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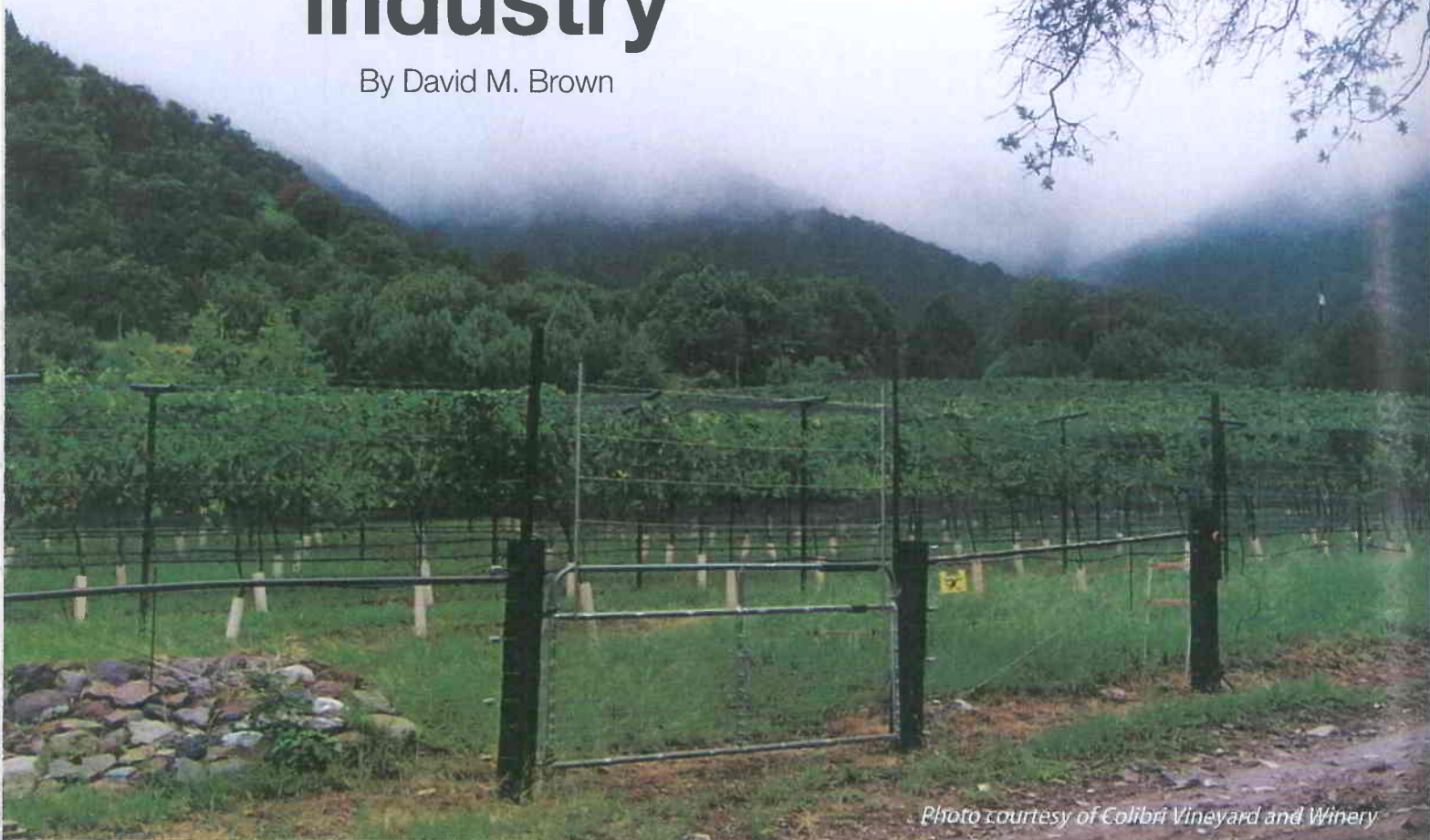
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# AZ wines and vines: A true **GROWTH** industry

By David M. Brown



*Photo courtesy of Colibri Vineyard and Winery*

The Arizona wine industry is blossoming. While no sober observer suggests that tourists are destination planning their vacations to the Grand Canyon State for its vineyards, wine lovers, amateur and professional, acknowledge that the state's 20 or so working vineyards are producing better and better wines every year. It's not Napa, but it's not Nome, either.

"The industry is growing pretty rapidly; we see more interest than ever from consumers and those interested in getting into the industry," said Todd Bostock, owner of Dos Cabezas Winery in Kansas Settlement, a farming community about 10 miles from Willcox in southeastern Arizona's Cochise County.

"There are more and more high-profile people committing to Arizona every year," added Bostock, whose winery produces a boutique-level 2,500 to 3,500 cases a year.

Bostock, his wife, Kelly, and his parents, Frank and Paula, purchased the Dos Cabezas Winery last November, having been winemakers there since 2003. The 80-acre Dos Cabezas Vineyard, now called Arizona Vineyards, is separately owned by another group, including Page Springs Cellars owner Eric Glomski and the lead singer of the rock band Tool, Maynard Keenan. The Bostock family also owns 40 adjacent acres, which they may plant in the future.

The Bostocks, who continue to buy grapes



from Arizona Vineyards, opened a weekend-hours tasting room in Sonoita in nearby Santa Cruz County and are moving the winery there as well as planning to open a café/market this summer, too. The vineyard will remain in Kansas Settlement, and for good reason: One writer called the area a “vinous paradise” because of its sun, water supply and freedom from vine diseases as well as human encroachment.

Bostock, the secretary and former vice president of the 43-member Arizona Wine Growers Association (AWGA), salutes the state’s young industry: “The quality of Arizona wine continues to improve, and we are learning from the early pioneers what varieties work

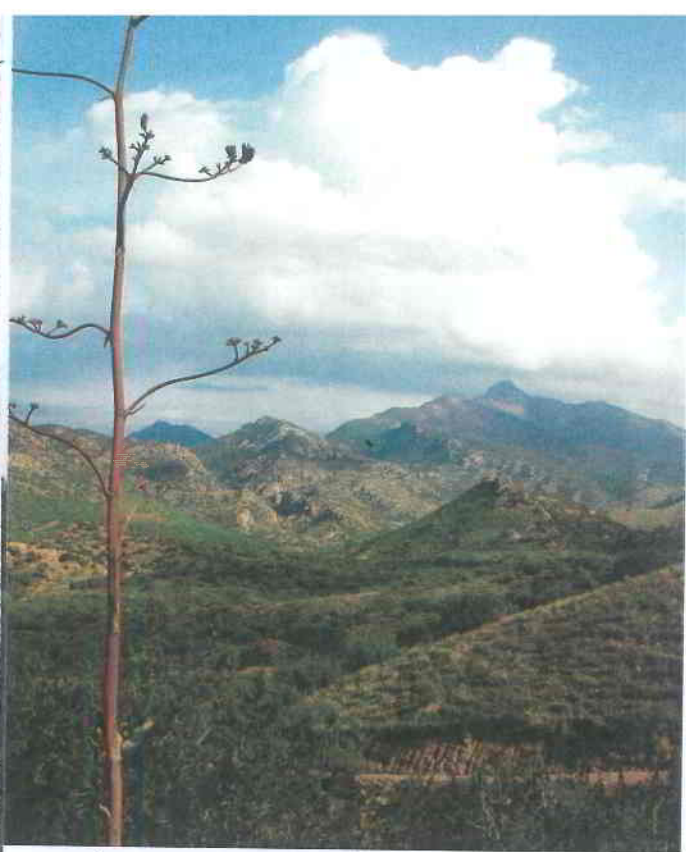
and which ones don’t.”

The Bostocks’ small winery has already won high praise. “Dos Cabezas is producing fantastic wines from petite sirah and a blend of petite sirah and sangiovese,” noted the august Hugh Johnson’s 2002 Wine Guide. Or the equally regarded Robert Parker in the Wine Advocate: “One would never suspect that in Arizona, especially Southern Arizona, not far from the Mexican border...there would be vineyards making wines as interesting and distinctive.”

And, again, Jay Bileti, who, after tasting the 1997 Dos Cabezas petite sirah, called it, in Wine and Cuisine Magazine, “the most intense fruit bomb ever made in Arizona.” The wine, often blended for balance and taste with other varietals such as sangiovese, Mourvèdre and grenache, has been honored in the Southwestern Wine Competition. The 2001 vintage took best red wine in a recent Arizona Governor’s Choice Competition. This year, the vineyard also won a Governor’s Choice award for best Arizona white wine — its 2005 viognier.

Finally, just last year, the family’s pinot gris was served for the second time at the

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*An Elgin vineyard in Santa Cruz County.  
Photo by Susan Ruff*



*Painting courtesy of Fountaine Cellars  
Winery in Bisbee.*

White House for Supreme Court Justice (and Arizona native) Sandra Day O'Connor's retirement party.

## Wines on a mission

The early missions in the state began wine-making four centuries ago, but the actual industry is only about three decades old — not long compared with California's Napa Valley, at more than 150 years, and Old World wine countries such as Germany and France, which have been growing great grapes for centuries.

Most of the vineyards in operation or planning operation are in the southeastern part of the state, as with Dos Cabezas, in Cochise and Santa Cruz counties. Well-known Arizona wineries are there, such as the highly regarded Callaghan Vineyards two miles west of Elgin, owned by Kent Callaghan, immediate past president of AWGA and an Arizona grower for 18 years; the six-acre Keeling-Schaefer Vineyards in Pearce, owned by Jan and Rod Keeling, the latter current AWGA president; Dennis and Melissa Minchella's Kokopelli Winery, which grows grapes for 25 wines on 40 acres in Bonita Springs Valley in Willcox; Sonoita Vineyards, owned by Arizona wine pioneer Gordon Dutt; Arizona Vineyards, which has a tasting room just outside Nogales on the road to Patagonia (Rattlesnake Red is a favorite bottle); and the Village of Elgin Winery.

Still, there are vineyards in other areas of the state — in places that might surprise even experienced palates. Granite Creek Vineyards is in Chino Valley, just north of Prescott, and San Dominique Winery is in Camp Verde. There are five in Cornville, southwest of Sedona in Yavapai County: Glomski's Page Springs Cellars, which produces Rhone-style wines, Echo Canyon Vineyard and Winery, Oak Creek Vineyards and Winery, Javelina Leap and Alcantra Vineyards.

Dale Fountaine's Fountaine Cellars Winery is in Bisbee's historic Brewery Gulch. Industry veteran Victor Winquist is his winemaker, producing about 8,000 bottles a year in the French style, including a cabernet sauvignon

reserve that's achieving some note. And, Leo J. Cox's Charron Vineyards, which outputs about 200 cases annually of white merlot, sits in the high desert just southeast of Tucson, near Vail.

Even southeastern Arizona is a place many would not expect to be the center of the wine industry. Dos Cabezas, for example, is at 4,800 feet, about 20 miles from the Mexican border and 50 miles east of Tombstone and the legendary OK Corral. What makes this area so good for growing? Keeling notes that the average August high temperature of 89 degrees F, with a nighttime low of 58 degrees F, makes for a day-night swing found in all great growing areas. "Most, like Napa, are maritime influence," he noted. "Here, it is the 5,000-foot altitude."

"Who would have thought," noted Le Monde in France, "that one could make wine at 1,800 meters altitude on a plain desiccated by the sun, where cowboys and Indians killed each other 150 years ago?"

Because of these locations, however, Arizona vineyards are great summer and fall-harvest getaways — opportunities to see both the Old West of gunfights and stage coaches and the New West of pioneer vineyards. Out of the low desert areas, these microclimates are more than 20 degrees cooler during the day and often twice that at night. Many have tasting rooms and tours.

For instance, at Jacquie Cook's Coronado Vineyards, less than a mile off Exit 344 of Interstate 10 in Willcox, guests can enjoy a bottle of wine and appetizers, and every third Saturday of each month, they can book wine-paired dinners. Cook also sells Arizona-grown nuts and fruit in her gift shop.

## Old wines and new wines

Arizona vineyards also produce a wide variety of wines — traditional varieties as well as unique brandings. For instance, Coronado Vineyards produces nine different wines: Arizona blush, a semi-sweet wine with a taste of strawberry and raspberry; brut — crisp, clean, bubbly; cabernet sauvignon, which Cook and crew age in French

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oak; chardonnay, with a bouquet of apple and citrus; Cibola gold, a sweet light wine that pairs well with Mexican and Asian cuisine; conquistador red, a sweet red with hints of blackberry and cherry; a Meritage, blended in the Bordeaux style from cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot; a riesling, in the German style with tastes of pineapple and pear; and syrah, the ancient Rhone varietal.

One of Cook's partners, the Eastman family, owns the nearby 520-acre Fort Bowie Vineyards and Orchard Products, which also grows pecan trees, walnut trees, peach trees and sweet cherries. The vineyards provide 10 table wines and one sparkling wine on two wine labels, Fort Bowie Vineyards and Chiricahua Cellars. Besides offering traditional wines such as a Chablis and Burgundy and Chianti, the vineyard produces innovative wines such as Bowie Blush, a fruity semi-sweet wine; Bowie Red, a semi-sweet red; Pecan Delight, a sparkling wine that picks up the pecan taste; and, perhaps the most well-known product, Arizona Sweet Water, a sweet white wine blended with fruit flavors.

In Sonoita, the heart of Arizona's wine-growing industry, the Bostock family also has vines planted at the Pronghorn Vineyard, where they've grown a variety of lesser-known grapes such as tempranillo, petit verdot, marsanne, roussanne, aglianico and touriga nacional. Callaghan plants Mourvèdre, syrah, zinfandel, tempranillo, and his best-known wine is the "Buena Suerte Cuvee" — a Bordeaux-style blend.

In Portal, not too far from Willcox, former medical professional Robert Johnson and Michelle McDonald, M.D., chief medical officer of the Pima County Health Department, own the Colibri Vineyard and Winery, near the 27-million-year-old Chiricahua National Monument and the many world-famous hummingbird sites in the area. "Colibri" means "hummingbird" in many Latin-based languages, Johnson explained, and because 10 species visit Whitetail Canyon, in which the vineyard is located, and the nearby Chiricahuas, they feature different species on their labels.

The couple, with Assistant Winemaker Ania Gorka, produce lesser-known varietals such as two Rhone-style whites: a viognier, medium bodied with a bouquet and flavors of honeysuckle and pears; and a roussanne, a bigger wine with a bouquet of honey and melon flavors. "These wines are emerging in popularity, and they're not like cabernet and chardonnay found on every shelf and store," he noted.

In Elgin, Chris and Sarah Hamilton's 17-

acre Rancho Rossa Vineyards specializes in ultra-premium varietals. He and his first wife, Paula, first planted in May 2002. She died from cancer shortly thereafter, so Chris now donates 10 cents to the American Cancer Society for every bottle sold out of the winery. Susan Ruff, program manager for the Patagonia Area Business Association, calls this "the rock 'n' roll vineyard," as...Chris has a lot of pictures of Hendrix, Clapton [and] the [Grateful] Dead hanging up — many that he took himself."

Rancho Rossa produces a variety of wines, including a casa cuvee, a blend of chardonnay, marsanne and roussanne, which pairs well with baked chicken or grilled halibut. His 2004 syrah won the 2005 Governor's Choice Award for Best Red Wine in the state.

## A sparkling future for Arizona wines

Where are Arizona's wines now? Keeling enumerates: Callaghan Vineyards in Sonoita has been reviewed by Robert Parker 20 times in the last four years. His vineyard has been reviewed in *Le Monde*, and his 2002 syrah won the Jefferson Cup against 4,500 entries across the United States. In addition, Wine Spectator has had many Arizona wines in their rating system during the past 10 years or so, most notably, Dos Cabezas. What's more, Arizona wines from at least three producers have been served at the White House.

The public is also more and more aware of the industry: Arizonans, for instance, enjoyed the first Arizona Wine Festival at the Tempe Festival of the Arts in December, sponsored by the AWGA — the beginning of a tradition, Keeling expects. New wineries are also under development, such as Tim and Joan Mueller's Canelo Hills Vineyard and Winery and Ann Roncone's Lightning Ridge Cellars, both in southeastern Arizona.

Lawmakers, too, are beginning to recognize the importance of the wineeries, noted Dennis Minchella of Kokopelli Winery: "Legislation is favoring small wineries, allowing us to ship wines."

You may ultimately look elsewhere for your wines, but, if you look at Arizona wines, you won't be disappointed either. "As it is now," Dos Cabezas' Bostock said, "I would be shocked if a wine lover from anywhere in the world was unable to find a wine from Arizona that they found enjoyable." ♦

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