

NAPA

WINE, FOOD AND CONVERSATION FROM NAPA VALLEY VINTNERS

ECO-FRIENDLY FARMING

Napa Valley wineries raise the bar on sustainable viticulture



The Many Styles
of Chardonnay
THE EVOLUTION OF THIS
MULTIFACETED VARIETY

White Wine Wonders
UNUSUAL WHITE WINES AND THE
TRAILBLAZING WOMEN WHO
MAKE THEM

Mentoring the
Next Generation
ESTABLISHED VINTNERS SHARE
EXPERTISE AND INSIGHTS

MEET OUR CONTRIBUTORS

We asked this issue's writers what they enjoyed most about researching and writing their stories. Here's what they said.



“The camaraderie within Napa Valley runs deep. Whether vintners, principals or colleagues, everyone I spoke to is working to not only carry on but build on the Napa Valley legacy.” —MARYAM AHMED (“THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP,” PAGE 24) IS A FOOD AND WINE ENTREPRENEUR AND WRITER, NAPA, CA



“Learning about the evolution of Napa Valley Chardonnay through the lens of family-owned wineries was the most fascinating part of writing this article.” —CHASITY COOPER (“NAPA VALLEY CHARDONNAY,” PAGE 20) IS AN AWARD-WINNING WRITER, ENTREPRENEUR AND WINE CULTURE EXPERT, CHICAGO, IL



“I love just thinking about summer concerts in the Napa Valley. I can't wait to actually experience them.” —MICHAELA JARVIS (“MUSICAL MYSTIQUE,” PAGE 8) IS A WRITER SPECIALIZING IN CULTURE, FOOD AND WINE, AMONG OTHER SUBJECTS, PLEASANT HILL, CA



“There is no one style of Napa Valley Zinfandel. The wines are incredibly diverse and have the capacity to transmit unique expressions of terroir.” —WANDA MANN (“THE VERSATILE APPEAL OF ZINFANDEL,” PAGE 28) IS THE EAST COAST EDITOR OF *THE SOMM JOURNAL* AND NEW YORK EDITOR OF *THE TASTING PANEL*, NEW YORK, NY



“Napa Valley wineries are harnessing their intimate knowledge of the land to take a lead in the fight against climate change. Learning about how they work in concert with nature to keep planet-heating carbon dioxide out of the air made me feel hopeful.” —KIMBERLY OLSON (“PLANET-FRIENDLY WINEGROWING,” PAGE 10) WRITES ABOUT HEALTH, THE ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN, AMONG OTHER TOPICS, SAN FRANCISCO, CA



“The women winemakers of Napa Valley have always intrigued me, but the enthusiasm of the women I interviewed made me even more excited about the future of the valley. What I found most interesting about photographing Charles Davis was his comfortability in front of the camera and his philosophies on business and life.” —ALISHA SOMMER (“WHITE WINE WONDERS,” PAGE 16; PHOTOGRAPHY FOR “BBQ RIFFS,” PAGE 30) IS A WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER SPECIALIZING IN FOOD AND WINE, AMONG OTHER SUBJECTS, ST. HELENA, CA

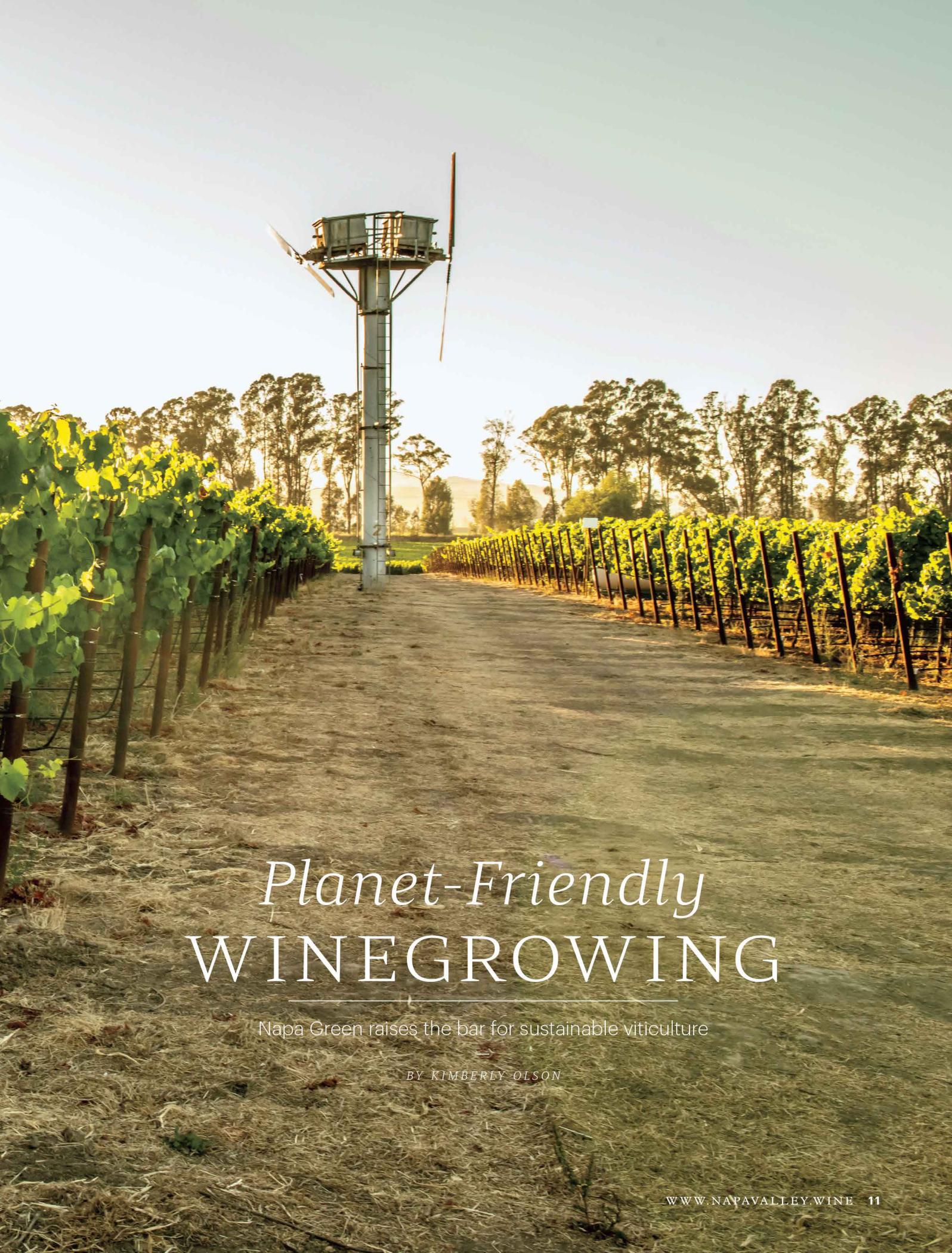


“I really enjoyed researching this article and am excited about helping to reduce wine's carbon footprint by making this simple switch to lighter-weight bottles.” —DR. LIZ THACH, MASTER OF WINE (“NAPA VALLEY LOSES WEIGHT,” PAGE 6), IS A DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF WINE & MANAGEMENT, SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY; AN INSTRUCTOR WITH STANFORD CONTINUING STUDIES; AND A WINE WRITER AND BUSINESS CONSULTANT, SONOMA, CA



By using precise irrigation, moving toward organic farming and monitoring soil microbes, Cakebread Cellars is improving its vine health.

ROBERT HORNES



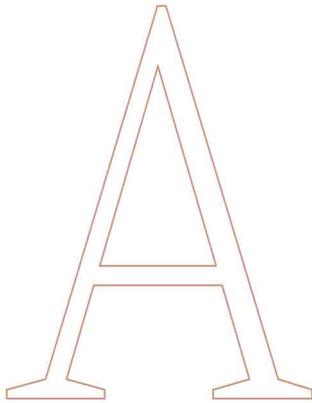
Planet-Friendly
WINEGROWING

Napa Green raises the bar for sustainable viticulture

BY KIMBERLY OLSON

“The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector.”

—WENDELL BARRY



An ever-growing number of Napa Valley wineries are furthering regenerative farming practices that remove heat-trapping carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and sequester it in the ground.

“Up to a third of the atmospheric carbon that humans have released has come directly out of the biological processes of soil and what we have expedited over time,” says Ben Mackie, climate and soil specialist at Napa Green, a sustainability

certification program for Napa Valley wineries and vineyards. “The biggest impact we can make as an agricultural industry is to get some of the carbon back into the soil.”

By mimicking nature’s own processes, Mackie says, regenerative farming creates a closed-loop system that requires fewer inputs such as fuel, pesticides and fertilizers. Napa Green’s program helps growers become carbon neutral to carbon negative within six to nine years.

It’s an ambitious program, but Jake Terrell, who oversees the three ranches at Sequoia Grove Winery in Napa, relishes the challenge.

Sequoia Grove Winery avoids synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, which create oxygen-depleted “dead zones” in our oceans and waterways and are manufactured using fossil fuels, making them a significant driver of the climate crisis. Instead, Terrell uses cover crops such as bell bean plants. “The plant creates this little root node for nitrogen-fixing bacteria to live in, and it uses nitrogenase to change atmospheric nitrogen to ammonia [the form that plants need to thrive],” he explains.

Terrell loves being in the vineyards in springtime. “When we till the dirt over for the first time since the previous year and incorporate all of our cover crops, you get to see all the cool worms and stuff that have been growing, breaking down the previous year’s organic matter,” he says. “It smells like really strong, fresh-cut grass.”

That rich, healthy soil is key to creating quality grapes. “The microbiology in your soil has a direct

influence on the flavors and aromas in the wine,” says Kelly Allyn, assistant winemaker at Sequoia Grove Winery. “So why wouldn’t we invest in something that helps not only future generations and the planet but also the quality of our wines?”

Napa Green’s scope goes well beyond certification. “For those enrolled in our programs, we see ourselves as an extension of their team,” says Mackie. “I read peer-reviewed articles and look at new technologies for growers so that people doing the work in the soil don’t have to do that independent research. We disperse it in a manageable format to folks who are very busy day to day.” Mackie is most inspired by preindustrial technologies that are coming back into vogue, like using sheep to manage cover crops, thereby reducing fuel and agrochemical use.

You’ll find sheep grazing in the vineyard at Seavey Vineyard, as well as goats, cattle and chickens on the property, whose manure becomes fertilizer. The winery also boosts its soil’s carbon content and water retention capacities by burning plant matter to create biochar for compost. Miguel Garcia of the Napa County Resource Conservation District even taught the Seavey team how to manage burn piles more cleanly, to reduce contaminant pollution.

To help protect the property’s 150 acres of oak woodlands from a catastrophic wildfire, Fred Seavey, family owner of Seavey Vineyard, heads into the forest to remove tree limbs and vegetative debris on the forest floor, which can become wildfire fuel. “It’s impossible to pull out dead manzanita on the forest floor,” he says. “In those areas, we burn manzanita to produce biochar and introduce it into our compost pile.”

There are myriad reasons to safeguard the trees, one being their greenhouse gas-guzzling skills. “A single oak tree can store 20 tons of CO₂,” Seavey says.

While walking the property, Seavey often spies a grey fox that lives in one area of the forest, hares in another, and a blue heron who’s nested in the irrigation pond. “It’s that connection to the land that makes us want to preserve it,” he says.



Seavey Vineyard boosts its soil's carbon content and water retention capacities by burning plant matter to create biochar for compost.



Ground cover at Napa's Sequoia Grove Winery.

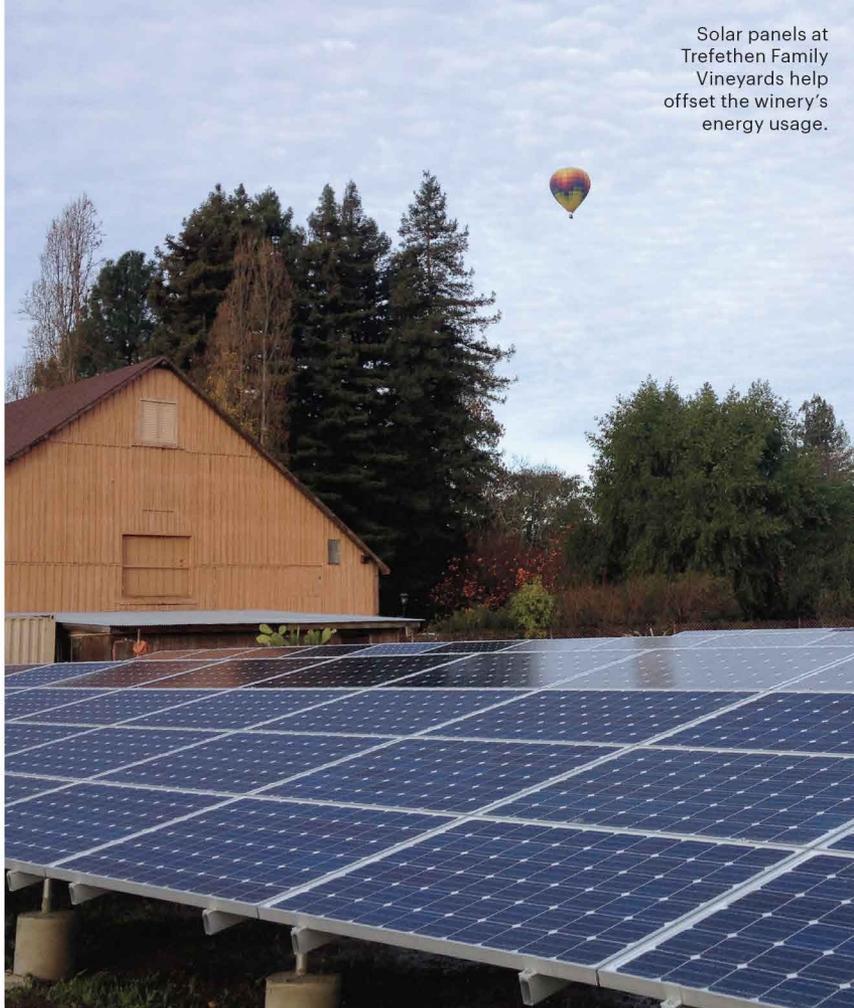


Seavey Vineyard uses grazing animals like goats, sheep, cattle and chickens, whose manure becomes fertilizer.

Owl box at Somerston Estate. Owls, bats and bluebirds control pests naturally.



Solar panels at Trefethen Family Vineyards help offset the winery's energy usage.



Permanent cover crop at Trefethen Family Vineyards.

“WE’RE PLANTING A VINE NOW THAT’S GOING TO BE AROUND IN 25-PLUS YEARS. OF COURSE WE’RE GOING TO DO THE BEST THING FOR OUR LAND AND VINEYARD. THAT’S GOING TO MAKE OUR WINE BETTER.”

—HAILEY TREFETHEN, VINTNER, TREFETHEN FAMILY VINEYARDS

Regenerative growing practices also make sense to Craig Becker, director of viticulture and wine-making at Somerston Estate. “A natural philosophy of vine growers is that you want to take as little as possible away from the vine long term,” he says. Somerston’s practices include adding composted vine prunings back into the vineyard and using limited tilling to avoid disturbing the soil and releasing carbon into the atmosphere.

Like any natural system process, changes are incremental. “Increasing soil organic matter is a multiyear process, unless you are adding compost, which we can expedite with management techniques,” Mackie says. “[It] would normally take Mother Nature 500 to 1,000 years to build an inch of topsoil.” The impact of regenerative farming on vine health, he says, comes to full expression in two to three seasons.

Each vineyard in the Napa Green program has a detailed carbon farm plan, and a sequestration calculator reveals whether a vineyard system is carbon positive or negative—and which actions might help capture more carbon. “You see the cumulative effect of decisions,” Becker says. “It’s been helpful seeing things that we might not have seen before that need some attention.”

Building on its success, Napa Green leveled up its program in January to help tackle critical issues of our time. Now, the new Napa Green Vineyard certification encompasses six pillars of sustainability—energy, waste prevention, water efficiency, social equity, integrated pest management and climate action.

Family-run Cakebread Cellars, founded half a century ago, was among the first wineries to receive Napa Green certification. “We want to be here for another 50 years,” says Aaron Fishleder, vice president of operations. “To do that, we need to take care of the land.”

By using precise irrigation, moving toward organic farming and monitoring soil microbes, Cakebread Cellars is improving its vine health. “Those healthy vines allow us to get more out of the fruit to produce our wonderful wines,” Fishleder says.

Other ecological moves at Cakebread Cellars include maintaining a bee-friendly farm; transitioning to electric tractors; and supporting biodiversity by, for example, netting certain areas



Scan this code to learn more about Napa Green.

to prevent bears from munching the grapes, while allowing them to remain on the land.

At Trefethen Family Vineyards, in Napa, third-generation vintner Hailey Trefethen says that wineries naturally gravitate toward long-range methods. “We’re planting a vine now that’s going to be around in 25-plus years,” she says. “Of course

we’re going to do the best thing for our land and vineyard. That’s going to make our wine better.”

Besides, regenerative farming dovetails with her family’s long-held values. “When granddaddy [Gene Trefethen] purchased the property,” Trefethen says, “he made the purchase contingent on the passing of the Agricultural Preserve—basically a zoning ordinance that says the best and highest use of this land is agriculture.”

Trefethen Family Vineyards has been using regenerative farming practices for years. “We try to reduce tillage or be no-till in certain parts of our vineyard,” says Brendan Brambila, director of viticulture. They’re also planting more drought-tolerant rootstocks to continue producing quality fruit and harmonious wines.

Tools like weed knives are replacing herbicides, and the vineyard has boxes for owls, bluebirds and bats, who all help control pests naturally. “We felt so much better having hundreds of bats flying around every night, and the bluebirds are incredible insectivores, reducing the need for insecticides in the vineyards,” Trefethen says.

As Napa Valley wineries further embrace regenerative farming, they’re demonstrating what’s possible. “We are arguably the premier winegrowing region in America, so what we do has a wave of impact,” notes Anna Brittain, executive director of Napa Green. “It’s not just about what we do here in Napa County. It reverberates to the wine industry and to the broader agricultural industry. I see us using this platform to have global influence.”

Harnessing our planet’s own natural resilience is key, and Napa Valley wineries—which have demonstrated their strength during troubled times—are proving to be worthy partners.