

Fetzer builds big in Lake



Jim Fetzer has purchased the old Barnes Yard between Nice and Lucerne on the northeast side of Clear Lake and is converting some of the land to grapes and some to olives. He plans to run a winery center on the land, which has waterfront acreage.

NEW FETZER PROJECTS

Ceago del Lago

\$6 million wine and agriculture center being developed by Jim Fetzer on the north shore of Clear Lake.

Saracina Vineyards

New Mendocino County estate winery created by John Fetzer and wife, Patricia. Features massive wine cave in hill near Hopland.

Jeriko Vineyards

Dan Fetzer has invested at least \$2 million in his Hopland estate winery, including new tasting room and vineyard plantings.

"Mendocino Gold"

New chardonnay brand being promoted by a partnership that includes Joe Fetzer and Tiburon beer magnate Bernard Orsi.

\$6 million Copia-like center part of new Lake, Mendocino projects by family

NICE

Vintner Jim Fetzer calls his pet project "Ceago del Lago," a stunning, Copia-like food and wine center rising on the northshore of Clear Lake.

The \$6 million development is the talk of Lake County, as an early California village complete with swaying palm trees emerges amid 270 acres of new vineyards and groves of walnut, olive and fig trees.

But Ceago del Lago is only one of a series of new wine-making ventures for six Fetzer brothers and their families in Mendocino and Lake counties. They're spending a minimum of \$12 million, heralding a return to the world of wine-making after being freed of no-competition clauses signed 10 years ago at the sale of the family-owned Fetzer Vineyards.

Besides Ceago, the projects include two new boutique Mendocino County wineries to showcase estate-bottled wines crafted from organically grown grapes, and a massive wine cave near Hopland where a 140-foot-long tunnel leads to a circular



Dan Fetzer checks out organic grapes at his Jeriko vineyard and winery, just north of Hopland.

tasting room.

In addition, some family members, led by brother Joe Fetzer, have formed a partnership with Tiburon beer magnate Bernard Orsi to launch "Mendocino Gold," a medium-priced chardonnay wine that they hope will rival the successes of popular chardonnays from Kendall-Jackson and Fetzer Vineyards.

The new Fetzer spending spree is being lauded by local wine leaders, who believe the family's ambitious ventures will help solidify the Mendocino-Lake region as one of the state's premium wine producers.

"The Fetzers are known for

making things happen," said John Enquist of the Mendocino Winegrowers Alliance.

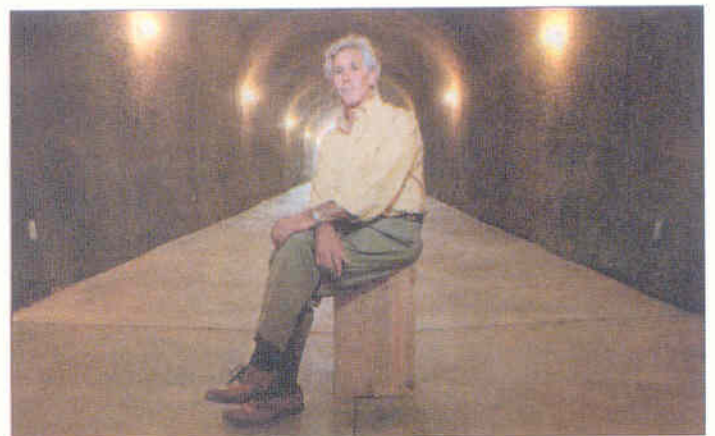
Enquist said just as Fetzer Vineyards, now owned by Kentucky-based liquor conglomerate Brown-Forman, helped put Mendocino County on the nation's wine map in the 1980s, the new Fetzer ventures promise to reenergize the local wine grape industry.

"The Fetzers like doing the best that can be done. That's an

attitude that benefits every winery and grower in the region," Enquist said.

Lake County leaders are ecstatic about Jim Fetzer's Ceago del Lago, which is being viewed as a potential windfall to a county that has long struggled with economic development.

"Ceago is a first-class development. There's nothing like it in our region. It's everything a community would want, and then some," Lake County Supervisor



John Fetzer, eldest of the Fetzer brothers, built a wine cave north of Hopland, the first in Mendocino County, where he will age his Saracina Vineyards wines.

FETZER: Brothers embark on series of wine-based ventures

Gary Lewis said.

The Fetzer project already has brought a much-needed cash infusion to his shoreline supervisory district, Lewis said, along with new jobs.

"Overall, it's going to enhance our county's wine industry, and that in turn will create more jobs. We need the economic diversity that this project provides," Lewis said.

Ceago del Lago – the name is derived from a Pomo Indian word meaning "grass seed valley" – is planned as the showpiece of Jim Fetzer's 2-year-old Ceago Vineyard winery and is the most ambitious of the family undertakings.

Situated along two miles of shoreline between Nice and Lucerne, Ceago del Lago, when finished next year, will feature the largest commercial pier on the lake open to visitors.

The pier will lead to a cluster of tile-roofed buildings, built around two large courtyards and housing a dining area, a tasting room, a barrel room, a recycling area and equipment sheds. Jim Fetzer calls it a "farm center," where visitors will be able to learn up close what it takes to bring agricultural bounty to the table.

Fetzer said he chose Lake County for his food and wine center because of the county's maturing wine industry and to tap the heavy volume of tourist traffic between the Sacramento area and the Mendocino Coast.

Fetzer and other family members, who built Fetzer Vineyards into a 2.2-million-case winery before selling it in 1992 for a reported \$82 million, are focusing on organic farming practices to carve out a new niche in a fiercely competitive wine market.

The number of wine grape growers registered with the state as organic has tripled in the past four years, but none have embraced the concept more eagerly than the Fetzers.

"Organic wines are the future. We've been saying that for at least 15 years," said John Fetzer, former CEO of Fetzer Vineyards.

Under Fetzer family

FETZER FAMILY TIMELINE

1958: lumber executive Barney Fetzer and wife, Kathleen, buy a rundown 720-acre ranch in Redwood Valley.

1959: Barney Fetzer and sons begin to revitalize ranch's 80-acre vineyard. Son John converts old sheep barn into a small winery.

1968: Fetzer Vineyards releases its first commercial vintage, 25,000 cases of red table wine.

1977: Paul Dolan, current president of Fetzer Vineyards, is hired by family as winemaker.

1981: Fetzers buy 1,130-acre Sundial Ranch near Hopland. Barney Fetzer dies unexpectedly of a heart attack.

1984: Family buys Valley Oaks Ranch, a mile east of

Hopland, transforming it into a food and wine center for entertaining and educating the wine trade.

1988: Fetzer Vineyards named "Winery of the Year" by Wine & Spirits magazine, winning the designation nine times out of the next dozen years.

1990: Famed Sonoma County chef John Ash named culinary director for Fetzer Vineyards.

1991: Fetzer Vineyards launches Bonterra Wines, produced from 100 percent organically grown grapes.

1992: Kentucky-based Brown-Fonnan Corp. buys Fetzer Vineyards for reported \$82 million. Production by then was 2.2 million cases a year.

ownership, Fetzer Vineyards launched a line of organic wines called Bonterra in 1990. Today, Bonterra sells 155,000 cases of organic wines annually.

For John Fetzer, the eldest of the Fetzer brothers, the new round of family investments reflects a belief in the region's wine future despite sagging prices and a current statewide grape glut.

He said he decided to focus on high-end estate wines crafted exclusively from grapes grown in his pesticide-free vineyards north of Hopland.

For their new "Saracina Vineyard" label, John Fetzer and his wife, Patricia, have turned to noted winemaker David Ramey, who's earned a national reputation for crafting estate wines for Napa Valley's Rudd Estate and Sonoma County's Simi, Chalk Hill and Matanzas Creek wineries.

"With David Ramey's help, we will within a few years be producing 5,000 cases of world-class wines made with organically farmed Mendocino grapes," John Fetzer said. Saracina Vineyard just issued its first release: 530 cases

of sauvignon blanc.

Fetzer said that for the past five years he's focused on tasting sauvignon blanc wines from around the world to better define the kind of wine he wanted to be bottled and sold by Saracina Vineyards.

Saracina wines are being aged in a massive cave Fetzer blasted out of a rocky hillside along Highway 101 near his Hopland ranch. The wine cave is a first for Mendocino County.

At a ranch adjoining John Fetzer's Saracina wine estate, brother Dan Fetzer is building a winery and tasting room for his certified organic Jeriko Vineyards. In all, Dan Fetzer said he's invested more than \$2 million in the Jeriko venture, including replanting of surrounding vineyards.

When Jeriko's tasting room opens to visitors in the spring, visitors will sample wines that Dan Fetzer believes represents the county's future.

"Mendocino County can carve out a niche for itself by producing high-quality wines



crafted from pesticide-free vineyards. There's no doubt in my mind that consumers are moving in that direction," he said.

As it is, Dan Fetzer is bucking a statewide grape glut by exporting up to 90 percent of his wine grape juice to European wine producers.

"Organic wines are big in Europe. At this point, wine-makers can't keep up with the demand, so they've turned to a small number of organic grape growers around the world for additional supplies," Dan Fetzer said.

Jim Fetzer and brother Bob together manage Kathleen's Vineyard, a 65-acre tract of grapes that is the site of the original "home ranch" in Redwood Valley. Both Kathleen's Vineyard and Fetzer's McNab Ranch are certified "biodynamic," which is an intense organic farming method first introduced in the 1920s by Waldorf School founder Rudolf Steiner.

Under the concept, crops are nurtured by organic compost, rotation, and beneficial insects and plants, instead of herbicides, pesticides and synthetic fertilizers.

Besides Kathleen's Vineyard, Bob Fetzer has extensive investments with brother Richard in other Redwood Valley vineyards. Most recently, Bob Fetzer and his wife, Sheila, acquired thousands of acres of ranch and timberland in remote Round Valley.

"We're spread all around these days, but the home ranch is the place that still connects all of us. Our mother lives there in the old house, and we used the former Fetzer Vineyard winery buildings to serve our individual wine-making ventures," John Fetzer said.