

LAST CALL

BY JEFF MORGAN

Sounding the Horn

CALIFORNIA VINTNER JIM FETZER IS LEADING THE CHARGE OF BIODYNAMIC GRAPEGROWING

IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S REMOTE CLEAR LAKE district, vineyards hug rugged slopes that rise up precipitously from the water's edge. But in stark contrast to neighboring Napa's tony real estate, the towns here are peppered with casinos, trailer camps, fast food joints, and cocktail lounges. It's an odd juxtaposition of pristine natural beauty and a decidedly downscale aesthetic.

"We're going to change this," says Jim Fetzer, who grew up in the area and whose family sold its eponymous winery

for \$80 million to drinks giant Brown-Forman in 1992. When an 8-year non-compete agreement expired, Fetzer was free to follow his dream of creating an organic wine estate called Ceàgo (SEE-AY-GO), which opened to the public last October. The vintner has a mission: to spread his gospel of eco-viticulture throughout the land.

"I've spent a lot of money and years to get here," says the blue-eyed vintner, whose chiseled features and youthful demeanor belie his 53 years. Fetzer was among the first modern-day California winemakers to commit to organic farming. Today, his 170-acre holistic ranch boasts 70 acres of grapes, plus olive and walnut trees, lavender, a huge vegetable garden, and sheep that act as roving natural herbicides. Fetzer subscribes to a biodynamic farming regime that follows celestial cues and rituals like burying manure-filled cow horns throughout the property. "That's what they call the voodoo element," he notes with a chuckle.

"Short term, I want to bring diversity into the vineyards," he says, explaining that monoculture is unhealthy for the environment. Long term, he intends to build a lakeside resort and restaurant to promote "agro-tourism." Ceàgo is currently a handsome, Spanish-inspired collection of structures interconnected by courtyards and blessed with fabulous lake views.

"I could have just planted a vineyard or simply retired," Fetzer says. "But I'd rather share this land." In doing so, he's creating a sustainable legacy for all to enjoy. ▣

