

Insider health

NATURAL PROGRESSION

Even by local standards, the group of culinary luminaries coming to town at the end of July is unusually health-minded. Dan Barber of Blue Hill at Stone Barns in New York, Bradley Ogden of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Terry Conlan from Lake Austin Spa Resort in Texas, and more are coming here for the first annual Aspen Healthy Gourmet Fest July 29 and 30, presented by the Aspen Center for Integrative Health. Among the group is **Jim Fetzer**, who helped build California's Fetzer Vineyards into an industry leader and now runs Ceàgo Vinegarden, which produces organic and supremely ecosystem-conscious biodynamic wines. Fetzer (along with The Little Nell's Richard Betts) is leading two tasting seminars of organic and biodynamic wines on July 29. **Tom Passavant** talked to him at his headquarters in Clear Lake, California.

We understand you're as passionate about skiing as you are about wine-making. When we started Ceàgo, I told [my staff] that I get to make sales calls in all the ski areas. I ski in Aspen with my friend Michael Mercier, who has a home there, and I'm also a passionate heli-skier.

How long have you been farming organically? I started Fetzer with my brothers and sisters in 1968, and the vineyards there went organic in '84. Ceàgo began in '99 and is totally biodynamic.

What's the difference between organic and biodynamic grape growing?

Biodynamic farming was started in the 1920s by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian scientist. Essentially, you look at your farm holistically and pay attention to the forces of life, including the tides, the phases of the moon, etc. It means working with nature, not fighting it.

How many wineries are biodynamic today? Some of Europe's best winemakers have been biodynamic for decades. Today they include Le Domaine Leflaive, M. Chapoutier, Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Domaine Leroy, and the man who really inspired me, Nicolas Joly of Coulée de Serrant. In America, Araujo Estate, Robert Sinskey Vineyards, Benziger Family



The Lay of the Land: Jim Fetzer amid his biodynamic vineyards at Ceàgo Vinegarden in California

Winery, and Frog's Leap, among others, are making biodynamic wines. Return to Terroir, a group founded by Joly, includes 80-some wineries around the world, many of them biodynamic.

Why are some organic and biodynamic wines not labeled as such? Some winemakers don't want to be put in the "organic" section of the wine store.

What is so special or distinctive about biodynamic wines? They let you explore how the grape tastes, not how oak tastes. In other words, they are a true expression of the *terroir*. Aspen Center for Integrative Health, 920-2957 x 2, www.aspennewmed.org.