NEWS RELEASE

The 120-Year-Old Secret About California Wine

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4 Angel-funded winemakers are reigniting a legacy that began at the Chicago World's Fair 124 years ago!
When it comes to wine, Lake County has been polishing its gold medals since 1893. But chances are – unless you were a crowd member at the World's Fair, or a 19th-century reporter for the Chicago Tribune – that's news to you.

First, let's set the scene...
Back when California's wine industry was just getting its footing, Chicago was constructing the most grandiose display in the nation: The Columbia Exposition, otherwise known as the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. And Lake County wine was one of its star features.

Themed to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus sailing toward the grand Americas, Chicago's mega-event was meant to capture the country's surge of optimism for the future of American industry.

Back then, the state's wine industry was fast-developing national interest.

The 1893 Horticultural Building, home of the Exhibition of California Wines. Source:
Chicagology.com

Entrance Ticket to the World's Columbian Exposition, 1893. Source:
www.rookno17.com

No offense to the life-size reproductions of Columbus' three ships, the original prototype for the Ferris Wheel, Eadweard Muybridge's zoopraxiscope (yes, real word, real object) or the world's first-ever moving walkway, the "travelator" – all inventions that debuted during 1893's world's fair – but California wine was bound to be the real showstopper.

At the World's Fair Exhibition of California Wines, Lake County wine was a star
And Lake County was spotlighted in a vast wine display, featuring a 25,000 gallon Redwood tank, a wine fountain and a full-sized cellar inside the Fair's Horticultural Hall designed by Chicago architects Jenny & Mundie.

It was there Lake County resident Colonel Charles M. Hammond and 53 other vintners set up shop, crossing their fingers as judges rated the wines of California.

Over 600 bottles and 301 varietal combinations were up for review – in what could only be imagined as one heck of a nerve-wracking public tasting…

25,000 gallon Redwood Tank on
display at the Exhibit of California
Wines.

Charles didn't have to fret – his wines from northern Upper Lake (both dry red and white) won top awards.
Hammond and the fair's Viticulture Commission knew in two swigs and the tip of a top hat: Lake County could make a mean Cabernet.

Display at the Exhibit of
California Wines. Source: Illinois
State Archives

Just imagine the scene. Inventors showing off their wares left and right; icons of history gathering together to form world banks and institutions; Helen Keller, Alexander Graham Bell, Pierre de Coubertin – even Buffalo Bill! – braved the crowds to get a glimpse of the action.

For burgeoning American industry, the White City's world's fair was a rather remarkable place to be – and Lake County's wines were sitting pretty right in the middle of the action.
Despite Lake County's world's fair triumph, the region's winemaking buzz soon quieted to a whisper.

There were some setbacks along the way.

After Charles brought home his champion wines from the fair, area winemaking businesses soon lost gusto (and legality) with Prohibition – and grapes did not re-emerge as a prominent agricultural feature in Lake County until the late 1960s.

Over the past decade, the region's definitely picked up some of its 19th-century winemaking pace.

Modern day Lake County is resurging as a winemaking capital – and somewhere, Charles Hammond is dancing.

According to the **Lake County Winery Association's website**, the County now features 8,400 acres of wine grapes. 32 wineries and 167 grape growers have done a great job at introducing a fresh region to California's wine scene – and nakedwines.com's Angel-funded winemakers are getting in on the action.

Angel-funded winemaker Tom Shula will release a Malbec highlighting both
Lake County and Lodi-grown fruit this month.

"Lake County has a variety of microclimates and soil types, and much of the county is well suited to the classic Bordeaux varietals," said Tom Shula, whose Lodi and Lake County-grown Malbec will release to nakedwines.com investors this March."It produces great wines – to rival or exceed many wines from Napa."

Winemaker David Marchesi, formerly of Duckhorn's Paraduxx and Gundlach Bundschu, recently debuted his Lake County Cabernet Sauvignon – his first wine for nakedwines.com – this past February. "It's a great region for opulent, really bright, even pretty wines," David explained. "The region has incredible potential."

Nakedwines.com's independent winemakers Tom Shula, David Marchesi, Camille Benitah and Franc Dusak are four waving a public notice about Lake County wine: The wine world should start paying attention (again).
Way back in 1893, standing triumphantly at the Chicago World's Fair, a couple of mustached British wine jollies gave Lake County a thumbs up. But it's time this California region stepped out of its shadowed history and into a 21st century moment in the sun.

"That California, with its manifold advantages…is rapidly taking its place as one of the principal wine-producing countries of the world is undoubted, and it is not surprising to those who know the facts of the case. The sooner these facts become more widely known the more quickly will California wines attain, more especially in this country, the high place in public estimation to which their excellent qualities their excellent qualities."

— Charles Oldham, Royal Commission Report on California Wines, February 12, 1894.

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