

Wine Spectator

A man and a woman are standing outdoors in front of a stone wall and greenery. The man is on the left, wearing a dark blue cardigan over a white shirt and tan pants. The woman is on the right, wearing a light blue striped button-down shirt and blue jeans. Both are smiling at the camera.

WineSpectator.com

Napa's Dynamic Duo

**The couple behind Favia
has consulted for many of
Napa's greatest wineries**

PLUS


**The Best of 2019 Bordeaux
Impressive Oregon Pinots
Women Wine Stars**

**Andy Erickson
and Annie Favia**

DOWN TO EARTH

BY AARON
ROMANO

—
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
LEIGH-ANN BEVERLEY/
BONAFIDE

A man with dark hair, wearing a red button-down shirt, blue jeans, and brown leather boots, is sitting on a rustic wooden Adirondack chair. He is holding a glass of white wine and looking off to the side with a smile. The setting is a vineyard with rows of grapevines in the background, some with green leaves and others with yellowing leaves. The ground is covered in gravel. In the distance, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. A dark blue text box is in the upper right corner.

ANDY ERICKSON
AND ANNIE FAVIA,
THE HUSBAND-
WIFE TEAM BEHIND
FAVIA WINES, ARE
WRITING THEIR
OWN STORY WHILE
REVIVING A PIECE
OF NAPA HISTORY



Coombsville is a fertile area for agriculture, nestled in the center of a west-facing caldera in southeastern Napa Valley.

Passing through the nondescript gate to Favia Erickson Winegrowers in Coombsville, a short drive east from downtown Napa, the landscape is not typical of the grand wineries along Napa's main arteries.

Instead, the 6.5-acre property is a pastoral postcard where native California plants such as coyote bush, Carpentaria and bay trees sprawl amid old, knobby walnut trees and olive groves. A flourishing vegetable garden sits in front of a restored Victorian home and is the property's focal point, with the tail end of the Vaca mountain range encircling the view. This is home for winemaker Andy Erickson and viticulturist Annie Favia, both Napa Valley veterans, and the property reflects their love of growing and creating things beyond wine.

The husband-and-wife team launched their Favia brand in 2003 from the basement of their then-home in St. Helena, Calif. During their 25-plus years in Napa Valley, they have, sometimes simultaneously, worked with some of the area's top wineries and vineyards, including Screaming Eagle,

Harlan, Corison, Abreu, Staglin and Colgin. Erickson still consults for several wineries, including benchmark estates such as Mayacamas and Dalla Valle, while their own Favia offerings have become some of the most distinctive and highly rated wines in Napa.

Their story is not limited to the list of places they've been. For many, Erickson's and Favia's impressive résumés would be a life's accomplishment, but it's just the beginning for this dynamic couple. "A long time ago, we looked at each other and realized there was an opportunity to put our heads down and work hard and focus on us," says Favia.

"We put all of our energy into this property," explains Erickson, noting entire weekends devoted to digging holes and fixing irrigation

lines. "It's a lot of work but also a lot of fun to have and share," he adds.

What they're doing here is both commemorating Napa history and creating something new in an old place. The two have fully restored a portion of the acreage formerly known as Antonio Carbone Wine Cellar and Italian Garden, dating to the 1870s. The original stone cellar sits under their house,



Italian immigrant Antonio Carbone (front) with family and crew at Antonio Carbone Wine Cellar and Italian Garden, founded in 1886. Today, a historic parcel of the original estate is treasured by Favia and Erickson.

with a postage stamp-sized crush pad below a balcony. “We want to bring this place back to its pre-Prohibition glory,” says Favia.

Their next chapter is here, living off the land, experimenting and challenging themselves to do more and better.

“**H**ave you read the book *Because a Little Bug Went Ka-Choo?*” asks Favia, referencing the Dr. Suess children’s book about a bug that sneezes, causing a chain reaction of calamitous events. “One thing we work on a lot with farming is cause and effect and being mindful, and [we] think 10 steps ahead about how our actions affect things down the road,” she adds.

Thinking 10 steps ahead starts with a reverence for the land’s former denizens. Italian immigrants Antonio Carbone and his brothers Nicola and Lorenzo settled in Napa in 1863, and in 1870 they purchased 125 acres in Coombsville.

Over the years, the property had been parceled out, but Favia and Erickson were lucky enough to acquire a portion previously owned by Huneus Wines, which included the Carbone residence and cellar built in 1886. Through Erickson and Favia’s gardens and winery, they’re bringing the Carbone’s history back into focus while strengthening their own story that runs parallel, transcending 150 years.

Favia likens it to a return to her rural upbringing on a farm in Connecticut, with a mother who was an avid gardener and a father who made wine in the garage from grapes shipped from California. “So many things in life are cyclical. We had this homestead upbringing, and reviving this property and that way of life again represents the full circle of living off the land and having food and wine on the table,” she says.

Favia, 50, has a sparkling and chatty personality, with Erickson, 54, being more restrained and soft-spoken. Favia winemaker Jessica Tarpy Shaheen describes Erickson as a visionary and Favia as a meticulous type that keeps them on course. The trio of Erickson, Favia and Tarpy Shaheen is involved in every aspect of the winemaking. The only deviations are that Favia gets the last say in the vineyard and Erickson gets the final word in the winery.

Tarpy Shaheen was hired in 2008 to do a bit of everything, and she’s an effective counterbalance to the husband-and-wife dynamic.

“REVIVING THIS PROPERTY REPRESENTS THE FULL CIRCLE OF LIVING OFF THE LAND.”
—ANNIE FAVIA



Winemaker Jessica Tarpy Shaheen (right), on board since 2008, is integral to a team where egos are put aside and everyone’s input is valued. Above: The trio evaluates juice samples ahead of the 2021 harvest.

In an industry that often sees a revolving door of help, she says she’s stayed so long because of Erickson’s and Favia’s humble personalities. “They’re not bringing their ego into meetings or blendings or the vineyard. I couldn’t have worked for anyone this long who is an egoist,” says Tarpy Shaheen.

Both Favia and Erickson are warm and affable people, happy to host friends for dinner and pluck a head of cabbage for them to take home. When the vegetable harvests are favorable, they share the bounty with local chefs in the spirit of Antonio (as well as Favia’s mother).

Favia’s green thumb includes a mastery of indigenous plants, and much of the property has been converted to water-conscious native growths. A walk through the estate includes her demonstrating how one of her favorite plants, *Ceanothus*, suds like soap when rubbed together in your hands with a bit of water.

Sustainability is an important goal: “Any input, even a cultural practice like canopy management, has an effect,” says Favia. “We have to operate thinking about everything around us, how our decisions affect our adjacent neighbors and community and the air above us, and leave something better than [we] found it. And that’s what we’re trying to do with this place. How do we make it a sustainable business?”

They chose Coombsville to establish roots in part because it’s removed from the hustle and bustle of other parts of Napa, but also because it is a fertile area for agriculture. “Coombsville has become a big part of our story,” explains Erickson. “We were itching to spread out and plant a vineyard, feed ourselves from a garden and orchards.”

They spent years searching for a place to make that dream happen and were intrigued by Coombsville, which became a recognized American Viticultural Area in 2011. “Annie really saw the potential for growing in this cool area. The first property we purchased, 5 acres, was a blank slate, along with some stunning 300-year-old valley oak trees,” he adds.

Not far from the Carbone property, they similarly devoted much of that land to farming fruit, vegetables and chickens. Favia planted a small, dry-farmed Sauvignon Blanc vineyard there. They sold that property to buy the Carbone Estate in 2014, but the decision was difficult. They had just completed a years-long restoration of their house, and the vineyard, orchards and gardens were thriving; however, “When the Carbone property became a possibility,” says Erickson, “we knew we had to do it.”

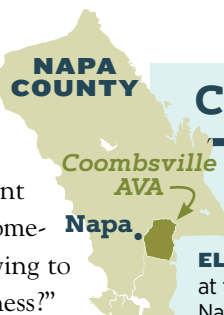
Coombsville, in the southeastern corner of Napa Valley, sits in the center of a west-facing caldera. Ancient, gravelly, volcanic soils and a climate among the coolest in the valley, with influence from the nearby San Pablo Bay, make for distinctive conditions.

“We think it’s always cool and windy here,” laughs Favia, “but it can be 10 degrees cooler than just a few miles up the road, and that allows us to make wines with great natural acidity and freshness.” She adds, “The cause and effect extend into our winemaking because we don’t want to have to add anything.”

Favia and Erickson aren’t the first winemakers in Coombsville, and their classic-scoring Coombsville Cabernet Sauvignon 2018 shows the region’s promise. “The reds set Coombsville apart,” explains Erickson, noting the impressive energy, acidity and savory tones that the area’s reds carry compared with wines from warmer climates. The volcanic soils give that hall-mark Napa Valley concentration, but the cooler climate lends the more savory notes and provides tension in the wines.

Recent years have taken Favia away from wine viticulture. Her latest project is Erda, a whole-flower and -leaf herbal tea company (see “A Winemaker’s Cup of Tea,” page 15).

Neither she nor Erickson



COOMBSVILLE AT A GLANCE

2011 Coombsville becomes Napa Valley’s 16th established AVA

ELEVATION RANGE Near sea level at the western edge of the city of Napa, to about **1,900 feet**

SOILS Gravelly loams and rocky volcanic soils

38 vintners and growers including Caldwell; Farella; Faust; Merus; Paul Hobbs; Favia

1,400 acres planted of **11,000** total acres

VARIETIES Chardonnay; Cabernet Sauvignon and other Bordeaux grapes; Syrah; Pinot Noir

is good at standing still. Despite Erickson’s subdued demeanor, his mind is always active while concurrently organized and exact. He still consults or makes the wines for nine wineries, including Dalla Valle, Mayacamas, To Kalon Vineyard Company and Alpha Omega.

“I love what I do. I might get up at 3:30 a.m. and drive to a vineyard and start tasting fruit just because I’m thinking about it,” says Erickson. But balance is also important for him. “I’m always on the move, but I’ve arranged it to where I’m home for lunch and dinner, and I start and end every day here,” he says.

The Carbone property has cemented a sense of place for both the couple and the Favia brand. When you’re on your journey and you find yourself home, you’re home.

Favia and Erickson’s first meeting almost took place in 1994 at Newton Vineyards—they both had their first real wine jobs there, working under winemaker John Kongsgaard. But they just missed each other by six months.

Raised on a farm in Connecticut and with ballet aspirations, Favia arrived in Napa after studying French literature and art history at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and then at the Sorbonne in Paris. Following her return to the States, she drove cross-country to Napa in 1993, where she began her career in wine at Newton Vineyards as an office assistant.

She went on to join winemaker Cathy Corison, where she found her calling working with her hands in the dirt. She reminisces about a February morning, when, after weeks spent in the cold, wet *cave* racking barrels, she headed out to prune the mustard-laced Kronos Vineyard, which Corison had recently purchased. “And

there were these cool, old head-trained vines, and I was like, ‘Oh my god, I want to do *that*!’”

From there, she attended Napa Valley College at night to earn a post-baccalaureate Associate of Science degree in viticulture. Over the next decade, she worked as a viticulturist for David Abreu Vineyard Management, which was deeply entrenched



Crops for Favia’s homegrown tea company, Erda, include organically cultivated herb varieties such as lemon verbena (left).



Favia harvests artichokes and other produce from the couple's sustainably farmed gardens.



Visitors to Favia Wines taste in an intimate cabin that doubles as the winery's tasting lab and displays historical artifacts and documents.

in the mass replanting of Napa Valley during the late 1990s and early 2000s, establishing some of Napa's most esteemed vineyards.

Erickson's story is parallel to Favia's. Most of his formative years were spent in rural Indiana, but his dad's Ph.D. in molecular biology kept the family moving around, including periods in La Jolla, Calif., and Massachusetts. After studying political science at Tufts University, he moved to San Francisco and landed a job at an advertising firm with clients in Napa Valley.

"We'd be going over spreadsheets and calendars, and I'm watching guys pruning and digging holes in the vineyard and thinking, 'I can do that, that looks more interesting than this budget,'" he says.

Erickson followed his interest and traveled to South America, spending five months in Chile and a year in Mendoza, Argentina, doing everything from pruning vines to working bottling lines. Then, as luck would have it, he crossed paths with winemaker Paul Hobbs, who had been exploring the wines of Mendoza. Hobbs helped Erickson get his first job in Napa, at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, in 1994.

After a short stint at Stag's Leap, Erickson became a barrel salesman for Seguin Moreau, but he knew he wanted to be working in wine. Then he landed an interview at Newton.

"And someone said, 'There's this cute blonde girl that works in the office that you should meet,'" he says, smiling. "But she had left six months before." He met the girl, Annie, a year later at a mutual friend's dinner party, and they went on to marry in 1998.

For a few years, the couple made small batches of wine out of the basement and garage of their home in St. Helena. They laugh about the fact that they once had so many unlabeled bottles that they were trading haircuts and miscellaneous goods and services for the wine.

Like Favia, Erickson returned to school, earning a master's degree in viticulture and enology from the University of California, Davis, in 2000. He then joined winemaker Bob Levy at Harlan and Bond for a year before Favia's connection to Staglin Winery, through Abreu, landed him his first winemaking gig in 2001. That same year, the couple had their first child, Madeline, and made their first commercial wine, which they produced and stored at Staglin. In 2003, their second daughter, Josephine, was born and they decided to get serious about Favia Wines.

Favia Wines began as a passion for Cabernet Franc, but it likewise made a splash with Rhône varietals, sourced from viticulturist Ann Kraemer's vineyard in Amador County, approximately 100 miles east of Napa, in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. But after purchasing the Carbone property, the couple knew their focus needed to be in Napa—and specifically Coombsville. The last vintage of the Rhône reds was 2018, but they still make a white, a Viognier called Suize, from Kraemer's grapes. Their small portfolio of wines, around 1,500 cases annually, now consists of four core Cabernet-based wines.

WINES & VINES RÉSUMÉS

ANDY ERICKSON

Past and current wine-making/consulting work (*current):

- ▶ Arietta*
- ▶ Dalla Valle*
- ▶ Mayacamas*
- ▶ Ellman Family Vineyards*
- ▶ Cervantes*
- ▶ To Kalon Vineyard Company*
- ▶ Seven Apart*
- ▶ Leviathan*
- ▶ Alpha Omega*
- ▶ Gargiulo*
- ▶ OVID
- ▶ Hartwell
- ▶ Jonata
- ▶ Dancing Hares
- ▶ Screaming Eagle
- ▶ Staglin Family

Early Experience:

- ▶ Stag's Leap Wine Cellars (*harvest intern*)
- ▶ Newton Vineyard (*cellar crew*)
- ▶ Spottswode (*harvest intern*)
- ▶ Harlan Estate (*assistant winemaker*)

ANNIE FAVIA

Past wine industry jobs:

- ▶ David Abreu Vineyard Management (*viticulturist*)
- ▶ Pahlmeyer (*director of vineyard operations*)
- ▶ Screaming Eagle (*consultant, vineyard redevelopment*)
- ▶ Mayacamas (*consultant, vineyard redevelopment*)

Early experience:

- ▶ Newton Vineyard (*office assistant*)
- ▶ Cathy Corison (*cellar worker*)



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Above: Erickson and Favia reside in the historic Carbone home, which sits atop the winery and cellar on the 6.5 acre property. Opposite: Lavender thrives in the tea garden.

Cerro Sur, which is Spanish for “south hill,” is a Cabernet Franc blend from a mountainside vineyard on the eastern portion of Coombsville; the 2018 bottling boasts a whopping 80% Cabernet Franc. The couple loves the complexity that Cabernet Franc offers. “It can have slight herbal tones and an Asian market spice mix, but with the same power you can get from Cabernet Sauvignon, when done right,” says Favia.

La Magdalena is a Cabernet Sauvignon-based blend from the eastern benches above Oakville. “We settled on vineyards from Coombsville and Oakville because they’re so unique, with very different personalities,” says Erickson. There are also two varietal Cabernet Sauvignons: one from Oakville and one from Coombsville. They also produce two wines—a Coombsville Chardonnay and a red blend—under a Carbone label they launched in 2015.

After working with Corison, who was buying grapes from Abreu, Favia developed a deep appreciation for Cabernet Franc, which she calls a wine that never fully reveals itself. “It toes a fine line to be really beautiful, but it’s a fun thing for us. We love a challenge,” she says.

Favia and Erickson were curious about what would happen if they used a higher percentage of the grape and made it the lead

“IT’S MORE ABOUT BEING HERE AND TAKING CARE OF THE LAND, MAKING THE WINES AND, HOPEFULLY, PEOPLE NOTICE.” —ANDY ERICKSON

variety, rather than Cabernet Sauvignon. Adding to the challenge was finding Cabernet Franc grapes; a mere 1,100-plus acres of the variety are planted in all of Napa Valley, compared to Cabernet Sauvignon’s approximately 24,000. They also wanted older vines that had north or eastern exposures, and Favia says that after year after year of developing vineyards and looking and listening and tasting, they fell in love with wines from the eastern Vaca range.

They both detail how Cabernet Franc is finicky to grow and vinify. It needs to be babied in some ways because it sunburns easily, and it can quickly turn vegetative if not ripened properly. “It can be a lot like Pinot Noir in terms of being very site-specific. It needs to be just right,” explains Erickson.

Their winemaking approach favors minimal intervention, natural yeast fermentation and no fining or filtering. “Our goal is not to add anything or take anything away,” says Erickson. “If the vineyard is well tended to and from an exciting site, the rest is just quality control and making sure wines express the *terroir*.”

There’s a confident humility that both spouses bring to the table. For example, Erickson admits that while blending is one of his favorite parts of winemaking, he never does it by himself.

“The minute you think you have the answers is when you should sit down and listen,” says Favia, noting that they are constantly learning things together and from one another. “You’re working with Mother Nature, and you only get one chance a year. So you’ve got to keep fine-tuning and searching for the little things that will make the wines incrementally better.” She adds, “We still have a lot to learn. We want to keep exploring and discovering.”

Favia and Erickson carved out résumés as some of Napa’s most extraordinary wine and vine minds. Yet, they don’t fancy the moniker that has followed them: Napa’s power couple. “‘Power couple’ makes it sound like we wield some power outside of what we do,” chuckles Erickson, adding, “It sounds like we’re going to be on the red carpet. There’s no red carpet.”

Instead, they favor their complementary traits. “Andy is scientific and precise, and I tend to be maybe more ...” Favia trails off, and Erickson eggs her on. “Say it,” he says with a smile. “I operate more from intuition,” she finishes.

They share a doting gaze, and that brief interaction seamlessly describes their connection. They momentarily pause the conversation. “The temperature is perfect right now,” says Erickson. “Good ripening weather,” adds Favia. “Definitely good flowering and set weather,” continues Erickson, taking a sip of wine. He says they’ve always just made the wines they love, and then figured out how to get them to people who will appreciate them and their story: “It’s more about being here and taking care of the land, making the wines and, hopefully, people notice.” □

RECENT RELEASES FROM FAVIA WINES

SCORE	WINE	PRICE
96	FAVIA Cabernet Sauvignon Oakville 2018	\$250
95	FAVIA Cabernet Sauvignon Coombsville 2018	\$250
95	FAVIA La Magdalena Napa Valley 2018	\$250
94	FAVIA Cerro Sur Napa Valley 2018	\$250

