 acres across two vineyards and a winery, it was time to find a full-time winemaker. Bob Foley’s eponymous label and numerous consulting projects didn’t afford him the time to take on this intensified role. Fortunately, there was another experimentalist in the valley eager to continue the Hourglass legacy.

Tony Biagi joined the winery for the harvest of 2012 as full-time winemaker, breathing new life into the brand with his successful track record at CADE and Plumpjack Winery. Biagi’s first project was spearheading the production of the first Hourglass white wine with the 2013 Estate Sauvignon Blanc. His philosophy on high pH winemaking aligns with Jeff’s and together, their style pays homage to the innovative tastemakers of the 1990’s like Helen Turley, John Kongsgaard and Heidi Barrett.

Throughout the decades, the Smith family has learned much from studying the winemaking pendulum of Napa as it continues to swing back and forth across the stylistic scale. Recent vintages continue to prove that Hourglass has found its ideal place on that spectrum, and with a renewed focus on terroir-driven energy, tension and precision, the winery continues to lead the way in Napa’s evolution.

## The Hourglass Aesthetic

*“Wine has always been a powerful ally of the philosophy of nature, because it has demonstrated conclusively to the world that spirit also resides in nature.” – Hegel*

Proprietor Jeff Smith calls his wines “innately sensual.” Just as striking, however, is the naturally occurring structure that moderates that sensuality and gives it dimension. As the winery has matured, so have its wines, and recent vintages manage to showcase the estate’s trademark fruit profile, but with an elevated level of tension. This counterbalance reflects the aesthetic that has come to define Hourglass.

Contradiction is the defining element behind the Hourglass aesthetic. Intrigue lies in the opposing counterpoints in nature that the passive eye (or palate) may avoid coupling. It was this winemaking philosophy that brought Jeff and like-minded winemaker Tony Biagi together. They agree that dramatic fruit alone can create a powerful wine, but brilliance can only occur with a counterbalancing sense of energy harnessed in the vineyard. Even the name, Hourglass, is intrinsically linked to that duality, temporal yet eternal, as it relates to the passage of time.

And while Jeff’s admittedly ‘Hegelian’ vision for his wines is his trademark, he credits his wife Carolyn as his true muse, calling her “the soul of Hourglass.” With her deeply discerning eye for design, Carolyn’s contemporary-meets-traditional style is unmistakable throughout the brand, from the property’s architecture, to the label, and ultimately, the wines.

Modern, yet classic. Generous fruit, old-world restraint. The contradictory aesthetic of Hourglass is directly linked to sophisticated allure of its wines.

## Winemaking Philosophy

Meeting through a tasting group of Napa’s most promising winemakers, Jeff and Tony discovered a synergy of ideas and quickly developed a “mutual mentorship” as they call it. “We both had 20 years under our belts,” Jeff explains, “and had followed the pendulum of ripeness swing in Napa winemaking style. We have both learned a great deal in the process and we found that we shared a philosophy of what components of this Napa style we wanted to retain, and which we wanted to refine.”

Jeff and Tony strive to fulfill this vision via close chemical analysis, both in the vineyard and the cellar, to achieve wines that strike a bold tensional balance. As Jeff describes, “Our objective is to farm to the precise moment when grape chemistry is in

balance. The goal is not to chase some mythical ideal of a vineyard's 'ultimate expression of terroir,' but rather to find *our* ultimate expression of that vineyard. Terroir is real, but it's subject to interpretation. We're driven to find an equilibrium where the vineyard delivers the dialectic puzzle pieces we hope to manifest in the wine. If we get that right, Tony has what he needs to work his magic."

The interplay of terroir and artistic intention yields wines of unique personality that possess and intriguing dialectic: rich with layers of concentration yet vibrant with a tensional edge, classically structured yet silky in texture, unquestionably modern but with traditional stripes. Tony Biagi is a postmodernist, in life and in winemaking. His approach to making wine is that of art informed by science, accepting a degree of unknowable alchemy and counterbalancing it with scientific analysis and experimentation. As Tony explains, "Think of making wine as assembling a complex puzzle, and each puzzle piece has a synergistic response to the other. Change any one piece and you change the entire picture. With each vintage, we make minute decisions in our farming and winemaking based on the differences each year brings, shaping each puzzle piece to give us the most vivid, multidimensional picture."

As demonstrated in his debut 2012 vintage at Hourglass, Tony approaches the puzzle from the center, building his wines from the inside out. He first establishes a classic structure core, using innovative methods to intertwine tannin and color. "That tannin/color relationship is critical to everything else we do," says Tony. "We go to great lengths in our vineyard practices, maceration protocols and cellar procedures to develop that bond." Upon this foundation, Tony builds mouthfeel with layers of silky textural depth, emphasizing the purity of fruit expression. "I want my wines to be rich but if that's all they are they become one dimensional and monotonous," says Tony. To that end, he balances richness with acidity and minerality to evoke energy, resulting in a wine that is alive on the palate while deeply concentrated.

Science, art and intuition merge to create the wines of Hourglass. From the vineyard to the glass, the process is a seamless continuum; the wine an animate, evolving entity.

## The People

### Jeff Smith

*Proprietor & Vintner of Hourglass*

Jeff Smith had the unique experience of growing up next door to many of the families that transformed Napa Valley into one of the most prestigious wine growing regions in the world.

Jeff's family moved to St. Helena in 1964. He is a K-12 product of the St. Helena public school system, but college took him to San Francisco, where he studied International Relations. Jeff's creative streak led him to front a well-received indie rock band called Noonday Underground with fellow musician and future Hourglass winemaker Bob Foley.

In the late 80's Jeff worked at the Robert Mondavi Winery for three years where he refined his knowledge of wine, food and culture. Though he describes it as a relatively entry level job, Jeff valued the access to the man he calls "one of the great visionaries of our industry." Mr. Mondavi was still quite active at that time and Jeff credits him as being "one of the most accessible people I have ever worked with. If you had questions about wine, he would make the time to share his insights. He was an amazing teacher."

With the business savvy he picked up under Mondavi, Jeff went on to become the second employee and Vice President of Sales & Marketing of SKYY Vodka. Not only did he help build the brand from the ground-up, he was responsible for the creation of the iconic cobalt blue bottle, as well as the foundation of SKYY's national distribution network. He propelled the business from zero to 600,000 cases in annual volume within 5 years, making it one of the fastest brand growths in American distilled spirits history.

In the early '90s Jeff witnessed a paradigm shift in Napa Valley brought on by phylloxera and changing attitudes toward winemaking. Small boutique vineyards such as Screaming Eagle, Colgin, and Harlan began offering high-end, small-scale wine brands, based around Dick Grace's direct to consumer model, and soon, the Napa "cult" wines were born. When Jeff's father passed away in 1990 leaving him the vineyard, Jeff was unexpectedly thrust into this new Napa. However Jeff's profound knowledge of wine and his cerebral approach to winemaking has made Hourglass one of the most sought after brands in the Valley.

Jeff was a founding member of the Appellation St. Helena board, Napa Valley Vintners, and has sat on the St. Helena Farmers Market board along with various professional boards. He resides in St. Helena with his wife Carolyn, and two children Isabelle and Holland. Dubbed a “modern day renaissance man” by his family, when he’s not producing wine, he’s creating elsewhere – in the kitchen, on the page, or with his guitar pick.

**Tony Biagi**  
*Winemaker*

San Mateo native Tony Biagi is a fourth generation Californian, whose first experience with wine was watching his father make modest amounts of a private label wine from a family friend’s vineyard in Lodi, CA. After graduating from high school with an aptitude for science, Biagi enrolled at U.C. Davis without any preconceived plans to study winemaking: “I went into college as a freshman wanting to be a marine biologist, but I wound up majoring in fermentation science, specializing in winemaking.”

In the mid-1990s, Tony worked at a retail wine shop in St. Helena and during that time, Tony witnessed a renaissance for Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon as phylloxera-crippled vineyards were re-planted and the next generation of star estates emerged. During the same time, Tony bolstered his practical oenology experience, working at Duckhorn Vineyards under the esteemed Tom Rinaldi. After starting as an oenologist in 1995, Biagi was named assistant winemaker and subsequently appointed head winemaker for Duckhorn’s Paraduxx label in 1998.

In 2001, Biagi left Duckhorn to become the general manager and winemaker at Napa Valley’s Neal Family Vineyards, where he worked through the 2002 harvest. By March of 2003, Tony had joined the PlumpJack Group as winemaker for the company’s PlumpJack estate winery in Napa Valley, and was later also named winemaker for the group’s second winery when CADE was founded on Howell Mountain in 2005. Tony’s wines have achieved extraordinary marks from the world’s top critics, with two of his PlumpJack wines earning 99 and 98 points respectively from Robert Parker, and another wine from CADE earning 98 points from Parker in only its second vintage.

Tony joined Hourglass in 2012, after developing a friendship and professional respect for proprietor Jeff Smith’s philosophy and collaborative style. At Hourglass, Biagi saw the new position as a hands-on opportunity to make estate-bottled wines from two of Napa’s most extraordinary parcels of land. “Now, more than ever, in Napa Valley as



well as California, estate properties that control every aspect of their fruit production are going to be most successful,” said Biagi. “What really intrigued me about making wine from the Hourglass and Blueline estate vineyards is that the possibilities are endless. It’s really a dream come true for me to be able to craft wines from such spectacular sites.”

When he’s not in the cellar, Tony enjoys cycling, gardening, and spending time with his daughter, Harper Alexis.

### **Michael Cooperman**

*National Sales Manager*

Michael Cooperman’s passion for wine came not from the glass but from his mother’s kitchen, in Santa Fe. As a boy, Cooperman would help his mother cook and observe as she constructed dishes and intuitively balanced flavors. It was this, Michael says, that cultivated his “deep appreciation for the simple subtlety of great food.”

Wine on the other hand, was his father’s purview. Michael was exposed to great wines from his father’s collection of Bordeaux and Burgundy, Californian and Italian wines, but it wasn’t until Michael moved to New York City in the late 1990s and began working in restaurants that he realized his keen palate for food translated to wine. Versed beyond his years in the nuance of flavors, he found that he could distinguish the sense of place (or terroir) unique to a wine without ever having been to its country of origin. As Michael says, “Wine was a window into another time and place. Since that moment I was hooked.”

From this revelation, Cooperman moved into restaurant management and was soon promoted to developing wine and beverage programs at Larry Forgione’s renowned restaurants (including An American Place, Restaurant Above, Manhattan Prime) amongst others. But a longing for the rugged mesas and rose-colored deserts of home steered Michael back to New Mexico in 2002, where he decided to round out his knowledge of the wine industry by working with Southern Wine & Spirits as Director of Education.

In the meantime, Cooperman delved into his formal wine education in earnest, gaining a Level 4 Diploma with the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) in 2008 and the Certified Sommelier and Certified Specialist of Wine accreditations shortly thereafter. Through his studies, Michael realized that he had a knack for teaching, for

painting the story behind wine and the people who make it to instill a sense of wonderment.

In 2012 Michael, moved to Napa with his wife and baby daughter to further pursue his passion for education. He began working as the Tasting Room Manager at V. Sattui Winery and a year later Michael took the position of Education Manager for Napa Valley Vintners, where he met Jeff Smith.

Jeff and Michael met while developing the Sommelier Napa Valley program, and hit it off right away with their shared zeal for learning and talking about wine, as well as their immense appreciation for balanced and precise, terroir-driven wines. Michael began with Hourglass shortly after, working the harvest in August of 2015 to get a sense of the vineyards' unique characteristics and Tony's winemaking philosophy. In his capacity as National Sales Manager, Michael has used his pedagogic aptitude and management skills to communicate how exceptionally Hourglass wines walk the razor's edge of drama and subtlety.

When Michael is not teaching or tasting, he loves being in the great outdoors skiing, mountain biking, or gardening with his family to put food on the table and revel in the joy of cooking with homegrown produce.