



Austin Hope

*small farming town in search of new opportunity. His parents bought land and planted both vineyards and apple orchards. He was just eight years old when the grapes came on line in the 1980s and he began learning in the vineyards alongside his father, Chuck Hope. After graduating with a degree in fruit science from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Austin followed his father's advice and sought employment with Chuck Wagner of Caymus Vineyards – the Hope family had previously sold Cabernet Sauvignon grapes to Wagner for its Liberty School label. Austin worked with Wagner in Napa, both inside the winery and the administrative offices, learning the nuts and bolts of the wine business from one of California's most respected producers. It was then that he realized he not only wanted to grow grapes but also manage his own label to bring his fruit directly to market. The Hope family began producing Liberty School wines in 1995 and founded Treana in 1996. After beginning as the assistant winemaker, Austin became winemaker for the Hope portfolio in 1998. Under Austin's leadership, Hope Family Wines ([hopefamilywines.com](http://hopefamilywines.com)) now produces five distinct labels: Treana, Liberty School, Candor, Troublemaker, and Austin Hope. In 2009, Austin Hope was named "Winemaker of the Year" at the California Mid-State Fair.*

## What is the history of Hope Family Wines?

I'm a third-generation California farmer. When we started out on this wine-making adventure, we looked not only at our own vineyards, but tapped into the Paso Robles community of winemakers to determine how we wanted to position our product.

We decided exactly how we wanted to bring our concept into the winery, and we never strayed from our original vision.

At Hope Family Wines, we use cutting-edge methods to produce our wines while still maintaining the integrity of our original practices. When we started, we were producing 50,000 cases and, as we grew, we never changed how we made the wine. That is one of the biggest things that we see in this industry – when people grow, they start looking for ways to cut corners or to replicate their

# Quality and Value

## An Interview with Austin Hope, Winemaker and President, Hope Family Wines

### EDITORS' NOTE

*Austin Hope arrived in Paso Robles in 1978, when his family moved to the*

process quickly, but we still pump our barrels with nitrogen and still shovel our skins out of the tank.

### Why has Paso Robles grown into such a strong region for wine?

We've known the quality of the region for 30 years but it took a long time to get a core group of producers that were consistently creating high-end wine, representative of Paso Robles. When we got here, there were only 10 wineries and now there are more than 200 in the area.

The best word that defines the region is "diversity." Within this area, there are 12 different microclimates, which is very unusual. You can literally go a few miles in any direction and see different soils, different rainfalls, and different temperatures that all yield a different flavor profile. Having a Mediterranean climate, our proximity to the ocean is huge because we have this big valley that draws in marine air. The diurnal shift from daytime to nighttime temperatures is great for growing wine grapes. Drawing from these different areas allows us to create exciting, dynamic blends that are sourced solely from Paso Robles.

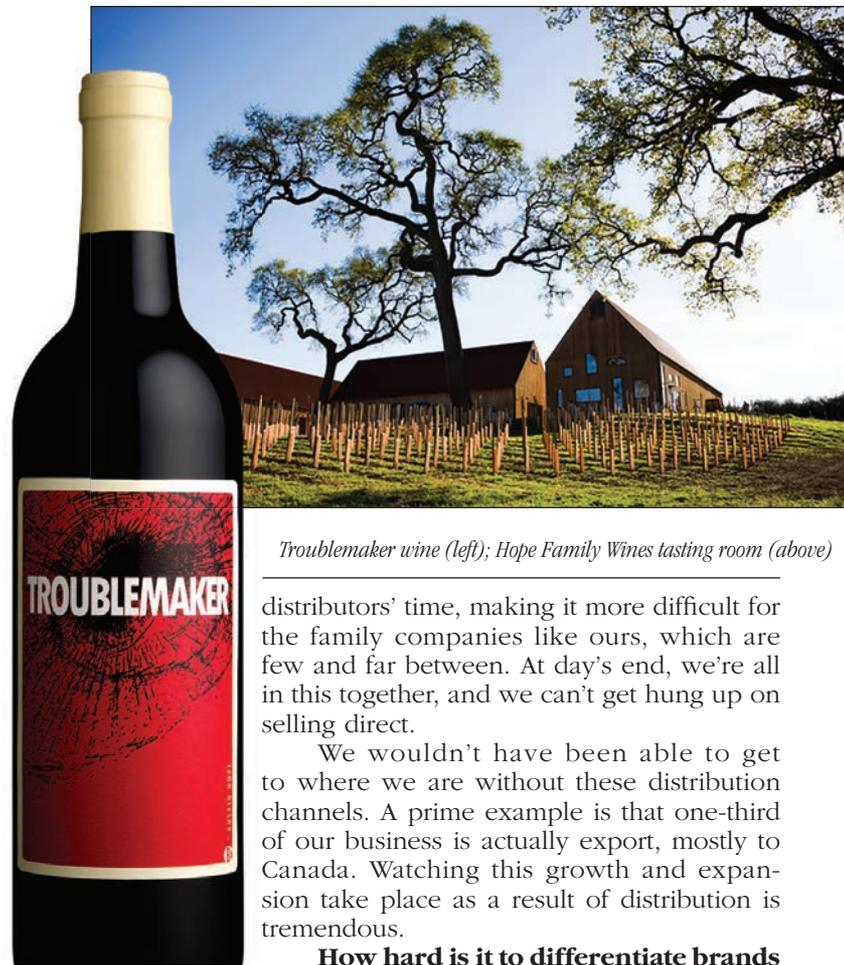
### How is technology impacting the wine-making process?

Technology has made a massive impact, especially in filtration. We used to run the wine through a filter to take the heavy solids out but new technology has provided us with filters that effortlessly yield cleaner wine with a more pure taste. As a result, we are making better quality and sounder wines that will age better.

### Are you content with distribution today?

A lot of people don't like the three-tiered system – they want to be able to go direct. That is a great tool to start off with but we like to look at it as a partnership with multiple channels. Hope Family Wines has 50-plus family farmers that work with us on a daily basis so there is no way we'd be able to distribute 400,000 cases worldwide without a great distribution team.

With the growth and diversity of the wine industry over the past 20 years, we have seen a tremendous change in distribution. Some of the big wine companies are monopolizing the



Troublemaker wine (left); Hope Family Wines tasting room (above)

distributors' time, making it more difficult for the family companies like ours, which are few and far between. At day's end, we're all in this together, and we can't get hung up on selling direct.

We wouldn't have been able to get to where we are without these distribution channels. A prime example is that one-third of our business is actually export, mostly to Canada. Watching this growth and expansion take place as a result of distribution is tremendous.

### How hard is it to differentiate brands in such a crowded space?

It's extremely difficult. This industry is, first and foremost, about quality and price. A good example is Chardonnay. Hope Family Wines makes a Liberty School Chardonnay of exceptional quality that is priced at \$12. The distributors, the gatekeepers, and the consumers all expect low price points on Chardonnay, which, in turn, forces us to drive price down on a product that we believe stands out in the market. However, with an oversaturated marketplace, value perception is something we have to work with.

In order to distinguish our five labels, we invest in full-time salespeople around the country who spread our message and increase our visibility. People crave a personal relationship with products, which plays to our message of a small family-run business in a blossoming region like Paso Robles. When consumers feel connected to our story and try our products, we have achieved the goal of sharing Hope Family's brand.

### Are there certain rules for consumption that should be followed in terms of food and wine pairings?

At Hope Family Wines, we believe that it is our job to demystify wine and make it approachable. As a beverage that often accompanies food, we need to get away from the rules and intimidation, and trust our individual preferences. I am excited to see the wine industry becoming more dynamic and approachable as younger generations embrace education through online sources that are right at our fingertips. Each of our wines has unique qualities that lend themselves to certain food pairings but one should have fun with them because they also pair with everything as a result of their balance and complex profiles. ●