



“The technological and enological innovations in the winemaking industry are truly amazing. In my life, I have seen myths in the vineyard debunked and break-throughs created. I enjoy *Wine Business Monthly* because of the breadth of coverage given to all aspects. I happen to gravitate to Mark Greenspan’s “Grape Growing” insights because I believe wines are grown and the vineyard is the place where you can make your mark as a winemaker.”

NAME AND TITLE: Sam J. Sebastiani, winemaker

WINERY NAME AND LOCATION: La Chertosa Winery, Sonoma Valley, CA

ANNUAL CASE PRODUCTION: 1,500 cases

PLANTED ACRES: All vineyards are contracted.

CAREER BACKGROUND: I started working in Sebastiani Winery in the late 1940’s—washing floors, pumping wine into railroad tank cars and working on our portable bottling line, which was moved from tank-to-tank. I carried on there until 1985. I then built and ran Viansa Winery, which opened in 1989. I have since sold Viansa and began to focus on small batch production under my “La Chertosa” label, sourcing my fruit through contracts in Sonoma Valley and Amador County. I am settling down to creating wines in the “Old World Style”—creating my swan song in a symphony of harmonic pleasing flavors.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE? My biggest professional challenge was to lead the conversion of Sebastiani Winery in the early 1980s from a principally generic, jug wine-oriented brand and facility, to a producer of premium varietal wine focused on the Sonoma Valley appellation.

With millions of cases (4.2 million) going out the door each year as primarily Burgundy, Chablis and Rosé, we were faced with either standing still and having our business erode out from under us—as the market was shifting to varietals—or create new branding and “varietalize” our line. This required a modernization of our facility, improvements in our enology and viticulture and a major shift in grape handling. To project this change to the market we created August Sebastiani Country Wines, and we were able to “reposition” the 80-year-old family winery.

My hat is off to Doug Davis, Jim Carter, Peter Ansdel, Paul Bergna, Al Steele, Mark Rasmussen and the others who led the revival.

VARIETALS THAT YOUR WINERY IS KNOWN FOR: La Chertosa is becoming regarded for Zinfandel, Sangiovese and Chardonnay.