



The Making of a Great American Winery: The History of Schramsberg Vineyards, 1965-Present



Jack and Jamie Davies in Vineyard

entrances to underground cellars. There could be no question in their minds that this was the challenge they sought, this was the place. On that day they decided Schramsberg would be brought back to life..

The Davies had ambitions to make wine, but not just any wine. They were setting out to produce sparkling wines – specifically, "America's most prestigious, select and admired sparkling wine; chosen for special guests, special gifts, pampering one's self and expressing one's taste in unique products." It was a lofty goal. They saw the challenge of producing sparkling wine in the United States as a need to change ingrained mindsets. To many Americans, sparkling wines were just bubbles and not granted the prestige given to the revered Burgundies and Bordeaux, indeed, in the mid-sixties, any wine produced outside France. They intended to create wine with richness and complexity. They envisioned their sparkling wines, fermented in the authentic Méthode Champenoise, as expressive as any of the great Champagnes – delicate, yet possessing distinct individuality and style.

With these challenges before them, they began their immense enterprise: the replanting of the vineyards, the creation and aging of the wine and engaging the world with the Schramsberg story. Among their many achievements is the innovation for which the 20th Century Schramsberg would become known with Jack and Jamie at the helm. The 1965 Blanc de Blancs was a product of the first commercial use of Chardonnay in American sparkling wine. The 1967 Blanc de Noirs followed, an accomplishment in California premier Méthode Champenoise wines in that it was produced using Pinot Noir according to the classic style. Their next wine released was the Reserve, with over four years of aging, which quickly became widely accepted as the finest sparkling wine made in the United States. The

Jack and Jamie Davies were determined to seek out a simpler, more meaningful life for themselves and their family. In 1965, after a year long search for hillside property in the Napa Valley, they discovered a run-down winery on the mountainsides above St. Helena. The historic Schramsberg property had been abandoned for years, but the Davies were looking for a challenge and the spirit of its founder was strong and compelling. The antique Victorian mansion presided over the tangled remains of once stately gardens and the gaping



Jack and Jaime's First Crush



President Nixon and Premier Chou En-Lai

Crémant Demi-sec, first made in 1973 using the Flora grape (a cross of Semillon and Gewürztraminer created at the University of California, Davis) became a favorite at the White House and was served at many state functions. In 1992, the 1987 J. Schram emerged as the crowning glory of the Schramsberg range, a wine to join the ranks of the world's finest sparkling wines.

Through the decades, this spirit of innovation has earned Schramsberg and the Davies praise and recognition throughout the world. In 1972 the 1969 Blanc de Blancs was

served at the "Toast to Peace" in Beijing, between President Richard Nixon and Premier Chou En-lai and Schramsberg wines have been served by every subsequent presidential administration. The Davies earned many awards throughout the years, including; "Winemakers of the Year" by Friends of the Junior Arts Center in Los Angeles, and the Junipero Serra Award for Excellence by the California Museum of Science and Industry, both in 1984, the 1995 International Festival of Méthode Champenoise Lifetime Achievement Award honoring "the thirty-year history of their exceptional winery and its world-class products." In 1996 the James Beard Foundation awarded them the Wine and Spirits Professional Award for "making a significant impact in the wine and spirits industry."

History continues to be made at Schramsberg – time has proven that the original goals have been met with style, grace and elegance. The noted wine author and critic, Nathan Chroman, summed up the Davies' contributions to American winemaking this way: "Some producers will earn a paragraph in the history of sparkling wines in California. The coming of the French will need a page. But it will merit a chapter to spell out what Jack and Jamie have done here."

The work was never done alone. Throughout the years Jack and Jamie gathered a strong and able staff to help them run the expanding business. Members of the Schramsberg team tend to stay; many employees have been with the winery for more than twenty years. In 1996, Hugh, the Davies' youngest son, joined the winery full time, adding his talent to the winemaking staff. To every ones great sorrow, Schramsberg lost Jack Davies in the spring of 1998. His presence and inspiration will always be missed but Jamie, with the support of her family, dedicated staff and the legion of friends she has made during the Schramsberg odyssey, continues the work and carries on the dream she and Jack started together.



Jack and His Three Sons