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The Unseen Engine of Fermentation

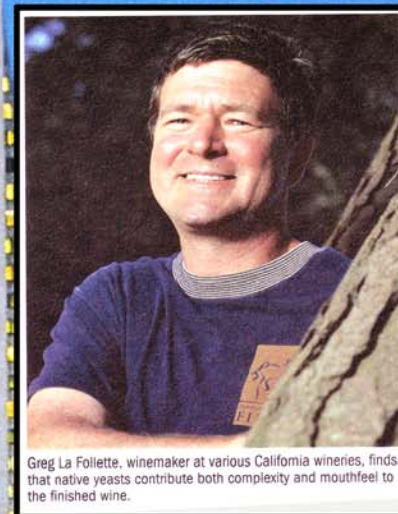
Yeast is a vintner's closest ally—and potential adversary BY DANIEL SOGG

“It’s not cookie-cutter winemaking. You can’t sit at a desk and read numbers. You need to go out and taste and feel the heat of live ammo.” —Greg La Follette

Greg La Follette, winemaker at California estates De Loach, Tandem and DuMol.

La Follette, who focuses on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, almost always uses native yeasts, which start at relatively small populations of about 100 to 1,000 cells per milliliter of grape must. (Standard inoculated fermentations start with about 1 million yeast cells per milliliter, which can increase 100-fold.)

Those small numbers force native yeasts to struggle, and La Follette finds that yeast, under stress, produces compounds, such as aromas of smoked venison and rose petals, that contribute complexity. He also believes, like many other vintners, that native yeasts provide superior mouthfeel, richer texture and a broader midpalate.



Greg La Follette, winemaker at various California wineries, finds that native yeasts contribute both complexity and mouthfeel to the finished wine.

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