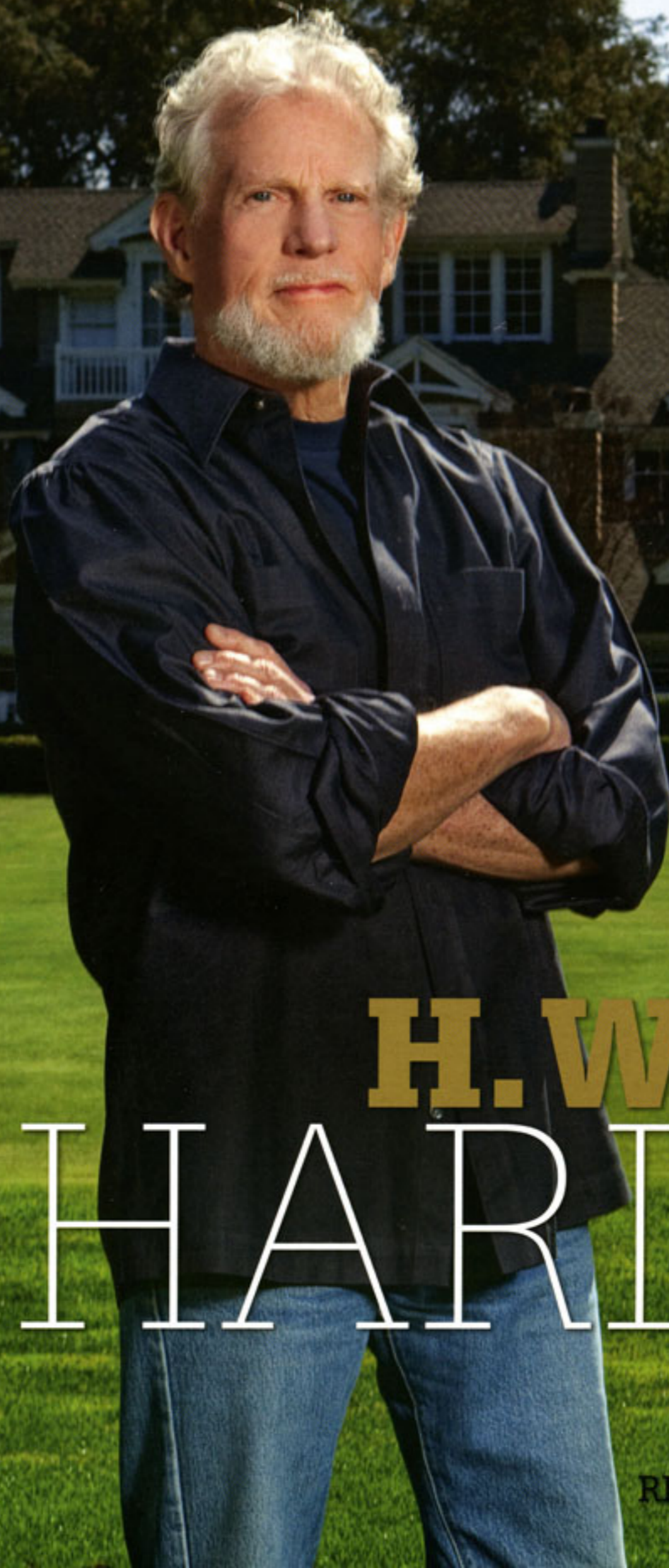


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# H. William

# HARLAN

THE VISIONARY MAN BEHIND MEADOWOOD, THE NAPA VALLEY RESERVE, HARLAN ESTATE AND BOND ESTATES



H. WILLIAM HARLAN ON  
THE ICONIC CROQUET  
LAWNS AT MEADOWOOD  
NAPA VALLEY

# The Power of Three

By Stephanie Wilson

## HOW H. WILLIAM HARLAN HAS CHANGED THE NAPA VALLEY LANDSCAPE

**W**ho is H. William “Bill” Harlan? Ask a wine aficionado, and the reply would be that he is the man behind Harlan Estate, a premier first-growth winery in Napa Valley that has achieved a celebrated status, as well as BOND Estates, a collection of five grand cru quality Cabernet Sauvignon wines that individually represent the best terroirs in the region. Ask someone in the hospitality industry, and the response might be that he is the visionary behind Meadowood Napa Valley, a legendary destination for discerning travelers to the region. Ask someone from the Napa Valley Vintners, and he or she will extol on Harlan’s generous community spirit for providing Meadowood Napa Valley as the host venue for the association’s annual fundraiser every year of its 30-year history, helping keep Auction Napa Valley the most successful charity wine auction in the world. *Food & Wine* called him a philosopher. Wine critic Robert Parker labeled him a “perfectionist,” and rewarded more than a few vintages of Harlan Estate with a perfect score of 100. To his partners and employees, he is a visionary leader. But what about when you ask Bill himself?

The first thing he would say is that the levels of success he has achieved across varying industries would not have been possible without his partners, associates, staff members, and the support of his family. This alone speaks volumes about his character. He is as inspiring as he is humble. He is a philosophic man of many words who also knows the importance of listening. He is an intuitive idea man who has the judgment to put together teams of likeminded individuals to execute a shared vision, not merely for his benefit but for the benefit of the community, the team, the world. And he himself is an executor, a catalyst for change. He is a self-professed man of dreams. And the Napa Valley landscape has been immeasurably impacted by these dreams.

Harlan’s winding career path can be compared to a grapevine in

one of his vineyards in Napa Valley. It has grown and evolved over the years while becoming firmly rooted in the land, tended to by the labors of others who believed that the final result would be worth their toils, and the fruits of their labors have allowed the region to flourish in untold ways.

But his success—in real estate, in hospitality, in winemaking, in life—is due to the fact that Harlan follows a certain set of rules that have shaped his decisions. A running theme seems to be the power of three: three original dreams, three various industries, three rules to maintaining a successful business that will stand the test of time, and three generations who share in his vision. As evidenced by the gamut of industries upon which he has left his indelible mark, we all can learn from these lessons.



THE HOSPITALITY  
BARN AT THE NAPA  
VALLEY RESERVE



EAST BARN AND BOCCE  
COURTS AT THE NAPA  
VALLEY RESERVE

## Life lesson No. 1

**DON'T OVER-THINK YOUR DECISIONS. IF WE ONLY DID THINGS THAT WERE TOTALLY RATIONAL AND LOGICAL WHEN WE WENT INTO THEM, WE WOULDN'T FOLLOW TOO MANY DREAMS.**

Harlan didn't grow up in the wine business. The Southern California native came to the Bay Area to attend the University of California at Berkeley, and first went to Napa Valley in the late 1950s for the same reason many college students today head to Canada or Mexico—it was a student-budget-friendly place where he and his friends would be served without charge and without ID. As such, he found it a great spot to entertain a co-ed. He began to frequent the area and it wasn't long before his passion for wine and for Napa Valley in general was ignited.

"In 1966, I came to the opening of the Robert Mondavi Winery," he recalls. "At the time, the main wineries in Napa Valley had been built in the late 1800s. So when Bob Mondavi started his brand-new winery, it wasn't of inconsequence. It was a new look for Napa Valley." This progression implanted the dream of creating a winery of his own in Harlan's mind.

Such an aspiration may not have been the most logical goal for someone with no experience in the wine business who had earned a degree in communications and public policy. Nonetheless, it was during that time that the winery mission began to take form. Harlan also had two additional dreams: to get a sailboat and sail around the world, and, one day, to get married and have a family. As time has told, Harlan is nothing if not a dreamer whose plans become actualized, no matter how grandiose they may seem at conception.

After graduation, Harlan spent a decade of "adventure" seeing the world. By the early 1970s, he began to plow a path in real estate, and in 1974, he and a few friends partnered to form a real estate development company, Pacific Union. "At that time, there were three things we felt were important: one was to make money, one was to make a difference, and the third was to have fun." The reasoning paid off and the real estate success provided Harlan with the means to manifest his other dreams.

In 1975, he traded a dozen parcels of land for a sailboat and sailed around the world off and on for almost the next 20 years. In fact, he lived on boats until his mid-40s when he could still fit most of his possessions in his car.

He continually trekked to Napa Valley in search of the perfect land on which to launch his wine mission. In 1979, his quest brought him to Meadowood Napa Valley, a small private country club in St. Helena founded in 1964. The 250-acre site was, as it is today, breathtakingly beautiful and natural, embodying the essence of northern California. While Harlan instinctively knew it wasn't the right property for his vineyard, he felt it too special not to pursue. "There are certain things that intuitively seem like the right thing to do," he says. "When I drove onto that property, it had a great feeling. You can't create a feeling like that. A place just has it or it doesn't. It's very rare to come across something

that gives such a magical impression." Acquiring it seemed like the right decision. Within 48 hours of first seeing the property, Harlan had entered into an agreement to purchase the property.

"I realized then that Napa Valley was about agriculture and about making wine," he says. "But it was also about visitors. One can grow the grapes and make fine wine, but if the consumer doesn't know about it, you won't be doing it for long!" Before travelers would be enticed to Napa Valley, word about the revitalization of the region had to spread beyond northern California. "There was a need to draw people to Napa Valley who had a certain appreciation for fine wine and who would respect the Valley for what it was," Harlan continues. "And, to accomplish this, there needed to be somewhere for these guests to stay, preferably a place where they could learn about wine and experience the natural beauty that we have here in Napa Valley." Thus, a collection of guest rooms and cottages was added to the Meadowood property.

**T**he timing was spot on, as the world was learning more about the incredible wines that were coming from the region. With insightful vintners like Robert Mondavi and others, Napa Valley was now entering the world stage for fine winemaking. Robert Mondavi brought the idea of hosting a wine auction that would amplify this emerging reputation of Napa Valley's quality wines and raise money for local health care needs. In tandem, the renown of the region's wines steadily grew along with the success of the charity wine auction, which has now become the wine industry's must-attend event each June. To date Auction Napa Valley has contributed \$90 million to scores of health care organizations, adding youth service and affordable housing non-profit programs a dozen years ago, and is now the world's most successful charity wine auction.

"Meadowood has had three goals since day one," Harlan states. "Number one, continue to be a gathering place for the local community. Number two, to be a common ground for the Napa Valley Vintners. And number three, to be one of the finest country resorts in the world, focused on food and Napa Valley wines."

Harlan also felt that while Napa Valley might become a tourist destination, it needed to be an authentic one, one that would remain grounded in its agricultural roots. It also had to remain true to its original character. To this end, a private membership program is still in place at Meadowood, and some 800 families enjoy its benefits.

Today, the rooms and cottages, built along the rolling hills above the fairways, offer rustically elegant accommodations—fit settings for enjoying a glass of Napa Valley's finest while sitting on the deck watching groups of wild turkeys and deer walk past. Miles of hiking trails meander throughout the surrounding hills and grounds, where a health spa and croquet lawns joined the upgraded tennis courts and golf course. To manage all of these aspects, a team of professionals was assembled

to execute the original vision of the ideal retreat in which to experience the traditional essence of Napa Valley.

At the root of that experience is, of course, the wine. Director of Wine & Cuisine Patrick Davila, Master Sommelier Gilles de Chambure, and Restaurant Sommelier Rom Toulon lead the property's wine program, which includes nightly tastings, wine appreciation seminars, an extensive Napa Valley wine list, and guided area winery visits. "Meadowood is a common ground for the Napa Valley Vintners, a destination for wine enthusiasts and collectors, and club where many of our local vintners and growers come to relax and spend time with their families and to socialize with friends," says Harlan. With prominent vintners and growers coming and going from the property each day, it's easy to understand why the professional team's commitment to exceptional wine experiences for guests and members alike is unwavering.

Of course, fine wine and fine food go hand-in-hand, and the dishes that come out of Chef Christopher Kostow's kitchen at The Restaurant at Meadowood showcase the region's bounty, simultaneously blending tradition with innovation. In his two short years at Meadowood, Kostow has earned quite the list of accolades—including two Michelin stars (also a testament to the service, which is overseen by Restaurant Director Nathaniel Dorn) and a rare four stars from the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

"Christopher's entrepreneurial vision in the kitchen brought the culinary experience at Meadowood to a level that complements the commitment to excellence in grape growing and winemaking embraced by the Napa Valley Vintners," says Harlan. "Because dining and wine go hand-in-hand, I believe this alignment is very important for us. Over the last four decades, Meadowood has evolved along with the Napa Valley itself. As such, the culinary evolution that's taken place in The Restaurant at Meadowood over the last few years seems very natural to me."

**H**arlan, a lifetime athlete, also wanted to ensure that guests and members of Meadowood would find what he considers integral to a long and healthy life: exercise. While swimming and motor sports figured prominently into Harlan's early years, he later discovered the combined pleasure of fitness and sportsmanship through golf, tennis and...if you know Meadowood, you know what comes next...croquet. Sports innovators at Meadowood include Golf Professional Doug Pike and Tennis Pro Doug King. These resident athletes help members and guests enhance their games, whether on the nine-hole, walking golf course or on one of the seven tennis courts. Croquet Pro Jerry Stark, a member of the American Croquet Hall of Fame, presides over the championship croquet lawns, where players don traditional croquet whites. Stark also leads Meadowood's croquet school, which is lauded as the country's finest full-time teaching facility of the traditional game.

Presiding over Meadowood in its entirety is General Manager Alain Negueloua. The care and keeping of guests on the estate has always been a top priority for Harlan. "I always wanted Meadowood to be reminiscent of the days when people would travel to the country on weekends to stay at

the estates of friends or relatives," Harlan says. "When the guests arrived, their host would greet them, welcome them inside, and make sure everyone had a wonderful time for however long they decided to stay. That's the warm, personal hospitality we always want to convey at Meadowood." There was a time when Harlan was able to spend more time at Meadowood. In fact, for many years he had an office above the reception desk. When he moved to be closer to his wineries, however, he knew he needed someone who would think like an owner, someone who would welcome and get to know the guests. Someone they'd ask for when they returned. After a long search he found this person in Negueloua. "Alain has the passion of an owner," says Harlan, "and the soul of an innkeeper."

## Life lesson No. 2

### RESPECT AND HONOR THE POWER OF NATURE.

While exploring the early idea of Auction Napa Valley, Robert Mondavi assisted with the planning of a five-week scouting trip to Bordeaux and Burgundy. Harlan joined the group traveling to these regions along with Robin Lail and her husband Jon. Along the route, they attended the Hospice de Baune, one of the world's most celebrated charitable wine auctions on which Auction Napa Valley was ultimately modeled. It was on that expedition that Harlan developed a vision to create a "first-growth" of California, even though the term is technically a classification of wines from the celebrated wine region in France.

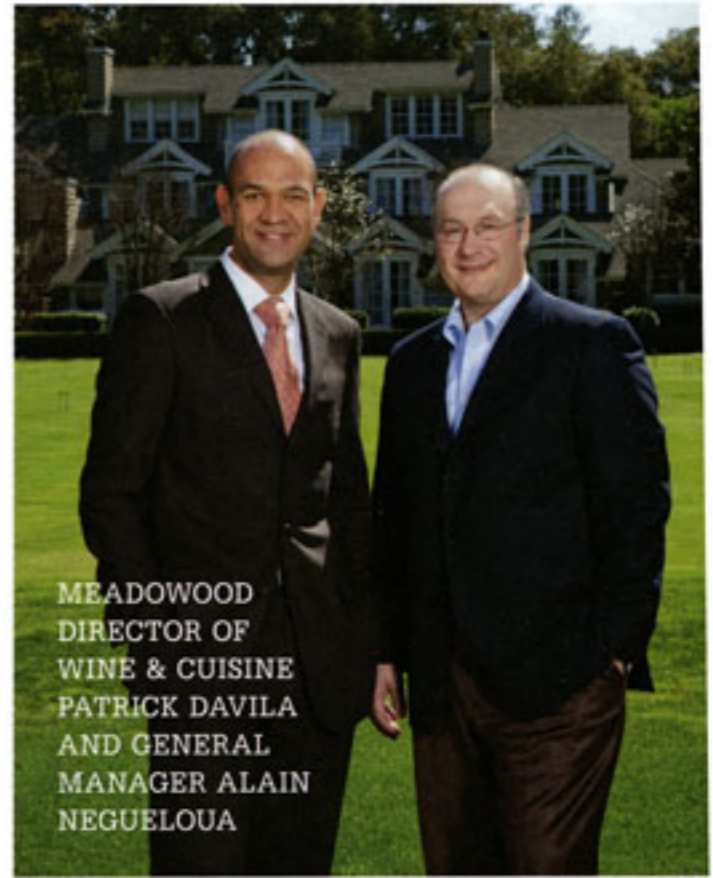
Rather than revitalizing or refurbishing an existing vineyard or winery, he wanted to start from scratch and carve out a vineyard in the hills as opposed to the valley floor as was the current fashion. In 1984, Harlan finally discovered his ideal land—some 240 undeveloped acres in the western hills of Oakville off of Oakville Grade Road. His patience proved to be a virtue, as the land proved to be invaluable when it came to producing fruit of the highest quality. To respect the power of the land and the legacy of the Valley's agricultural reserve, he left nearly 200 acres undeveloped, using 40 acres for the vineyards and winery. "In the end," Harlan says, "it all comes down to the land. Mother Nature makes the difference."

This was a lesson that Harlan fully appreciated when he was fulfilling his sailing dream. "One of the great things about sailing is you recognize the power of nature and the power of the sea," he states. "On the sea, you are on your own. On land you have help, but nevertheless, with fine wine, the land and nature is where our ultimate destiny lies."

By his mid-40s, Harlan's desire to establish a family life led him to Deborah Beck. His living arrangements changed along with his priorities when he married Deborah in 1986. He traded in the boat for a little house on Main Street in downtown St. Helena, and the two started a family.

Harlan's shift in priority to family life timed perfectly with his dream of creating a winegrowing estate. At the onset he looked to three basic principles he felt were factors in the longevity of a winegrowing business: 1) be based on the land; 2) be family owned; and 3) be virtually

H. WILLIAM HARLAN  
ON THE MEADOWOOD  
FAIRWAYS, THE ANNUAL  
SITE FOR AUCTION NAPA  
VALLEY, THE WORLD'S  
MOST SUCCESSFUL CHARITY  
WINE AUCTION



MEADOWOOD  
DIRECTOR OF  
WINE & CUISINE  
PATRICK DAVILA  
AND GENERAL  
MANAGER ALAIN  
NEGUELOUA



MEADOWOOD  
TENNIS PRO  
DOUG KING  
AND GOLF PRO  
DOUG PIKE



THE NAPA VALLEY  
RESERVE'S RANCH  
MANAGER MARK  
GRIFFIN AND  
HEAD GARDENER  
GRETCHEN KIMBALL



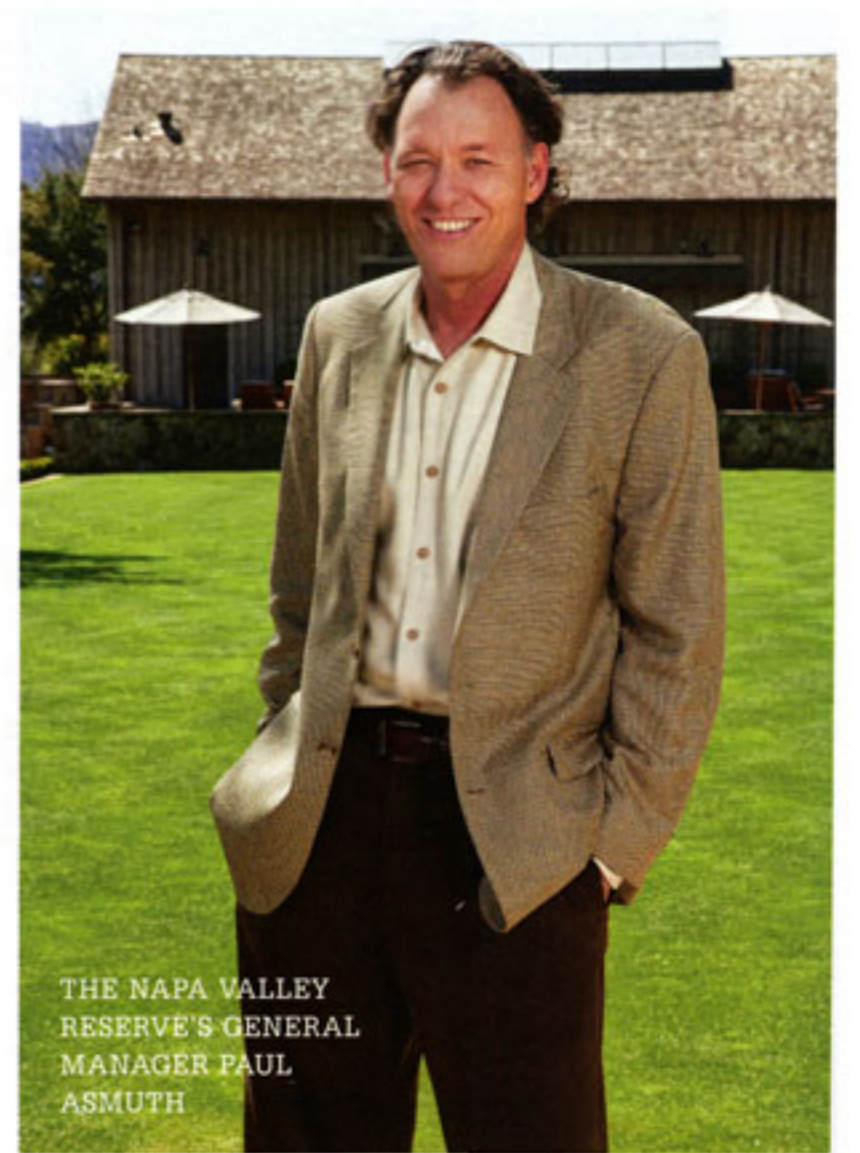
CHEF CHRISTOPHER  
KOSTOW OF THE  
RESTAURANT AT  
MEADOWOOD IN  
GARDENS AT THE  
NAPA VALLEY  
RESERVE



THE NAPA VALLEY RESERVE  
VINEYARDS LOOKING SOUTH  
ON THE ESTATE



THE NAPA VALLEY RESERVE'S  
DIRECTOR PHILIP NORFLEET  
AND MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR  
CAROL NORFLEET



THE NAPA VALLEY  
RESERVE'S GENERAL  
MANAGER PAUL  
ASMUTH

debt-free. Says Harlan, "I believe the most important thing in establishing a family business is to make sure the business is aligned with the family's culture and values. This is the key to passing a business along from one generation to the next."

In this venture, Harlan continually relies on his partners and team, without whom he says he would not have been able to realize this dream. The team includes Director of Winemaking Bob Levy, Harlan Estate Director Don Weaver, BOND Director Paul Roberts, consultant Michel Roland, Winemaker Cory Empting, and Vineyard Manager Mary Maher, whom Harlan says are "the best in the world at what they do."

Creating a winegrowing estate that will last for generations wasn't accomplished overnight. While Harlan Estate is now one of the most respected labels in California (multiple vintages garnered the highest scores from wine critics, and its limited production means that it is only available via a waiting list), it is a labor of love some 26 years in the making. In the early 80s, Harlan wanted to make wine immediately—it had been almost two decades since he first dreamt of doing so. He satisfied that itch at the old Sunny St. Helena Winery originally owned by Robert Mondavi's father. Harlan began sourcing grapes from vineyards throughout the valley and making wine in St. Helena. "Over the next decade or so, we made a lot of varietals, and we made many mistakes," Harlan recalls. "But it enabled us to put together a great team," many of whom are still with him today. Their loyalty and belief in a shared vision is one of the founding reasons for the success of his namesake winery.

His experience sourcing grapes from more than 60 growers throughout the valley over the years resulted in what may be one of the most innovative and inspiring projects in all of Napa Valley: BOND Estates. Harlan and team learned about how geographic diversity influenced terroir and differences in quality and character. Some of these vineyards stood head and shoulders above the rest. They established relationships with a few of the growers with a plan of creating a second winery once Harlan Estate was fully established. Over the years, two more vineyards were added to the portfolio. In one winemaking facility on a hillside that overlooks Harlan Estate vineyards, the winemaker at BOND produces five grand cru quality wines representing the finest of terroirs of the Napa Valley. Harlan's goal is to capture the breadth of expression of the land.

## Life lesson No. 3

### CREATE A LEGACY THAT WILL STAND THE TEST OF TIME.

Even with the resounding success of Meadowood, Harlan Estate, and BOND in place, Harlan won't rest on his laurels. In 2001, along with his Meadowood partners, Harlan acquired the land that lies between the Napa River and the entrance to Meadowood and founded The Napa Valley Reserve, a private estate that allows members to experience the joys of the winemaking culture and community from an insider's perspective. Through The Reserve, Harlan is able to share his passion for growing grapes and making wine. "Second to raising our family, there has

been nothing that has given me more pleasure," he states. "What I would like to do is give other people the same sense of satisfaction without all the responsibilities of owning a vineyard and winery."

Members are supported by a team that includes Director Philip Norfleet, Membership Director Carol Norfleet and General Manager Paul Asmuth. It is yet another one of Harlan's ventures that employs family values and is based on the land. "Nature is an intrinsic part, a vital part, of our experience here at The Reserve," Norfleet says. "We often find two or three generations of a family enjoying the estate.

"Our goal is to create an experience for our members that's representative of the one they would have if they owned their own wine estates," Norfleet continues. Production activities through the seasons include harvest, pruning, blending, label design, and bottling. But, at The Reserve, members have the luxury of participating in as much or as little of this process as their schedules permit. In addition to production, the club's programs afford members the opportunity to enhance their understanding and enjoyment of wine through tastings, special events, food and wine pairing meals, expert speakers and, most of all, by sharing their wines with friends and family.

**B**eyond merely educating members about the winegrowing process, The Reserve showcases the very best of Napa Valley. Harlan explains, "In this era of technology and communication and all of these things that are going on, it gives a certain balance in our lives to move with the pace of the seasons instead of the speed of a microchip. It's not about having more stuff, it's about meaningful experiences. [The Reserve] is about what *life* is about, and bringing back the things that were so important to our heritage."

Harlan credits many of his successes over the years to his partners. "I've been very fortunate in having partners of great longevity and trust," he says. Harlan's original partners in Meadowood and later The Napa Valley Reserve were with him for more than 25 years. With the retirement of his original partners, Stan Kroenke has taken over their positions. Says Harlan of his new partner (relying once again on the power of three), "Stan brings to us exceptional strategic thought and experience, sound financial support and judgment, and, probably most importantly, trust.

Time and again, Harlan speaks to the importance of heritage, of legacy, of respecting the land and preserving it for the next generation. He is constantly imparting this wisdom not only on his partners and associates, but also on his family—his wife Deborah and their children Will and Amanda, both of whom have been learning the responsibilities and vagaries of agriculture virtually since their births. The family lives in a home tucked away in the hills above the vineyards. Every day, the astounding beauty that their father has worked tirelessly to create over the past five decades greets the young Harlans. One day, it will be up to them to protect and enhance the Napa Valley heritage and the family culture that can flourish for generations. And when that happens, it will be Bill Harlan's biggest dream, realized. ■