



NORTH BAY BUSINESS JOURNAL EVENT

2007 Women in Business Awards Dinner Gala

Thursday, June 21, 2007;
5:30-9:00 p.m., Hyatt
Vineyard Creek Hotel &
Spa, Santa Rosa
Keynote Speaker: Laura
Alber, President, Williams
Sonoma

2007 Best in Residential Real Estate Reception & Awards Gala

Thursday, May 24, 2007;
5:30-7:30 p.m.;
Fountaingrove Golf &
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WINE

Tech exec launches make-your-own-wine club

Monday, May 7, 2007

BY JEFF QUACKENBUSH
STAFF REPORTER

SONOMA COUNTY – Laser-optics entrepreneur Lindsay Austin, once at the helm of a Telecom Valley startup, has turned his passion for wine into a club that gives aficionados the chance to make their own wine.

Mr. Austin is a former JDS Uniphase executive, CEO of Spectraswitch and co-founder of Pavilion Integration in Silicon Valley. His new venture is Kings Hill Cellars, a winemaking club with a specially built 2,000-square-foot crush pad, fermentation room and cave under the guest house in his 60-acre estate on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas Mountains near the Napa County line.

He caught the wine bug in high school using rehydrated raisins and decided on the venture while picking grapes

He's designed it to be a bridge between clubs of enthusiasts and award-winning amateurs such as Garage Enologists of North County in Healdsburg and Valley of the Moon Dilettante Enological Society in Sonoma, blend-it-yourself-by-mail programs such as the one offered by Mayo Family Winery, and custom-processing operations such as Crushpad in San Francisco and Judd's Hill Microcrush in St. Helena.

Kings Hill is for people who want to get a hands-on introduction to winemaking from crush to bottle without the investment in commercial-grade equipment, barrels and bottles. He supplies the grapes from 14 notable North Coast vineyards, winery equipment, barrels, bottling service, wine label design and printing and, most importantly, advice from consulting winemaker Richard Mansfield of St. Helena.

Club members contribute three to five Saturdays during harvest and throughout the winemaking process until J&J Micro Bottling of Calistoga rolls its mobile line up to put the wine in bottles. The price of the service starts at \$2,450 to make a half barrel of sauvignon blanc and goes up to \$5,950 for a full barrel of pinot noir.

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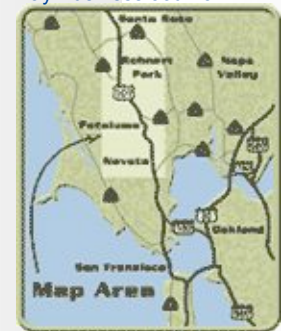
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"This is an experience," Mr. Austin said. "We're not just selling wine we made for you; it is yours. It is like taking high-end cooking classes at the CIA at Greystone not because you want to become a chef but because you want to appreciate the food more."

The ultimate end version of this hands-on model is real estate developer-turned-vintner Bill Harlan's Napa Valley Reserve program in St. Helena. Membership costs more than \$150,000 and has a waiting list.

Mr. Austin started Kings Hill because he couldn't find a similar outlet and an attempt to create a 10-member co-op winery proved too difficult. Peter Witter of Axia Architects in Santa Rosa designed a guesthouse that also would accommodate a concrete-walled microwinery below, and the structure was completed in time for the 2006 harvest by initial club members John and Shelley Rechin, who operate tenant-improvement general contracting company Total Concepts.

At the first harvest, a handful of club members produced nine barrels' worth of wine. As membership slots fill up, 20 barrels have been set aside for the 2007 harvest and 40 for 2008. That's when Mr. Austin plans to stop taking members.

One reason why there aren't more operations like Kings Hill, and why most custom processors prefer that their winemaker and staff perform the work, is the complexity with managing the activities of multiple winemakers in the same facility. With beginner and amateur winemakers, the challenge gets ratcheted up a notch because of the complexity of the winemaking process itself and the need to monitor it throughout.

For details, visit www.kingshillcellars.com.

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