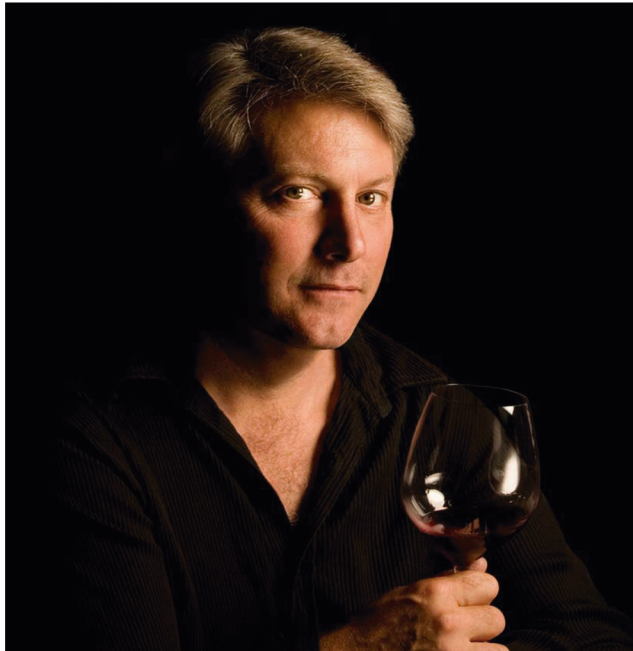


THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



BOB FOLEY ALL IN HIS OWN TIME

Ben Weinberg meets the irrepensible Bob Foley and finds a man still hungry for new challenges, despite his many achievements in California and beyond

On my first trip to Robert Foley Vineyards, I got lost. In my defense, that's an easy thing to do—Foley's place perches near the relatively remote, Seventh Day Adventist-dominated (and alcoholically dry) town of Angwin, which in turn snuggles up to the backside of Howell Mountain in northeastern Napa. In some ways, the location is ideal, sufficiently far from the hustle of Napa Valley yet close enough to drive in for dinner. It's also an absolutely fabulous area for Cabernet Sauvignon, where neighbors include Dunn Vineyards, Ladera Winery, Neal Family Vineyards, and Clark-Gaudoin Vineyards.

Howell Mountain is, however, quite hilly and meandering, with squiggly roads and scrubby forest vying for space with ordered rows of grapevines. For guidance, I had just a few notes jotted on the back of a used envelope and a GPS. But the road seemed to make a lot of extra turns, and my GPS faded in and out. By the time I found the gated entry, I was almost an hour late, as well as hungry, thirsty, and nearly incontinent.

There are several buildings on site, and of course the office was the last one I tried. I pushed through the door and skidded to a stop in the entrance. Catching my breath, I peered into the room beyond and saw the maverick Napa Valley winemaker sitting on the far side of a long, darkly finished oak table. He was surrounded by workers and interns, all of them tucking into a communal plate of sandwiches prepared by the local mega-market.

Foley looked up at me, pointed to my right, and shouted, "Bathroom's down the hall!" Upon my return, he gave me a bottle of water and a turkey sandwich. "Dig in," he enthused. "Plenty for all." It wasn't a great sandwich, but then, he really didn't need to feed me at all.

On my second visit, Foley again offered me a grocery-store sandwich. I wasn't hungry and turned it down, but we had a good time together, anyway. Then there was that third trip, when Kelly Peterson-Holmes, who manages her family's Peterson Family Vineyard (of Switchback Ridge fame), actually made me a sandwich and insisted I take it with me for the long ride to the Sacramento airport.

Naturally I scheduled my fourth trip—the one leading to this article—for just before lunchtime, with visions of roast beef and Cheddar dancing in my head. I arrive punctually, and Foley fidgets while I set up and test my equipment. I nod my readiness. He sits on the opposite side of the darkly finished oak table and leans forward.

"It's been a tough few months," he barks, his steely, hazel eyes flashing. "Both hips replaced—one last November, and the other just a few weeks ago." He points through a nearby window toward a blue scooter parked outside. "Kelly Peterson brought me that contraption so I could get around. Faster than me holding, but still too slow."

I look forlornly at the tabletop. "No sandwiches?" He scowls. "No time. Too much to do!" His intensity rocks me back in my seat. "We all slow down eventually." I say meekly. Foley's eyebrows twitch and the corners of his mouth curl. "That's crap! I'm 63 years old. That's the new 40, right? I redid my hips so that I could run around my vineyards for

another 20 years. By then, my son will be 35 and my daughter 40. Hell, my granddaughter will be 22. Hopefully one or all will want in by then. I hope so. Being happy is the best advertising, that's for sure!"

When I ask what else makes him happy, his voice drops half an octave. "I love music." A broad smile creases his face. "I play guitar and sing with the Robert Foley Band as much as I can. If all original stuff, I write down lyrics and melodies all day long wherever I am, whatever I'm doing." (For the record, the band is actually pretty good. My personal favorites off their album *Paperboy* are "Amber Rose" and "Hands of Time.")

"When you have such musical talents, why are you making wine," I ask. He replies, "In terms of making a living, it was an easy choice. Music is a tough life when you add in the pressure of money."

Foley got his start in wine relatively early in life. "My dad was an engineer, and in 1962, when I was in the third grade, we moved to the East Bay area of San Francisco. After that, I always remember wine as Dad's serious passion. Bill Miller [of Inglenook] lived next door and, a few years later, took me to the winery. At the time, there was no wine tourism, but I loved the atmosphere."

During that visit, Foley tasted Inglenook's 1968 Chardonnay from cask. "It was inky but lovely—so far outside of my experience as to be something completely new. Boom! Just like that, it changed my life." He hurried off to UC Davis and took degrees in enology and viticulture. After graduation, he worked for Joe Heitz and, in 1978, was part of the group that started Markham Vineyards in Napa.

In 1992 Foley helped Jim Pride create Pride Mountain Vineyards. Then, in quick succession, he was instrumental in the founding of Paloma (1994), his own Robert Foley Vineyards (1998), Hourglass and Switchback Ridge (1999), and Eagle Family Winery (2000).

Don Lagson Atlas Peak, sourced from a single vineyard owned by Tom and Mary Dinkel, is one of his newest ventures. (Foley projects there will be around 100 cases of the inaugural 2007 vintage Cabernet Sauvignon.) Another is Red Hook Winery on Long Island, New York, where Foley works with Ale Schoener and Steve Mathiesen and consults with the resident winemaker. "We're applying California techniques to Long Island vineyards, which is exciting. I'm learning so much, but since they're not paying me, I guess we're even."

Foley rubs the nape of his neck. "I get asked to do a lot of projects, but I'm very careful in what I take on. I don't agree to any deals where I can't be out in the vineyards as much as I want and need to be." His wife Kelly (the subject of Paperboy's track 6, Kelly's Jacket) helps out where needed, as do Hector Lopez, Foley's vineyard manager, and the aforementioned Kelly Peterson of Switchback Ridge.

So many wineries
Switchback Ridge was a typical winery project for someone like Foley. He met John Peterson in 1993 at Cornell (now Frank Family Vineyards). They struck up a conversation in

As for Hourglass, in 1992 Dr Mark Kliever, dean of viticulture at UC Davis, told proprietor Jeff Smith that his hill could be one of the premier Cabernet Sauvignon sites in Napa. He explained that the valley is shaped like an hourglass, and Smith's site defines the narrowest point in an area known for stellar Cabernet (neighbors include Grace Family, Colgin's Tychson Hill, Duckhorn, and Vineyard 29). Smith enlisted the help of family friend and fellow bandmate Foley, and annual production now hovers near 1,000 cases, with a new winery in Calistoga recently completed.

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