



ROBERT ASHLEY YOUNG A Pioneer in California Winegrowing

Guided by integrity, inspiration and innovation, Robert Young greatly influenced the California wine community starting in the early 1960s. He was a pioneer in establishing the premium grape industry in California and the first to plant Cabernet Sauvignon in Alexander Valley. Robert was instrumental in changing the way growers and vintners work together. He initiated greater standards for grape quality and inspired his peers nationally and internationally to take pride in the quality of their fruit.

Robert Young was a successful prune farmer in the early 1960s, when his progressive agricultural practices caught the attention of Robert Sisson, then Sonoma County Farm Advisor. Sisson identified Young as one of the foremost farmers in Sonoma County and encouraged him to lead the newest trend in California agriculture: premium varietal wine grapes. In 1963, Cabernet Sauvignon was the up & coming varietal, according to the University of California at Davis. Practical reasons also supported Young in the planting of this late harvesting grape, which could be picked after the same crew brought in the prune harvest.

“When Robert first began growing Cabernet Sauvignon, everyone thought he was out of his mind,” recalls Richard Arrowood, Robert Young’s original winemaker. “I recognized that he was merely far ahead of his time in understanding and planting for what was next to come.” An innovative farmer, Young had a long understanding of the importance of research and experimentation. At a time when traditional California vines were head-pruned, he invested in trellising with the notion it would grow vines that produced higher quality fruit and make grape growing a more profitable enterprise.



While Sonoma County’s winegrowing history extends back more than 150 years, Chardonnay from Alexander Valley was uncommon when Young planted his first vines in 1967. The widely publicized success of this vineyard, coupled with the family’s desire to continually upgrade, prompted the Youngs to select and propagate a singular clone, known today as Robert Young Clone #17. In 1975, Young brought additional acclaim to the varietal and set a new standard for grower and vintner relations, when he became one of the first American grape growers to be honored with a vineyard-designated wine. In collaboration with Richard Arrowood, then winemaker for Chateau St. Jean, the single vineyard 1975 Robert Young Vineyard Chardonnay was introduced.

For more than four decades, Robert Young remained a successful leader in California wine grape growing through an uncompromising respect for the land. “We are blessed to live on and farm land that is very, very special,” he says. “I hope that what we have now will never be abused; that future generations will treat the land well and understand that by being generous, the land will continue to grow whatever we wish for it to grow.”

Robert Young’s roots to his land ran deep. He was the third generation to farm the family property, a role he assumed at the age of 16, when his father died, leaving him the head of the household. Upon graduation from Healdsburg High School, he married his high school sweetheart, Gertrude Rotlisberger. Robert and Gertrude shared 48 years together and were blessed with four children: JoAnn, Susan, Jim & Fred. Robert Young passed away in 2009. His children and grandchildren carry on his legacy and commitment to the land their ancestors settled over a century ago.



ROBERT ASHLEY YOUNG
Lifetime Awards & Accolades

Sharing his insight, knowledge and dedication to quality, Robert Young greatly contributed to professional and community associations throughout the years. Some highlights of his lifetime of accomplishments include:

Wine Industry Integrity Award – *2nd Annual Recipient, 1999*

Winegrowers of California – *Chairman, 1985*

California Association of Winegrape Growers – *Chairman of the Board 1982-84, Director 1979-86*

International Organization of Vine and Wine - *Elected Delegate from California*

Alexander Valley Association – *Member, Chapter President 1972-73*

Winegrape Growers of America – *Member*

Industry Advisory Committee for Grapes at U.C. Davis – *Member*

Sonoma County Farm Bureau – *Member*

Kiwanis Club – *Lifetime member, President 1980*

Alexander Valley School Board – *Past Chairman*

Healdsburg High School Board – *Past Chairman*

Supreme Knight of the Knights of the Vine