

# “An Amazing Adventure”

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS AS WINEMAKER, TODD GRAFF USHERS IN A NEW ERA AT **FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS** by Liz Thach, MW

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FRANK FAMILY VINEYARDS



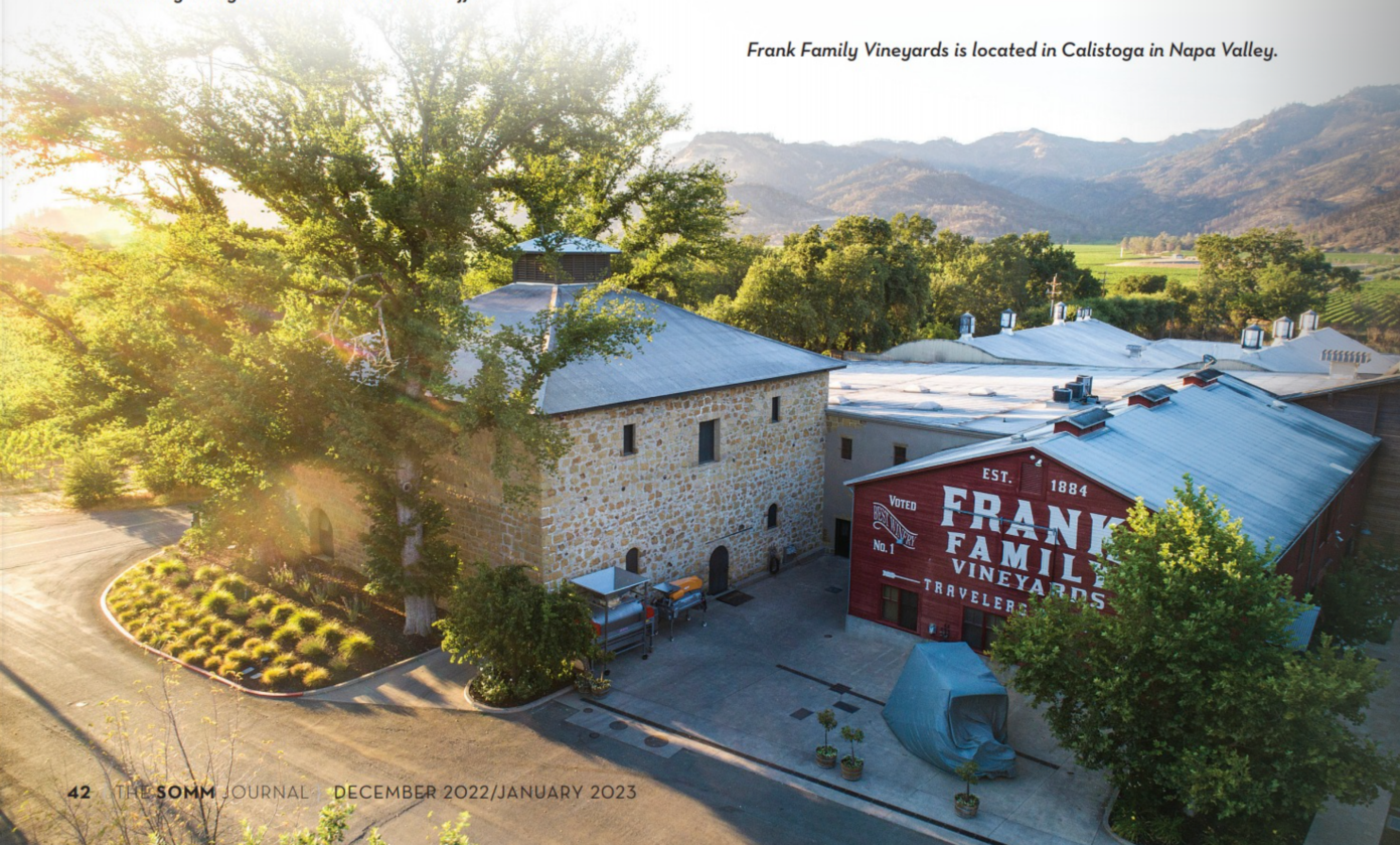
*Frank Family Vineyards winemaker Todd Graff.*

**GROWING UP IN** Sonoma County, Todd Graff knew from a young age that he wanted to work in the wine industry. After obtaining a viticulture degree from the University of California, Davis, he traveled the world, working harvests in Germany, France, and Australia. But California wine country called him back, and in 2002, he took a job as winemaker at Frank Family Vineyards in Calistoga.

Frank Family Vineyards was established in 1992 in the historic Larkmead Winery, where Hanns Kornell once made sparkling wine; built in 1884, it's the third-oldest facility of its kind in Napa Valley, and its founders, Rich Frank and his wife, Leslie, lovingly restored it to focus on Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay as well as their own sparkling expressions. "It's hard to believe I am celebrating my 20th anniversary with Frank Family this year," Graff says. "But working for Rich and Leslie Frank has been an amazing adventure."

Graff is credited with helping to build the Franks' estate vineyard assets over the years to more than 350 acres and with producing one of the country's most popular Chardonnays, among other exceptional wines. "I am proudest of our Chardonnay program," he says. "I see the variety like the chiseled dancer with very broad shoulders. It can express the subtleness of beautiful French oak while remaining bright and balanced."

*Frank Family Vineyards is located in Calistoga in Napa Valley.*





*Rich and Leslie Frank are the founders of Frank Family Vineyards.*

The November 2021 announcement that Frank Family was being sold to Treasury Wine Estates came as a surprise to many in the industry. “Rich and Leslie had many successful careers,” says Graff, referring to Rich’s tenure as president of Disney Studios and Leslie’s as an Emmy Award–winning news reporter for ABC. Both continue to be intimately involved in the winery’s operations, but they decided it was time to look ahead to their next chapter after retirement. “Treasury offered the best transition in keeping both the cellar and tasting-room teams together as well as offering ways that Frank Family could improve its wines, vineyard sources, winery facilities, and sustainability initiatives even more,” Graff explains. “The transition has been impressively great.”

Graff reported that there have been few changes with the sale, and those that have occurred have been quite positive—including the fact that the winery now has access to a vast array of famous Napa Valley vineyards owned by Treasury Wine Estates in addition to its Winston Hill and Lewis vineyards and long-term contracts with Beckstoffer and Sangiacomo. “I still have complete control over the winemaking process,” Graff says. “We are currently looking to add more estate vineyards to our portfolio, so our wines will only get better as we’ll have even more control from grape to bottle.”

Though Frank Family has one of the most popular and devoted wine clubs in Napa Valley, the winery built a national brand over the years and relies deeply upon its partners in distribution and sales. “Having come from Hollywood, Rich firmly understood that the success of a great movie depended on distribution, so he grew a smart business in wine. We sell

a large portion of our wine in restaurants and retail, and we’re proud that our wines are recognized nationally,” reports Graff. “We could not have done this without the support of our distributors, retailers, and sommeliers.” With harvest completed, he’s going on the road to thank them in person: “It is a great feeling when you know that you’ve produced a great-tasting wine,

put a cork in the bottle, and sent it off into the real world. But truly nothing is better than being at a restaurant and seeing that bottle being enjoyed by others,” he says.

The wines in Frank Family’s Napa Valley collection are all available nationwide; beautifully crafted, they offer the stunning flavors and elegance for which the region is known. See below for my notes. *SJ*

## Tasting Notes

**Frank Family 2016 Blanc de Blancs, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$55)** Aged five years on the lees, this is a beautiful vintage bubbly with a nose of creamy almond, lemon, and minerals. Soft, elegant mousse with persistent bubbles; fresh green apple appears on the palate before the long finish. Enticing! **94**

**Frank Family 2021 Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$40)** Seamless, with a brilliant golden hue and an inviting nose of yellow apple and lemon custard. Creamy vanilla and pear meld with toasty, well-integrated oak on the palate. Barrel-fermented and aged ten months in (33% new) French oak. **93**

**Frank Family 2021 Pinot Noir, Carneros, Napa Valley (\$40)** Glowing ruby color, with scents of dried strawberry, Bing cherry, and Tahitian vanilla. Good concentration and complex, savory notes—allspice, pomegranate, and umami—on the palate. Aged ten months in (33% new) French oak. **92**

**Frank Family 2019 Zinfandel, Napa Valley (\$45)** Aromas of mixed berries, including boysenberry, plus black cherry and a touch of pepper. Well-structured, velvety tannins with an appealing earthy character. Aged 18 months in (33% new) French oak. **91**

**Frank Family 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley (\$60)** A big, meaty, and comforting Cab, with classic cassis, herbs, and a hint of boysenberry on the nose and palate joining appealing, toasty notes of spice. Excellent concentration, fresh acidity, structured tannins, and a long finish. Aged in (30% new) French oak for 20 months. **93**

