



PEJU PROVINCE

Life in Motion

It was the love of farming and a passion for wine that brought Anthony Peju to Napa Valley. But it was a series of ideas, starting in Peju's birthplace on the Caspian Sea, then France, England and eventually, Los Angeles, that created the future for this landmark Napa Valley winery.

Tony Peju was attracted to Los Angeles by the film industry, he wanted to become a movie director. While studying film at LACC and UCLA he worked delivering flowers, owned and serviced vending machines, even tried selling yachts. But he found none of it satisfying.

Then he met Herta Behensky, his future wife. She encouraged him to concentrate on one thing. Since he enjoyed and had experience with plants and flowers that became the focus. Tony began to work in a variety of florist and landscape companies. In 1969 he found a florist store for sale in Hollywood but all he had to his name at the time was a brand new Mustang. Fortunately, a banker named Mrs. King had faith in Tony's idea, and by using the Mustang as a down payment, she helped him to acquire the store. Soon, he purchased a small house, and then another, using his landscaping talents to improve and sell them profitably. A second store led to the eventual purchase of enough land for what was to become a nursery operation. He continued to buy and sell houses but by then he had an idea of what he really wanted; a farm.

Originally, Peju was interested in acquiring 500 acres within driving distance of Los Angeles, a place he could go to 2-3 days a week. He was happy growing things and felt it was time to live on a farm, at least part time. Scouting for property between Los Angeles and the Mexican border, including date farms and palm farms in the desert, then Santa Barbara and Solvang, yielded no results. After life in Los Angeles, he realized the equation must also include a cultural life. So one day he drove north and discovered the Napa Valley.

With its proximity to San Francisco and a series of small towns offering a social life and restaurants, Napa Valley seemed to be right, even though he was forced to trim his expectation of 500 acres. Peju began looking at dozens of properties, flying up to Napa from Los Angeles at a moment's notice to inspect whatever possibilities his real estate agent discovered.

After two years of searching, the property Peju purchased turned out to be just 30 acres but it had the magic ingredient—location. Neighboring vineyards at the Rutherford site included Robert Mondavi, Inglenook and

Beaulieu. Situated between Highway 29 and the Napa River, the acreage included a 1900-era house and rambling vineyards, some 60 or more years old, planted to Cabernet Sauvignon and French Colombard.

Before Peju purchased the property in 1983, the grapes were being sold and Peju continued to sell to those wineries. Gradually he started improving the vineyard—which was renamed as the HB Vineyard for his wife Herta Behensky—and the winemakers began telling him what good wine these grapes were making. The section of the old vineyard that they preferred was a 5.5 acre block of cabernet sauvignon of undetermined age. Under Peju’s care, those particular vines found an ideal balance of soil and climate in Rutherford. He began thinking that if other wineries could make great wines from his grapes, he could do it, too. The old block of cabernet was to be the foundation for a future of uniquely flavored and highly prized wines.

So again, Tony Peju was on the road, but this time to UC Davis for study in enology. As he began to make and sell wine it was apparent that the cabernet from that special block would be the core of Peju Winery’s success. When the vineyard was replanted to disease resistant root stock, all the cabernet was grafted from that original 5.5 acre block. That is the source of what is now called the HB clone and Peju believes the combination of that unique clone in that particular region is what makes Peju Province estate wines so distinctive.

Peju’s initial winemaking efforts were rewarded with high critical praise. He converted a garage to a wine tasting room and enjoyed brisk sales but unwittingly, launched a far reaching controversy.

Peju had a county permit to build a winery but he needed to develop cash flow and establish a track record as premier producer before beginning construction. So he put out a sign that said “wine tasting” and sold wine from the garage. But the county objected, saying that couldn’t be done until the winery building was finished.

However, California law states that a grower may be allowed to sell his product at the location where it is grown. Napa County officials disagreed with that interpretation, so unfortunately, the issue went to court. The judge agreed that if Tony Peju grew the grapes, he could sell the wine. It was among the cases in a changing Napa Valley that prompted the controversial “winery definition.” At the peak of the mid-80s furor over Napa Valley’s capacity for visitors, many people were selling directly from their wineries but not openly. Unintentionally, the court ruling in the Peju case became instrumental in making other tasting rooms and retail sales legal at Napa County wineries.

Long before the winery was built, even before the land was purchased, Tony Peju had an idea of how the winery would look.. Working with a variety of architects in Los Angeles, Peju settled on a concept by Calvin Straub who, among many notable projects, designed the Lawry California Center in Los Angeles. Peju kept

some of Straub's original ideas and added some of his own when construction actually began.

Today, the complex is a far cry from the converted garage. The winery is impeccable, surrounded by two acres of gardens, pathways and fountains. Sculpted sycamore trees provide a landmark border as visitors enter an environment that reflects both Tony and Herta's deep interest in horticulture, art and landscape. A new tasting room, to be completed in the Fall of 2003 is the realization of the architectural rendering that from that early design and has, since the first bottles, been prominently featured on the label of Peju Province wines. It is a 50 foot, copper roofed tower, evocative of French Provincial architecture. The building, flowing seamlessly into the existing tasting room and winery, is figured in Brazilian cherry wood, with relic beams from old Midwestern farm buildings and artisan craftsmanship in every detail.

Looking to the future, Tony and Herta have introduced their two daughters, Lisa and Ariana, to the workings of the wine business. Both of the young women are immersing themselves in all aspects of Peju Province Winery.

It is in visiting the winery that the meaning of its name becomes apparent—Peju Province. Invitingly, Peju created a microcosmic province, a land of beauty and a multi-sensory experience where the fragrance of rose and wine mingle, where art and agriculture meet, where splashing fountains echo the sound of the good wine being poured inside.

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