Cole Bailey Vineyards: A Class Act in Redwood Valley

It might seem that a winery which uses a name spoofing the use of long pompous words isn't serious. When you learn that one of the winery's owners was the prototype for the character Otter in the movie classic Animal House you might think the winery is quirky.

While both the wine name and the Animal House reference are true about Redwood Valley's Cole Bailey Vineyards it's doubtful you'll find a couple more seriously committed to winemaking excellence. Bob Anderson and Jennifer Malloy are the producers of Sesquipedalian Bordeaux style red and crisp fruity sauvignon blanc. The dictionary says sesquipedalian refers to long and ponderous words. Cole Bailey on their website defines it as "a sophistical rhetorician inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity." Sound like any wine reviewers you know? "We wanted our wine not to be intimidating and snotty," says Anderson. "Our silly label is intended to encourage people to learn about wine."

"If you ask someone what is their favorite pasta sauce, there's no hesitation in their reply," adds Malloy. But, Malloy and Anderson have learned, many people are intimidated by a wine list or even choosing wine in a supermarket. A sidebar on their website lists what they call the "world's worst wine words" and invites bloggers to join in with their own.
Both Malloy and Anderson are practicing attorneys to "help pay for the wine habit." Their vineyard moniker comes from their 10-year-old son's name Cole and a family name Bailey. Anderson is managing partner at Lanahan and Reilly the largest law firm in Santa Rosa, where they do corporate finance and securities, mergers and acquisitions and work with startup companies. Malloy, slim, tall, with shoulder length blond hair and wholesomely attractive, is general counsel to an education company.

Anderson went to Dartmouth College with Chris Miller, who wrote the screenplay for the movie Animal House in 19xx. "The reason the movie is still popular today is that it reminds everyone of their college experience," says Anderson, who was known as "Otter" in his fraternity. He adds that Miller was two years younger and looked up to Anderson, who admittedly "had fun and did crazy things." It was an all male school and they had to take to the highway to visit the girls' schools. Miller eventually went to work writing a column called "Tales from Adelphia House" at the National Lampoon. The National Lampoon editor watched a national cult develop over this column and said you have to do a movie. And he did.

> Cole Bailey focuses on making small lots of hand-crafted cabernet sauvignon and sauvignon blanc. The wines are christened with the multi-syllabic moniker "Sesquipedalian" to entertain the taster's mind as well as the palate. In other words, don't forget your brain when you come to visit! The sauvignon blanc, syrah and estategrown cabernet sauvignon are each noble, with the understated yet pulchritudinous aroma typical of a blue-blooded Brahmin. Nevertheless, from the first sip, it is clear that the cabernet, syrah and sauvignon blanc "Sesquipedalian" are mouthfuls. Like a character from a Faulkner novel, they come right at you, powerfully forging ahead full-throttle, stunning reflections of their respective vineyard's terroir. These wines speak to a worldly palate and have no patience with those anchored to the jejune in life

Animal House became a hit. Anderson meanwhile became an attorney. In the early 1980s he bought a vineyard in Lake County and joined the group that started Mount Konocti Winery. He explains that as a farmer who wanted to be paid for the grapes he was growing, being part of a winery helped solidify that goal. In 1983 John Parducci and his brother bought into Mt. Konocti and helped with marketing, adding more assurance that the wine would be sold and the grape growers would be paid. And then Jess Jackson started a winery down the road and Lake County wines were discovered.
"Even though we said we didn't want to get into winemaking ourselves, here we are," muses Anderson, a slim fine-looking man with graying hair, a goatee and a glint in his eyes. "When we saw this place in 2001, we fell in love with it," says Malloy. The property is terraced up the south facing hill at the north end of Redwood Valley. A lovely redwood sided home with green metal roof sits on the widest terrace. Stone patios and a swimming pool are shaded with tall evergreens and some oak trees. A charming wine cellar is situated into the hillside next to the pool. There were 500 syrah and sangiovese vines when they bought it.

Now Bordeaux varietals cabernet sauvignon, petite verdot, cabernet franc, malbec and merlot grow in proportion to their blend, of which 85 percent is cabernet sauvignon. The grapes grow on terraces wide enough to allow a small tractor to pass by. Due to the steep slope the hard spring frost didn't damage the grapes, which are now deep blackish purple and about to be picked from beneath their small canopy of shady leaves.

"We felt the climate on the hillsides in inland Mendocino County could grow excellent cabernet sauvignon," says Anderson. Cole Bailey's goal is to make elegant, European style wine. "We want to make the best wine we can," says Anderson, "not try to make wine just to get a score from a certain critic."

Cole Bailey makes 1000 cases. Half of that is sauvignon blanc grown at Beckstoffer vineyard near Talmage. The wine is not what some call "grassy" but made in the style to be crisp, it hangs a little longer to get that crispness. Malloy always thought she didn't like white wine and then discovered it was because, "I'd only had over-oaked chardonnay." Cole Bailey's Sesquipedalian Sauvignon Blanc is aged in neutral oak barrels, which means they buy used barrels. Their Sesquipedalian cabernet sauvignon ages in a mixture of new and used French oak barrels. Their winemaker is Alex Velos and his wife is wine maker at Ravenswood. In some years Cole Bailey makes a little syrah from the 500 vines still on the property. Anderson's glinty eyes get downright excited when he mentions the name for the syrah label—Otter's Road Trip Red.