

www.privateclubs.com

APRIL 2003 \$3.00

PRIVATE CLUBS

AND THE RESORT LIFESTYLE

NAPA'S HIDDEN FACES

DISCOVER THE UNBLEMISHED
ORIGINS OF CALIFORNIA'S
WINE RUSH.

Altamura Winery tames the stern mountain character of the fruit with gentle crushing and extended barrel aging.

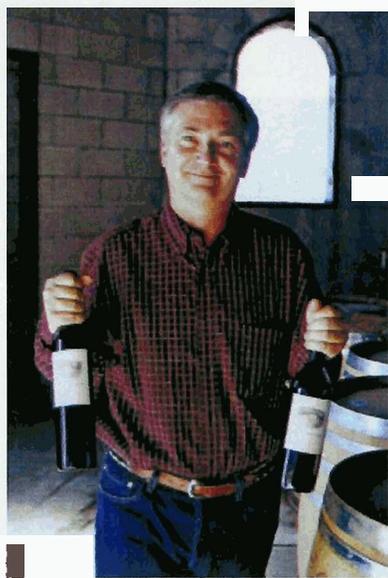
Directly east of Napa township off U.S. Highway 121 is Wooden Valley, a kind of miniature Napa Valley lifted upward in the recent past by the seismic crumpling of

the Coast Ranges. Its bucolic ranchland and forests are surrounded by craggy escarpments that show the layered stacking of the Great Valley bedrock through the ages. Wooden Valley is a longtime source of big, intense blending components for the Napa Valley reds of such producers as Caymus, Mondavi, and Pahlmeyer. Its only winery is Altamura Winery & Vineyards, and Frank Altamura's vibrant, powerful wines argue convincingly for Wooden Valley's viticultural character as well as its historical ties to the valley.

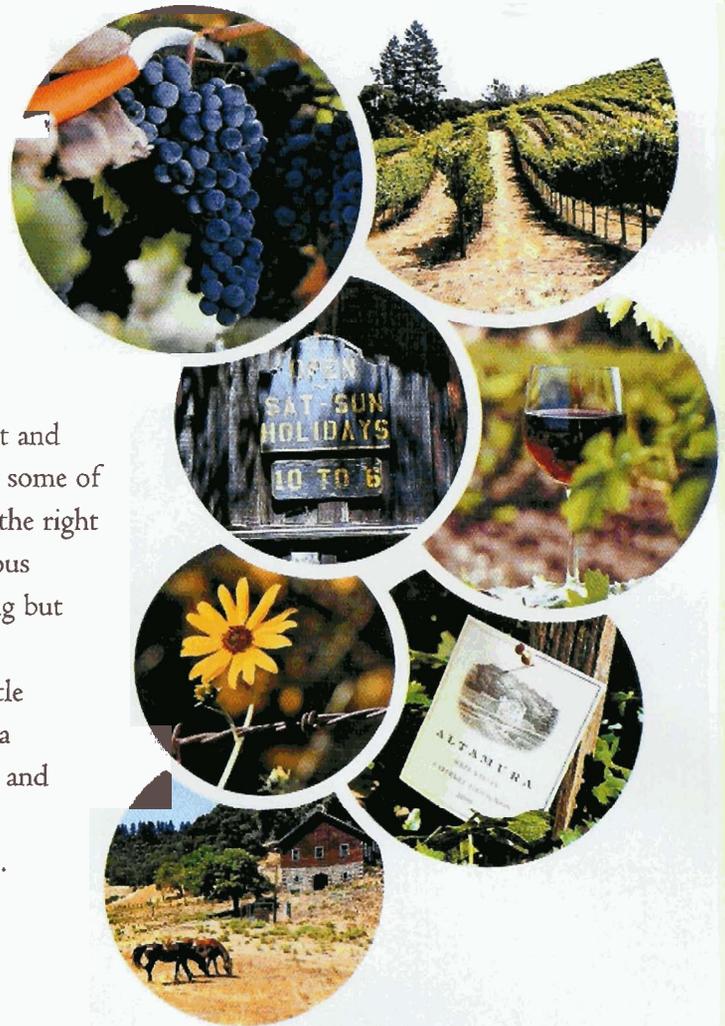
The sprawling ranch has been in Frank and Karen Altamura's family since 1855. Their vines, about two-thirds Cabernet Sauvignon and the rest Sangiovese, were planted in the late 1960s.

The grapes went to Robert Mondavi Winery for many years while Frank Altamura gained cellar experience working for Napa Valley wineries such as Sterling, Trefethen, and Caymus until 1985. After that, he turned full time to his own wines.

The Altamura estate currently produces around 3,000 cases of Cabernet and Sangiovese each year. They're consistently some of my favorite Napa Valley wines, with just the right combination of power, finesse, and luscious flavor to make them delicious when young but also ageworthy. Altamura tames the stern mountain character of the fruit with gentle crushing and extended barrel aging. "It's a misconception that wine has to be rough and tannic at first, then at some point it magically turns drinkable," Altamura says. "It's got to have the fruit and balance from the beginning."



Frank Altamura showcases some choice wines from Altamura Winery & Vineyards



BY ROD SMITH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRED LYON