

Hudson



FROM KAREN MACNEIL

PEOPLE TO KNOW

September 7, 2021

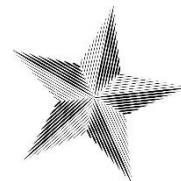


Lee Hudson

For over thirty years Lee Hudson has grown premium grapes on over 200 acres in the Carneros AVA. Currently, he sells to 27 of Napa and Sonoma's premier vintners, who include the 'Hudson Vineyards' designation on their labels. Born and raised in Houston, Texas, Lee received his B.S. in Horticulture at the University of Arizona. In 1975 he moved to France and worked with Jacques Seysses of Domaine Dujac, in Morey St. Denis, Burgundy for 2 years. Lee returned to the U.S. to continue his graduate studies in viticulture and enology at the University of California, Davis, where many of his former classmates are now his clients. In 2008 he was awarded "Grower of the Year" by the Napa Valley Grapegrowers Association. Hudson is also a significant philanthropic force, supporting, among other things, Napa's annual charity auction and community healthcare organizations such as Queen of Valley Foundation.

To learn more about Lee, read the written interview below:

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Karen MacNeil: You studied winemaking at UC Davis, with classmates that include notable vintners John Kongsgaard, Randall Graham. That's a lot of talent in one class. Are some of you still connected?

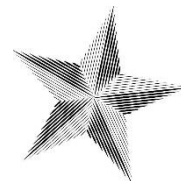
Lee Hudson: I studied Viticulture and Oenology as a graduate student at UC Davis in 1977 and 1978. Cathy Corison, Michael Martini, Dave Ramey Tony Soter, Dick Ward, David Graves, John Kongsgaard, John Williams, Randall Graham, Tom Peterson, Mike Fisher and others were my classmates. I'm in contact with most of them and we still have class reunions every so often. As a group, they remain my best resource and have offered continued professional and personal support over the years. We were fortunate to have graduated into a dynamically expanding premium wine business that encouraged growth and exploration. Within this great explosive expansion I've been able to maintain mentorship within my peer group.

KM: What was your first job in the wine industry?

LH: After graduating in 1975 with a bachelor's degree in Horticulture from the University of Arizona, I traveled to France where I found a job at Domaine Dujac, Morey St. Denis Burgundy. It was a transformative experience, as an experience in one's early 20's can be. Its agrarian lessons of hard work, commitment, excellence, and community were the foundation which glorified the transformation of soil, water and sunlight into wine. To my young eyes this was the Light. In addition, I found a remarkably generous mentor in my employer, Jacques Seysses, who graciously took me under his wing and showed me glimpses of behind-the-scenes Burgundy.

KM: Over the years, you've grown an assortment of exciting alternative varieties: aleatico, albariño, arneis, friulano, ribolla gialla, verdejo and vermentino. Did you choose these lesser-known varieties or were they requests from vintners who buy grapes from you?

LH: In the 1980's and early 1990's, while establishing my business as winegrower to small North Coast premium wineries, I didn't have the time to entertain my curiosity surrounding alternate varieties. As my experience grew and my business matured, I found I had more time to explore and at the same time there was interest on the part of some of my clients. My introduction into off beat varieties started with grenache. In addition to my own interests, I had interest from Bruce Neyers and Ehren Jordan so in 1995 I planted two acres of grenache. In 1999 I ventured further afield by contacting Glenn McGourty of the UC



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Viticultural Research Station in Mendocino. Glenn had been managing an extensive Mediterranean Red Wine Ampelography project. I asked Glenn to suggest five mid-season red varieties that he thought might ripen in cool climate Carneros. At his suggestion I planted 150 vines each of aleatico, barbera, corvina, freisa and petit sirah. With these we made wine for the Hudson Wine program for the next 10 years. We concluded that the only variety we could use was aleatico and grafted the other four over to aleatico.

In 2010 I was ready to explore additional alternate varieties focusing on whites. This time I decide to go to the winegrowing community and ask which varieties were working for my peers. I chose to plant enough for one barrel of each of albariño, arneis, greco di tufo, ribolla gialla, friulano, verdejo and vermentino. After 6 years of vinifying each separately, we decided to keep just the ribolla and the friulano. All were interesting and unique but not necessarily useful for our purposes.

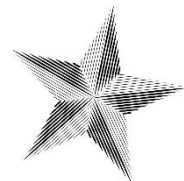
KM: You've said, "I tell my grape buyers that I want them to come out and visit their vineyard block at least five times a year, walk the vineyard with me, discuss crop reduction, leafing." Why is that important to you?

LH: Maybe not five, but often. I don't consider myself a grape grower but rather a wine grower. It's a significant difference between growing a commodity for bulk consumption and aspiring to grow world class wine for international recognition. To do so you need to be all in, not just show up at harvest. One needs to know the ground, the lay of the land. It's the difference between Good and Great. This is what we at Hudson aspire to.

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KM: Just about every article about Hudson Ranch makes mention of the perpetually award-winning giant pumpkins grown there. I've also heard that buyers have been known to pay up to \$500 for a single seed from one of these 'whoppers'. What do you suppose is the fascination?

LH: Giant Pumpkin Growing is a State of Mind not easily explained. One seed, sunlight, water, soil, hard work, craft and 120 days can come together to produce something magical often weighing more than 2000 pounds. What's not to love? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. There is money in pumpkin growing as some contests award large prizes.



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KM: You have quite an eclectic art collection, curated over many years. Do you think wine is also art?

LH: No; I consider winemaking a craft. The Old Masters of the 15th,16th and 17th centuries were artisans—explorers working in architecture, science, botany, metallurgy, stone and paint. To be a craftsman is a lifetime of work, dedication, and discipline. A wine is not made in one vintage. Over many vintages one comes to understand how best to interpret the year in front of us. This is the “Craft.”

KM: You’ve been quoted as saying, “I’ve got this blessing of having been brought up by a self-made man and an heiress, and I got great lessons from both of them.” What were those lessons?

LH: My father gave me strength, discipline, ambition, and the freedom of possibility, while my mother gave me insight into the world of excellence and refinement; so I got both the rough and the polished.

KM: You often mention a book that had a significant impact on you—The Man Who Planted Trees. What gave it power for you?

LH: I read this allegorical tale when I was 16. It is a French short story about a shepherd who single handedly re-forests a valley in the foothills of the Alps. For me as a young man it was magical and inspirational.

KM: Tell us something about you that would surprise most people to learn.

LH: During the 1970’s I was a yogi and a vegetarian. I didn’t drink wine for many years. That’s all changed.

KM: What character traits do you possess that has most contributed to your success?

LH: Stubbornness, persistence, and open-mindedness.

