

The Legacy Wines of Peter Mondavi, Sr.



When you see or hear the word Mondavi, most wine consumers think of Robert Mondavi, the legendary wine visionary whose death at the age of 94 heralded the end of a remarkable era in the California wine industry. But the Mondavi name reached far deeper into the fabric of Napa Valley than the aforementioned luminary, thanks to his brother Peter Mondavi, Sr. who passed away last Saturday at his home in St. Helena, on the property of his Charles Krug Winery. He was 101.

Mondavi was born in 1915 in a small iron mining town in the Mesabi Range of northern Minnesota to Italian immigrants Cesare and Rosa Mondavi. It was a company town, 50 miles from the Canadian line. In 1922, Prohibition was the law of the land. Cesare saw a future in supplying wine grapes, not just to iron miners in Minnesota, but to Italian families across the country. So Cesare moved his family to Lodi. Peter was 8 when the Mondavi family arrived in California.

In 1942, Peter was drafted into the Army Air Corps, and was discharged in 1946. When his parents bought the Charles Krug Winery in 1943, however, he was on leave in California, and participated in the purchase.

In an interview with the Napa Valley Register in 2014, Mondavi recalls the decision to purchase the winery. "My dad didn't jump into anything," Mondavi said. "So, when Bob - Robert Mondavi, Peter's older brother - brought up the idea, dad thought about it for a while... as a condition, dad wanted Bob and me to promise to run the winery together..."

Mondavi said the winery and vineyards needed a lot of work, but he was stationed in Warrington, England, for almost three years, and could not help. "I have to give my brother, Bob, all the credit, because he put the winery in shape," Mondavi said. "The buildings had dirt floors, and the ceilings were gone. The vineyard had mostly grapes for bulk wine."

After the war, Mondavi said it took him a while to get used to civilian life, but he and his brother found a place for themselves in the winery. With his chemistry and winemaking background, he moved into production, and Robert was responsible for sales and promotion. They remained partners for 23 years. Peter Mondavi became Krug's CEO in 1976 and officially retired, in 2015, at the tender age of 100. During his leadership, he had firmly established Charles Krug as a producer of high-quality wines — a reputation that helped advance the rest of Napa Valley.

Peter Mondavi was responsible for the family's greatest scientific innovations in winemaking. He was the first in Napa to introduce French oak barrels for wine aging, in 1963, and the first to employ cold sterile filtration to prevent wine spoilage. His work with cold fermentation made it possible for Napa vintners to produce crisp white wines that wouldn't oxidize. His acquisition of 800 acres of vineyard land in the 1960s and 1970s helped to usher in a new standard for estate-grown wines in Napa. He was among the first to recognize Napa's Carneros region — formerly dominated by dairy cows — as a prime spot for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Today, the third generation is at the helm of Charles Krug. Peter Jr. is responsible for running the operations at Krug while his brother Marc concentrates his efforts at CK Mondavi. Together, they have ushered in a new era of grape growing under the Charles Krug label, replanting most of the 850 acres of vines now owned by the family. In addition, the winemaking operation has undergone a major renovation; including state-of-the-art temperature controlled fermentation tanks — an innovation they owe to their father's foresight - and new crush pad facilities. Here are few wines that Peter Mondavi, Sr. leaves as a legacy.

The **2014 Charles Krug Sauvignon Blanc** from the St. Helena region of Napa Valley is a perfect example of how good this varietal can be when the fruit is ripe and the acidity is high. Fragrant scents of tropical fruit and grapefruit dominate the nose and are repeated on the palate where flavors of passion fruit and Honeydew melon glide across the tongue. The bright acidity keeps the flavors focused and the finish - featuring a touch of lemon/lime citrus - clean and refreshing. **\$18**

Aromas of lemon blossom and tangerine dominate the nose of the **2013 Charles Krug Chardonnay** from the Carneros region of Napa Valley. The palate has a delightful touch of toasty oak nuances that complements flavors of white peach and juicy tropical fruit. The smooth, creamy, vanilla notes give depth on the medium-bodied finish. **\$21**

Fruit grown in the Carneros region - which straddles the Napa and Sonoma Valleys — is the beneficiary of the maritime effect that cools in the region every evening. The grapes used in the **2013 Charles Krug Pinot Noir** come from Carneros and produce a wine with a perfumed nose of wild strawberries and bright red cherries. Delicate flavors of fresh strawberry, plum and ripe cherry float delicately across the palate, all the way through to the elegant finish, which has just the right amount of acidity to keep all of the flavors in balance. **\$27**

As an ode to Peter Mondavi, Sr., Generations was created in 1991 and was a blend crafted by Marc Mondavi. Of course, it was questioned by Mr. Mondavi, since he was partial to single varietal wines. Marc demonstrated to his father that a wine of this nature could hold its own against the growing popularity of Cabernet Sauvignon in the Napa Valley. The **2012 Charles Krug Family Reserve Generations** is an artful blend is composed of 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Malbec, 5% Merlot and 5% Petit Verdot. The bouquet is dominated by aromas of blackberry, dark plum and cocoa. Flavors of dark red and black fruit join in with hints of mocha and vanilla on a full-bodied frame. The powerful-yet-elegant finish is supported by notes of tobacco, toasty oak and fine tannins. A bargain at **\$60**