

THE GODFATHER OF WINE



WHILE NOT THE GODFATHER OF WINE, PER SE, HOLLYWOOD ENTERTAINMENT MOGUL FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA HAS WORKED DILIGENTLY TO FURTHER WINE COUNTRY'S GLOBAL STARDOM. THIS YEAR, COPPOLA CELEBRATES 31 YEARS IN THE WINE INDUSTRY—AND A NEW WINERY IN SONOMA

He's the creator of *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*, and he has pursued entrepreneurial interests ranging from a publishing venture to adventure resorts in Belize and Guatemala. Francis Ford Coppola, filmmaker, producer, screenwriter, is not your archetypal Hollywood mogul. "These ventures don't represent businesses as much as my restless nature to have fun besides making movies," he says.

Coppola is also a lifelong wine lover, and since 1975, he and his family have called Napa Valley home. Using profits from *The Godfather*, Coppola settled in the Victorian house of Captain Gustave Niebaum on the Inglenook Winery estate, which Niebaum established in 1880. In 1978, he began producing a Bordeaux blend using grapes from the vineyard he owned next to the house. "Since I was studying Roman history at the time, I called the wine Rubicon, after Caesar's 'No Surrender' stand near Rome," he says. Alluding to the auditory value of his decision, the filmmaker smiles and adds, "The name also sounds like 'ruby' or 'red.'"

Coppola dubbed his wine-making company Niebaum-Coppola, acknowledging the role of shipping magnate Niebaum in elevating Napa Valley wines to the international stage with Inglenook vintages. In 1995, Coppola purchased the Inglenook chateau and surrounding vineyards and reopened the winery as Niebaum-Coppola.

In March 2006, Coppola renamed the property Rubicon Estate, after his flagship wine, and at the same time announced the launch of a second winery in Geyserville, on the property that had been home to Chateau Souverain. As much as Coppola loves Rutherford, he says he feels a pull toward Sonoma. "Sonoma is a spectacularly beautiful county, with many treasures," he says. "It reminds me of the innocence of Napa Valley when we first moved there."

The exterior of the new property (which at press time had yet to be named), with its mountain chalet appeal, will remain the same. But Coppola is having his movie production designer completely renovate the interior, creating a dynamic backdrop for the winery and the director's film interests.



COPPOLA, THE WINE MAN

As for his Wine Country pursuits, Coppola readily acknowledges he's not the wine-making expert. When asked about his direct involvement with Rubicon, he targets his real passion: "I'm most involved in the packaging, the presentation, and the labels. Our Captain's Reserve is the only label made of wood on the market. I wanted to associate the wine with an antique compass that Captain Niebaum may have used."

Yet Coppola is well versed in the unique growing conditions of his Rutherford vineyards on the slopes above the Napa River plain. Here, his vines yield outstanding cabernet sauvignon and merlot grapes for Rubicon. Coppola is also acutely aware of the need to build a special team to produce his signature wine. To that end, he leaves the winemaking to Scott McLeod. And in his typically creative, nontraditional style, Coppola tapped a sommelier rather than a winery operation professional to manage Rubicon Estate. Coppola selected Larry Stone, an acclaimed sommelier who has worked at four-star restaurants in Chicago and San Francisco. With a seasoned understanding of what customers seek in world-class wine experiences, Stone manages both the winery operation and guest hospitality.

Rubicon Estate's public areas have housed a mishmash of items reflecting Coppola's interests in art, history, and the written word. Included are historic sailing paraphernalia and furniture belonging to Captain Niebaum, the Tucker car from the eponymous movie, Coppola's Oscars, and a collection of early filmstrip viewers called magic lanterns. Stone will oversee the preservation of Niebaum heritage artifacts at Rubicon Estate, while the personal movie-making memorabilia will be relocated to the Geyserville winery.

DIVERGENT PRODUCTIONS

The two wineries are run as separate businesses: Rubicon Estate is owned privately by the Coppola family; and a new company, Francis Ford Coppola Presents LLC, owns the Geyserville winery and Coppola's other branded products.

Coppola's restless imagination manifests in the unique guest experiences at each winery. Guest visits to Rubicon Estate (which requires a \$25 tasting fee) include five tastes and a general tour of the chateau, museum,

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and winery. For an additional cost, other tours are available, including a private tasting as well as an in-depth look at the wine-making facilities, a vineyard tour, and an introduction to the acclaimed cabernet sauvignon clone 29 grapes used in Rubicon wine.

Coppola's vision for the Geyserville winery comprises a Wine Country tourist destination and a haven for neighbors to relax with their kids. To that end, some of the tastings are free, and kid-centric activities are plentiful. The winery offers an on-site restaurant that emphasizes local ingredients, and during the summer the winery hosts Friday Geyserville Neighbors' Market, featuring local vendors and live music. In addition to the movie memorabilia display, the winery store stocks an eclectic set of Coppola products, from Mammarella pasta to his favorite brands of pencils and journals.

The wines sold at the properties are unique too. Coppola is intensely proud—and knowledgeable—about his flagship Rubicon wine, which sells for \$110 a bottle and has the faint aroma of violets, a special characteristic imparted by the Rutherford land and climate. "Our team upholds the heritage, tradition, and culture of California winemaking," he says. "We make the wine in the exact winery so the gravity flow is gentle to the grapes—in the same way it was made 150 years ago."

At the Rubicon Estate tasting room, you can purchase Rubicon; Captain's Reserve; Blancaneaux, a white Rhône blend from estate vineyards; and several other estate varietals, including Edizione Pennino Zinfandel, named in tribute to Coppola's maternal grandfather.

At the Geyserville winery, you'll find limited quantities of Skywalker Ranch Chardonnay, made from Marin County grapes in collaboration with George Lucas. Or you can buy the sparkling wine named for Coppola's daughter, Sofia, and sold in cans. Coppola's value wines include his Diamond label line, which sells for about \$15 per bottle. And of course you can find the first wine to be produced in Geyserville—the Francis Coppola Diamond Collection



Entrance to Rubicon

Black Label Claret 2004. Reflecting his commitment to Sonoma, Coppola released his first Sonoma Russian River Valley appellation wine, FC Reserve Viognier, last summer. It is available only at the winery and via his online store at www.ffcpresents.com.

A STRAIGHTFORWARD APPROACH

Coppola does not employ a superficial approach in either his moviemaking or his wine production. Spurred on by his wife, Eleanor, and her interest in gardening, Coppola has made sure that his estate vineyards are certified organic and that all Rubicon Estate wine is made from certifiably organic grapes.

He surrounds himself with perfectionists as well. In addition to selecting only the best grapes, Coppola's fastidious team wanted to ensure that the wine be presented in a superlative way. To that end, they invited Georg Riedel, the Austrian glassmaker, to define the perfect stemware for Rubicon pourings. (Riedel and his wine-making team, top sommeliers, and wine critics, selected the Sommeliers glass line.) As Riedel explains, "The glass is the loudspeaker for the music of wine. It helps bring out the symphony of flavors."

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Coppola Winery tasting room



No wonder Coppola supported this glass-selection exercise: His movies play to all the senses, from the visual drama of *The Godfather* to the mysterious music of *Apocalypse Now*. Wine appreciation, in his value system, isn't about gulping down a beverage.

"My grandfather made wine in his basement in New York City," he says. "He had seven sons who would hunt down grapes to make wine. We always had wine on the table. There was no taboo on alcohol. That's why Zinfandel is so enjoyable to me today: The fruit flavors, the intoxicating aromas, the lush feel of the wine reminds me of Italian dinners with family. And that's why I like to serve Rubicon with a big T-bone steak in the company of Eleanor and a few other couples.

"We need a new word for 'lifestyle,'" he adds. "Maybe we should call it the art of living."

Rubicon Estate

1991 St. Helena Hwy., Rutherford
(800) 782-4266, (707) 968-1100
www.rubiconestate.com
Open daily from 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Francis Ford Coppola Winery

400 Sovereign Rd., Geyserville
(707) 433-8282
www.ffcpresents.com
Open daily from 11 a.m.


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