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Q&A with Bob Fraser of S.F. Chronicle Wine Competition, Winter WINE-Land

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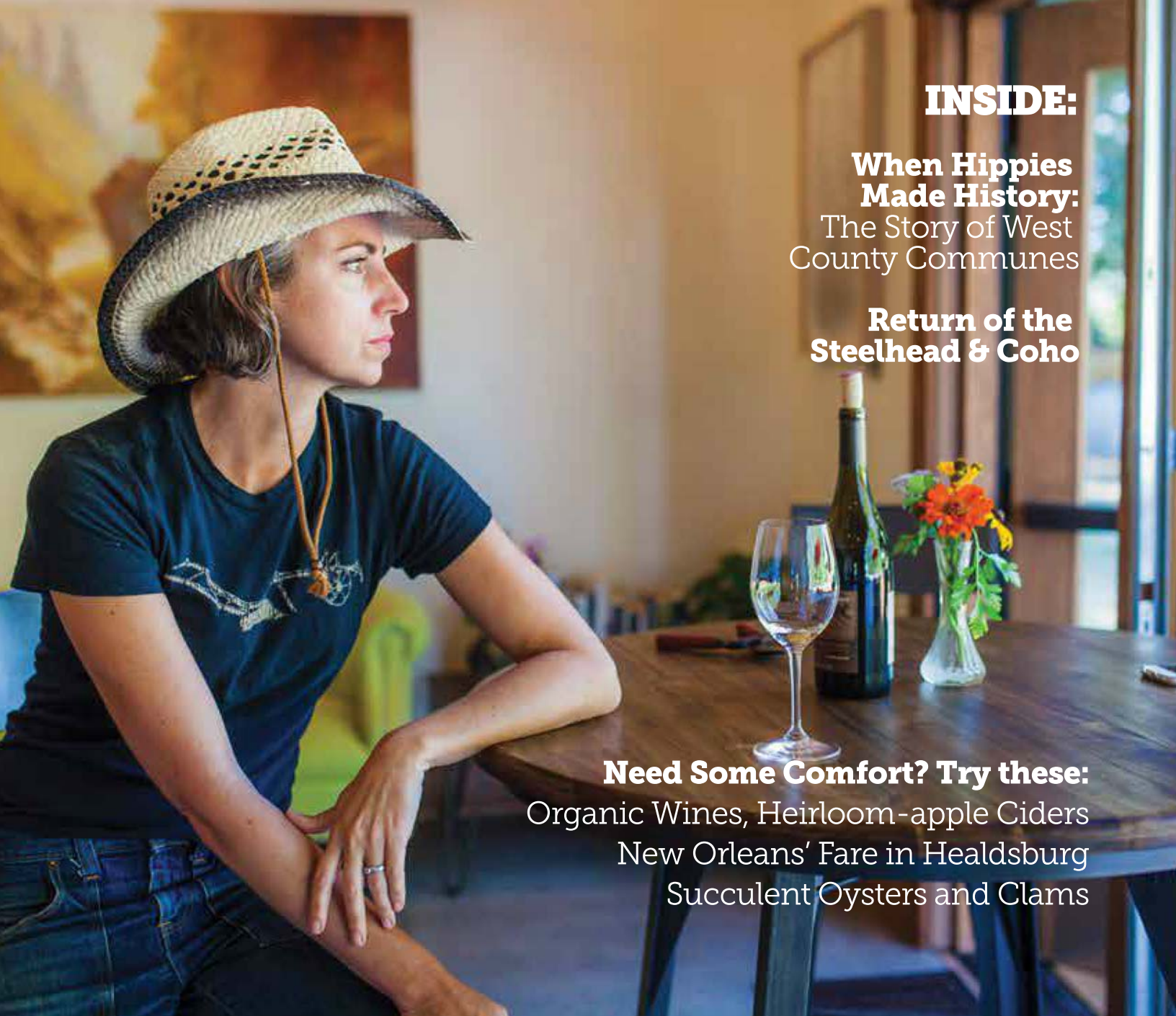
events+

Paws for Love Gala, Chinese New Year, Cloverdale Citrus Fair

\$4.95

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sonoma discoveries



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About Bob Fraser

“Bob Fraser is a leader and a visionary in the wine industry,” Founder/CEO of Wine Channel TV Digital Network Jessica Altieri said. Since 1986, Bob has been the director of the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, the largest competition of American wines in the world. He also coordinates the Lake County Wine Awards Competition in June and the Sonoma County Harvest Fair Wine Competition in September. He received his BS and MS in Agriculture Business Management at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and started a career in agriculture education with stints at King City High School and Kelseyville High School. Following this, he accepted the coordination teaching position of the Agriculture Business Management program at Santa Rosa Junior College. In the late 1980s, Bob formed a new program at Santa Rosa Junior College: the Wine Studies Associate Degree. The program provides students of all ages with a certificate that has become widely recognized in the wine industry. Today, this program has become one of the largest and most prestigious wine studies programs in the country. Bob retired in 2014, but he remains on the staff of the SRJC Wine Studies Program as an adjunct instructor and continues to direct the wine competitions mentioned above. He and his wife, Cary, currently reside in Cloverdale.



Can you paint a “then versus now” picture of the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, to be held at the Cloverdale Citrus Fair?

When it first started in 1983, the original competition—the Cloverdale Citrus Fair—was just a small competition of the northern Sonoma and southern Mendocino counties, with only 45 wines entered from 15 wineries. I first became involved in 1986, just as the event was growing in size and scope, expanding to include more counties in Northern California. Back then, the competition was quite simple, yet with credible and fair wine award results. It was, however, just a regional wine competition, and while its results were respected, it wasn’t a big name yet. Fast forward to now: the San Francisco Chronicle has been the naming sponsor of the competition for 17 years, and now the Cloverdale Citrus Fair event, the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, is the largest competition of American wines in the world. Last year the SFCWC had over 7,000 wine entries from 28 states. Our panel of wine judges draws from some of the most respected names in the industry, and our public tasting has sold out for years, with thousands in attendance.

What excites you most about the event and its growth?

The growth of wine competitions and ours especially is wonderful for wine consumers and trade. With more and more wineries from across the country entering their wines into the SFCWC, we get an increasingly accurate read of what truly are the best wines in America. I love that wine consumers can trust that a SFCWC winner is one they will enjoy; and since we break down our winners by category and price point, it is easy for consumers to find a winner that fits both their budget and taste preferences.

What is the West Coast-style of wine judging that you introduced to the competition, and why is it significant?

The West Coast-style of wine judging is heavily reliant on collaboration and discussion between the judges. After blind tasting the wines, the judges gather to discuss the rating they gave to each wine, and if there is a significant difference in ratings, explain their reasoning. Because our judges come from all areas of the wine industry (including media, trade, education, retail and restaurant/hospitality), they bring different and highly valuable opinions due to their particular

areas of expertise. This style of wine judging is one that we believe results in fair and accurate ratings.

How do you control/seek the ideal temperature to evaluate white wines?

It is quite ideal that we have the competition at the Cloverdale Citrus Fairgrounds in January, as the temperature is pretty close to cellar temperatures. We can regulate the ideal temperature of the wines by increasing the heat in the facility to get to the ideal temperature for the wines.

What trends in winemaking stand out? Anything we should be looking for in 2017?

There are a couple trends outside of the continued popularity of Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. The rosé category has staged a comeback in the last few years with the wines becoming much drier in residual sugar. Also, there is a huge increase of blended red wines, outside of the traditional Bordeaux blend. We actually broke up our “all red blends category” into categories like Cabernet-based red blend, Syrah-based red blend, Zinfandel-based red blend, etc. This will give the judge and ultimate consumer a guide to the ingredients within the red blend being evaluated.

What are the most important qualities in a wine competition judge?

Our wine judges must have strong wine expertise in their respective field and an exceptional wine palate. We strive to pick the strongest of the professional judges from major wine regions throughout the country to give us geographic diversity on our wine panels. In the last few years, we had judges representing New York, Virginia, Illinois, Texas, Washington, Oregon, Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, and many others. Ultimately, they must be qualified, easy to work with, and excited to collaborate with the other judges. I respect our wine judges—they’re intelligent, talented people who are really passionate about wine. That’s what we look for in a wine judge for the SFCWC.

Tell us about the program you formed at Santa Rosa Junior College in the late 1980s and how it has grown.

We formed the first stand-alone Wine Studies Program in the country with students able to major or obtain a certificate

in Wine Studies. It enables students to either enter the wine industry or to attain further skills to utilize for upward mobility within the workplace. With the tremendous help of our Agriculture Trust Foundation group, we were able to construct the Shone Farm Winery within the Warren G. Dutton facility at the Santa Rosa Junior College school farm in Forestville.

What inspires you in your work overseeing judging at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair?

It has always been a priority of the Santa Rosa Junior College Agriculture Department for the instructors to volunteer and get involved with the local industry and community. So, working with the Harvest Fair Board and management staff, putting on the Sonoma County Harvest Fair Wine Competition has been very gratifying for me.

You grew up on your family’s farm on the Sacramento Delta. What was your role on the farm, and how did this experience influence you?

I was heavily influenced by my grandfather and father, with their hard work ethic and honest living. Obviously, as a farm kid, I started work irrigating and driving tractors at age 12. I then progressed toward heavy equipment, grain combines, and swathing/baling hay. Finally, my father told me to get off the farm and get some different experiences as a college student. I was upset at first, but found out that working with other employers was the best advice and guidance my father gave me.

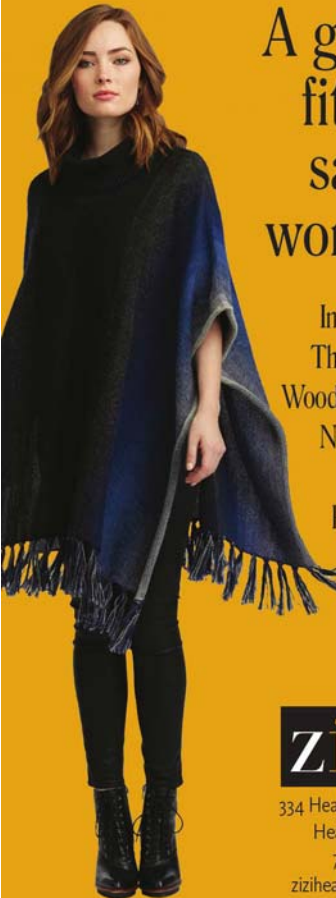
What do you like most about living in Cloverdale?

I love the small town atmosphere and the opportunity to get involved with the community. My children were able to get involved with sports, cheerleading, FHA-HERO, and other extra-curricular activities which may not have been possible at larger schools. **SD**

RESOURCES:

Cloverdale Citrus Fair
February 17-20, 2017
cloverdalecitrusfair.org

San Francisco Wine Chronicle Wine Competition Public Tasting
February 18, 2017
winejudging.com



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