

# BARRA

*of* MENDOCINO

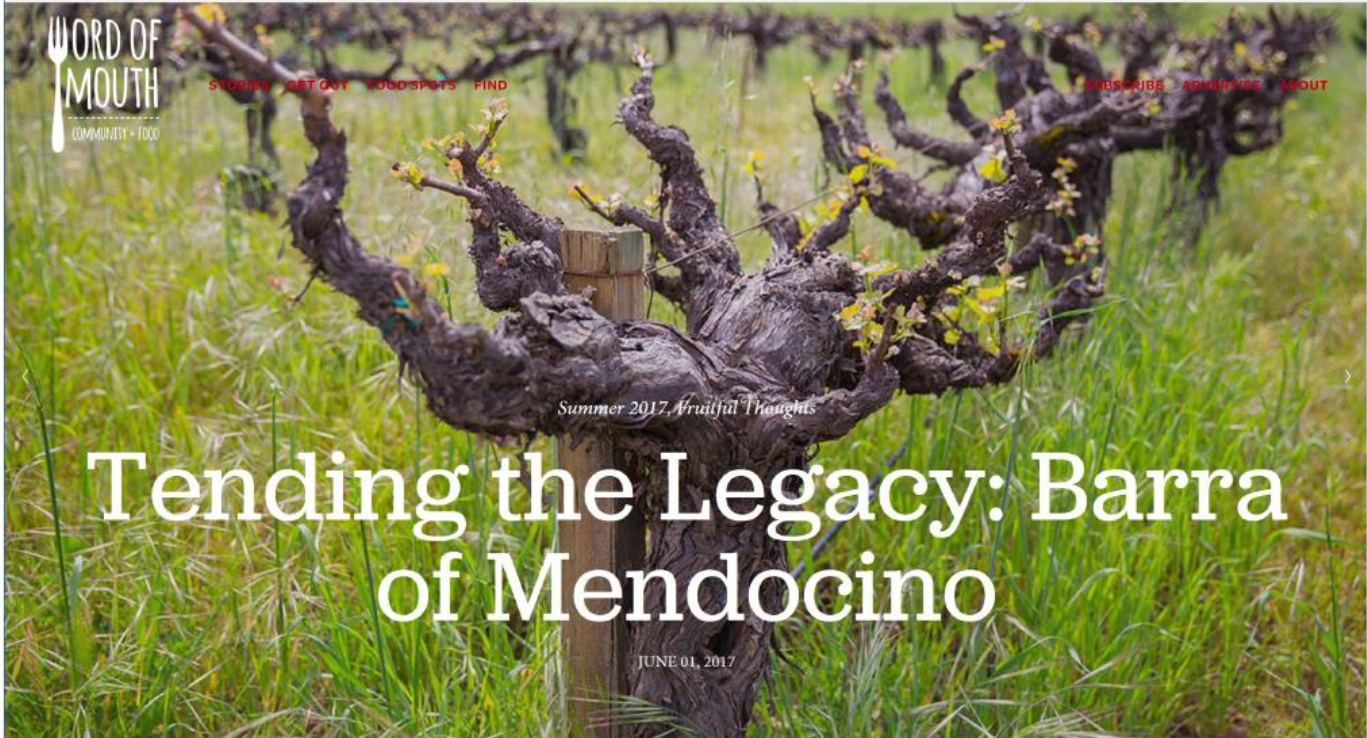
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<b>Proprietors:</b>	Martha Barra
<b>Winery Address/Phone:</b>	7051 N. State Street Redwood Valley, CA 95470 Ph: 707.485.0322 Fx: 707.485.6784
<b>Head Winemaker:</b>	Randy Meyer
<b>Sales &amp; Marketing Contact:</b>	Shelley Maly (Martha's daughter)
<b>Finance &amp; Operations:</b>	Shawn Harmon (Martha's son)
<b>Vineyards/Certifications:</b>	Redwood Valley Vineyards-175 acres (CCOF certified in 1989) Bella Collina Vineyards-20 acres (CCOF certified in 2001) Vineyards At BARRA of Mendocino Winery-50 acres (CCOF certified 2007) Redwood Valley Vineyards II -50 acres purchased in 2014 (CCOF certified 1994)
<b>Custom Crush Facility:</b>	<b>Redwood Valley Cellars</b> 2.8 million gallon crushing and storage facility servicing the North Coast
<b>Winery:</b>	<b>BARRA of Mendocino Winery</b> Set on 50 acres of beautiful vineyard surroundings planted with Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel, the BARRA of Mendocino Winery & Event Center is an architectural phenomenon that dates back to the 1970's when it was built as the tasting room for Weibel Champagne Cellars (the building itself resembles an upside down champagne glass!). The sprawling 5,000 square foot tasting room highlights 40 foot ceilings, a circular tasting bar, indoor fountain and gift shop.
<b>Brands:</b>	BARRA of Mendocino, Girasole Vineyards, CORO Mendocino
<b>Varietals:</b>	Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Muscat Canelli, Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petite Sirah



## CHARLIE BARRA LEGACY TIMELINE

- 1926** Charles Barra born in Calpella, California to first generation Italian immigrants Antonio Barra and Marie Rovera
- 1946** Senior year in high school, Charlie farmed wine grapes which earned him \$10,000.00 (3 x as much as the principal!)
- 1952** Served in U. S. Army from 1952-1954
- 1955** Planted 150 acres of prime wine grape vineyards in Redwood Valley (Redwood Valley Vineyards)
- 1960** One of first wine grape growers to use sprinkler system water for frost protection in vineyards. Constructed five water reservoirs for storing winter water runoff to use for frost protection and irrigation. Pioneered the use of grape gondolas for in-field harvesting of grapes, making the use of wooden boxes in the field obsolete.
- 1963** Founder and past president of California North Coast Grape Growers Association and board member for 41 years. Lobbied for a variety of grower causes, including varietal percentage change in wines from 51% to 75%, the first appellation designation in the U.S, and for pricing regulations that said a grower and winery had to agree on prices before grapes were crushed
- 1965** Appointed to Mendocino County Planning Commission
- 1968** Appointed by then Governor Reagan to the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
- 1969** Founder and chairman first two years of St. Mary's Mardi Gras fundraiser
- 1974** Planted 300 acres of vineyard in Potter Valley and Ukiah Valley
- 1975** Again appointed to Mendocino County Planning Commission
- 1976** Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Limited Partnership which owned Souverain Winery through 1985
- 1980** Acted as advisor to Bank of America on agricultural lending. Married Martha Barra
- 1988** Founded St. Mary's School Foundation, serving as its president for 21 years
- 1989** Officially converted all vineyards to organic farming, following the practice of using no pesticides, insecticides or herbicides. Certified and inspected each year by California Certified Organic Farmers
- 1992** Invented radio-controlled fishing bobber, patented by U. S. Patent Office
- 1996** Purchased 50% interest in Redwood Valley Cellars, a 2.5 million gallon custom crush and storage facility located in Redwood Valley, California
- 1997** Began producing premium wines and marketing under the label of *BARRA of Mendocino*
- 2000** Planted 20 acres of Petite Sirah and Zinfandel vineyards on eastern hills near Lake Mendocino (Bella Collina)
- 2003** Developed other wine labels called *Girasole Vineyards* and *59<sup>th</sup> Harvest* and developed national as well as international wine sales channels
- 2006** Charlie Barra turns 80 and completes his 61<sup>st</sup> harvest!
- 2007** Purchased remaining 50% interest in Redwood Valley Cellars to become sole owner of 2.5 million gallon crushing and storage facility servicing the North Coast
- 2009** *Girasole Vineyards* Pinot Noir wins Wine & Spirits "100 Best Buys of the Year" award
- 2011** Charlie Barra honored by Slow Foods San Francisco as a pioneer for organic grape farming in the United States
- 2012** Launched redesign of *Girasole Vineyards* label and released first Rosé under *BARRA of Mendocino* brand
- 2013** Charlie Barra celebrates his 68<sup>th</sup> Harvest in Mendocino County, and is honored in story by Tim Fish of Wine Spectator
- 2014** Barra family purchases 50 acres of certified organic vineyard adjacent to home ranch in Redwood Valley
- 2016** Planted 5,900 vines of Pinot Blanc and 14,000 vines of Cabernet Sauvignon
- 2017** *Girasole Vineyards* named a Wine Enthusiast "Value Brand Of The Year"
- 2018** Mendocino County Fair Wine Competition establishes the "Charlie Barra Best of Show White Wine" designation
- 2019** Charlie Barra passes away, June 29, 2019 at the age of 92



*story and photos by Ree Slocum*

Many could've predicted that Charlie Barra, son and grandson of Italian wine grape growers, would one day own his own 327 acres of vineyards and winery with tasting room. Born in 1926 with pruning shears in his hands, 19 years later Charlie made a whopping \$10,000 his first year leasing a vineyard, while also managing to graduate from high school. He worked hard growing grapes, and in 1955 bought the current Redwood Valley Vineyards on East Road in Redwood Valley.

In 1980 Charlie made another wise decision and married his sweetheart, Martha. She happily jumped into the domestic and business partnership with Charlie, contributing organizational and legal skills while Charlie managed the day-to-day business of growing grapes. Organic grapes, as it turns out. Martha told me a favorite Charlieism: "I've grown organically for 50 years. The first 30 I didn't know it!" He'd learned the age-old methods from his grandfather and father, who never used chemicals in the old country.

One of the earliest changes Charlie implemented in the early 1960s was hiring seasonal workers through the Bracero Program, a federal program whereby agriculturists in the states could legally bring in workers from other countries (in this case Mexico) if they anticipate a shortage of domestic workers.





The Bracero program disappeared and has been replaced by the H-2A program. Among the most heavily regulated and monitored programs in the states, H-2A is expensive. The employer pays the going wage set by the Department of Labor and all of the worker's expenses: transportation to and from their country, lawyer fees to do the paperwork, housing, food, transportation, and doctor appointments.

Martha not only continues the valuable H-2A program, but has also enlisted the help of Sheriff Tom Allman in brainstorming how to get more local workers who need and want jobs. The two came up with a very new program called the Inmate Picker Program. The minimum security inmates who are chosen for the program are highly vetted.

They work in the vineyards during the day, earn a fair wage, go back to jail at night, and receive their paycheck every week during harvest from Redwood Valley Vineyards. Martha has hired a few who have returned to the vineyards seeking work after their release from jail.

Since 2003, Martha and her grown children, Shawn and Shelley, have become an integral part of running the winery, the custom crush facility, the brands, and the vineyards. At 90, Charlie is now retired. He still has that twinkle in his eye, especially for his lovely wife, and has the quick-witted mind his friends love.

Winemaking is a labor-intensive endeavor. Fortunately, the Barras have loyal employees that Martha considers family, including three Hispanic families who've been working in the vineyard since the early 1980s. Roberto Gonzales has been vineyard foreman since 2013 and has 35 years of experience growing wine grapes. Katrina Kessen is tasting room manager and events coordinator, whose southern hospitality is a charm. And wine maker Owen Smith, signed on in 2013 and is instrumental in producing the current award winning, organically grown and processed estate wines under the Barra and Girasole (jeer-ah-so-lay) labels.

I visited the winery and tasting room on a cloudy day after Martha took me on a tour of the Redwood Valley Vineyards. Barrels of Pinot Noir were out of storage and spread on the wide cement floor of the Redwood Valley Cellars facility. Owen Smith, Barra's winemaker, was tasting the various barrels to see which ones would be included in this year's Barra of Mendocino's Pinot Noir. According to Owen, each barrel has a bar coded label telling him not just which Barra varietal and vineyard the grapes were from, but also the age and type of the barrel, where it was made, who the cooper was, the toast level, and the length of time the staves were aged before the barrel was assembled. Also included is how many times the barrel has been used and for what wine. All this information allows them to track what has worked in the past so they can apply that knowledge to next year's production.

When you sit down and share your next bottle of Barra of Mendocino or Girasole wine, raise your glasses to toast Charlie and Martha. Their fine, well balanced, organic wines add a splash of old world style to our palate and meals.