

Tricycle Wine Co.

Sonoma, California

A MARRIAGE BETWEEN CALIFORNIA FRUIT AND HUNGARIAN OAK TURNS OUT PROSPEROUSLY.

Tricycle Wine Co.

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Laura Taxel reviews restaurants and writes about food, beverage, and dining trends for local and national publications. Her articles appear regularly in *Cleveland Magazine*, *Edible Cleveland*, *Cooking Light*, *The National Culinary Review*, *Sommelier Journal*, and *Culture*. In an award-winning career that spans 25 years, she's also been published in the *Plain Dealer*, *Continental*, *Mother Earth News*, *Natural Health*, *Luxury Living*, *Ohio Magazine*, *Inside Business*, *Smart Business*, and *Santé*. Her work was chosen for the annual *Best Food Writing* anthology in 2004, 2006, and 2008, and she is the author of *Cleveland Ethnic Eats*, a best-selling guide to northeast Ohio's most authentic ethnic restaurants and markets. Her new book, *Cleveland's West Side Market: 100 Years & Still Cooking*, will be published by the University of Akron Press in October 2012. She is married to photographer Barney Taxel and lives in Cleveland.



LAURA TAXEL

When Peter Molnar, his brother Arpad, and Michael Terrien joined forces to launch a winery in 2004, they all had households dominated by young kids and their three-wheelers. So it's no wonder they named the venture Tricycle Wine Co.—which has also turned out to be a fitting moniker for their three-pronged project: three owners, three labels, and three primary activities, namely growing grapes, making barrels, and producing distinctive and expressive California wines.

The Molnars own Poseidon's Vineyard in Carneros and Obsidian Ridge Vineyard in the Mayacamas Range. They also have a significant

interest in Kádár Hungary, a Central European cooperage that purchases and mills wood from the forests of Tokaj (and has been sustainably managed since 1769). It's an unusually ambitious undertaking for a producer that currently bottles a mere 12,000 cases per year. "We use single blocks of our own fruit and crush in small batches," explains Terrien, the founding winemaker. "We have single-source oak for our barrels that expresses a particular terroir, just like our grapes. And we are able to control the age and toast to our own specifications. This is what defines our wines."

Family and friendship have made it all pos-

WINERY SPOTLIGHT



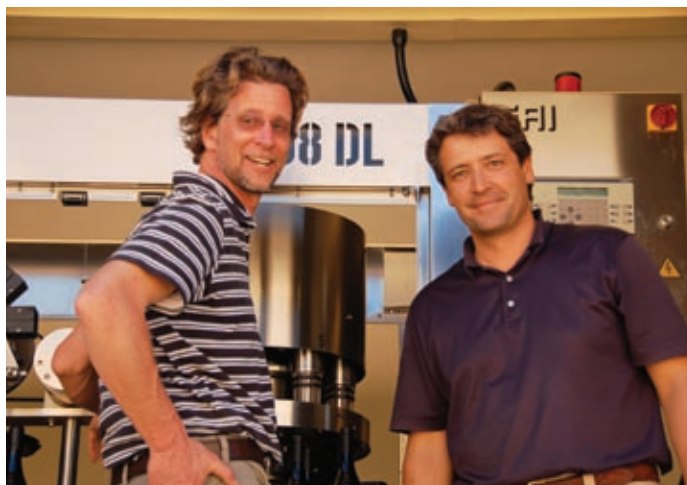
Tricycle Wine Co.'s Obsidian Ridge Vineyard in the Mayamacas Range (left) and Poseidon's Vineyard in Carneros (above); sawing wood at the Kádár cooperage in Hungary (bottom).

Photos courtesy of Tricycle Wine Co. (previous page, top), Kádár Hungary (bottom)

sible. In 1956, Nicholas Molnar emigrated to the United States from Hungary. He ended up in California, where, in 1973, he purchased a 100-acre Napa Valley farm and planted grapes for sale to sparkling-wine producers. Motivated by the desire to reconnect with their heritage, his sons, Peter and Arpad, went to Budapest after college in 1990. That's when they discovered the Tokaj cooperage. "Two wars, a revolution, and the Communist government had brought this venerable old company to the edge of collapse," Peter recounts, "and a long tradition of skilled craftsmanship was about to disappear. My family decided to help rejuvenate and modernize it." In 1993, they began importing barrels for the North American market. The operation is now a joint venture with Chêne & Cie, which also owns the cooperages of Taransaud in Bordeaux and Canton in Kentucky.

In 1995, Peter Molnar called on his friend Terrien, who holds a master's degree in enology from the University of California-Davis, to make Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Poseidon's Vineyard in Kádár barrels. The result was a label called Kazmer & Blaise (from their middle names). They gradually replanted the vineyard, pairing specific clones with particular plots to bring out the best in both. They also added two more brands: Molnar Family, a second label from Poseidon's Vineyard, and Obsidian Ridge, from the 1999 acquisition of a property 2,640 feet above sea level in Lake County's Red Hills, which became an American Viticultural Area in 2007. There, they've put in Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Petite





OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

Kazmer & Blaise Chardonnay Boon Fly's Hill 2009 \$50

Vines struggle in the cool marine breezes and fog on this small hill adjacent to a Carneros marina. Acidity and citrus aromas brace the luscious peach and pear flavors, along with bready notes from prolonged fermentation in 100%-new Kádár barrels.

Kazmer & Blaise Pinot Noir Primo's Hill 2009 \$50

Gravelly soil deposited eons ago by Carneros Creek lends structure and the robust flavors of roasted meat. The 100%-new Kádár barrels provide forest and dark-spice overtones.

Molnar Family Chardonnay Poseidon's Vineyard 2009 \$25

This Chardonnay displays notes of lemon, tangerine, and custard pie. The cool climate yields bright acidity; barrel fermentation and malolactic conversion add weight in the mouth.

Molnar Family Pinot Noir Poseidon's Vineyard 2009 \$30

Red raspberry and plum, backed by a touch of briar, point to the vineyard's chilly location in the deep south of Carneros, where the maritime influence is strong. Kádár barrels provide clove spice and a toasty inflection.

Obsidian Ridge Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 \$28

Tannins, black cherry, and blackberry reflect the presence of mountain-grown fruit. Cedar and spice frame the luscious ripeness of this vintage, representing the third consecutive drought year in Lake County.

Obsidian Ridge Half Mile 2009 \$60

From the highest block of the vineyard, whose obsidian-strewn soil yields Petit Verdot and Cabernet Sauvignon with tremendous structure. Espresso and spice overlay compellingly dark fruit.

Syrah, and Malbec, along with Syrah clones from the Northern Rhône.

In 2004, all their efforts came together under the umbrella of Tricycle Wine Co., with Arpad Molnar managing the business side, Peter Molnar overseeing the vineyards and barrel production, and Terrien serving as winemaker. After years in a leased space, they finally moved into their own 10,000-square-foot production facility in Sonoma in the spring of 2011.

Terrien and Alex Beloz, a winemaker who joined the group six years ago, prefer minimal intervention in pursuit of varietally honest



Managing partners Peter and Arpad Molnar (top left); founding winemaker-partner Michael Terrien with Peter Molnar (top right); Terrien with winemaker Alex Beloz (right); Tricycle's Kádár barrels (far right).



Photos courtesy of Tricycle Wine Co.

WINERY SPOTLIGHT



Sailboat masts on the coastal horizon of Poseidon's Vineyard (above); Tricycle Wine Co. cellar in Sonoma (top right); Kádár cooperage and staff in Hungary (bottom).

bottlings. “We want the wines to be about the places that provide our raw materials,” says Terrien. The house style lets the clay and gravel of Carneros speak and gives voice to the volcanic rock of Obsidian Ridge. During vinification, the grapes and wood essentially have a conversation. “French and Hungarian oak are the same species,” explains Peter, “but because of topography and climate, the Tokaj trees are denser, more tightly grained. This affects the rate of oxidation in the barrel, which is good at framing the fruit and developing the midpalate and aromatics. The barrels are not very tannic and the oak-ing is subtle, even in our reserve Chardonnays and Pinots, which go into 100% new oak.” An analysis conducted by Chêne & Cie’s research department found that the wood imparts a sweet, smooth vanillin character and notes of cinnamon, nutmeg, and clove.

Critical acclaim and high ratings confirm the success of the Tricycle team’s efforts. But they’re also proud to make affordable wines, thanks to a combination of their stake in the barrel business and the ability to acquire vineyards before real-estate prices skyrocketed. Terrien believes the company has thrived, despite the recent economic downturn, because its reasonably priced offerings drink like more expensive bottles. As Arpad adds, “The tricycle has come to represent not only the three aspects of our winemaking, but also an approachability—a tricycle is about as non-threatening as it gets—that can be rare in the fine-wine category. In addition, it signifies balance, a key component that we search for in our wines and lives.”



Photos courtesy of Tricycle Wine Co. (top), Kádár Hungary (bottom)