

whole
living

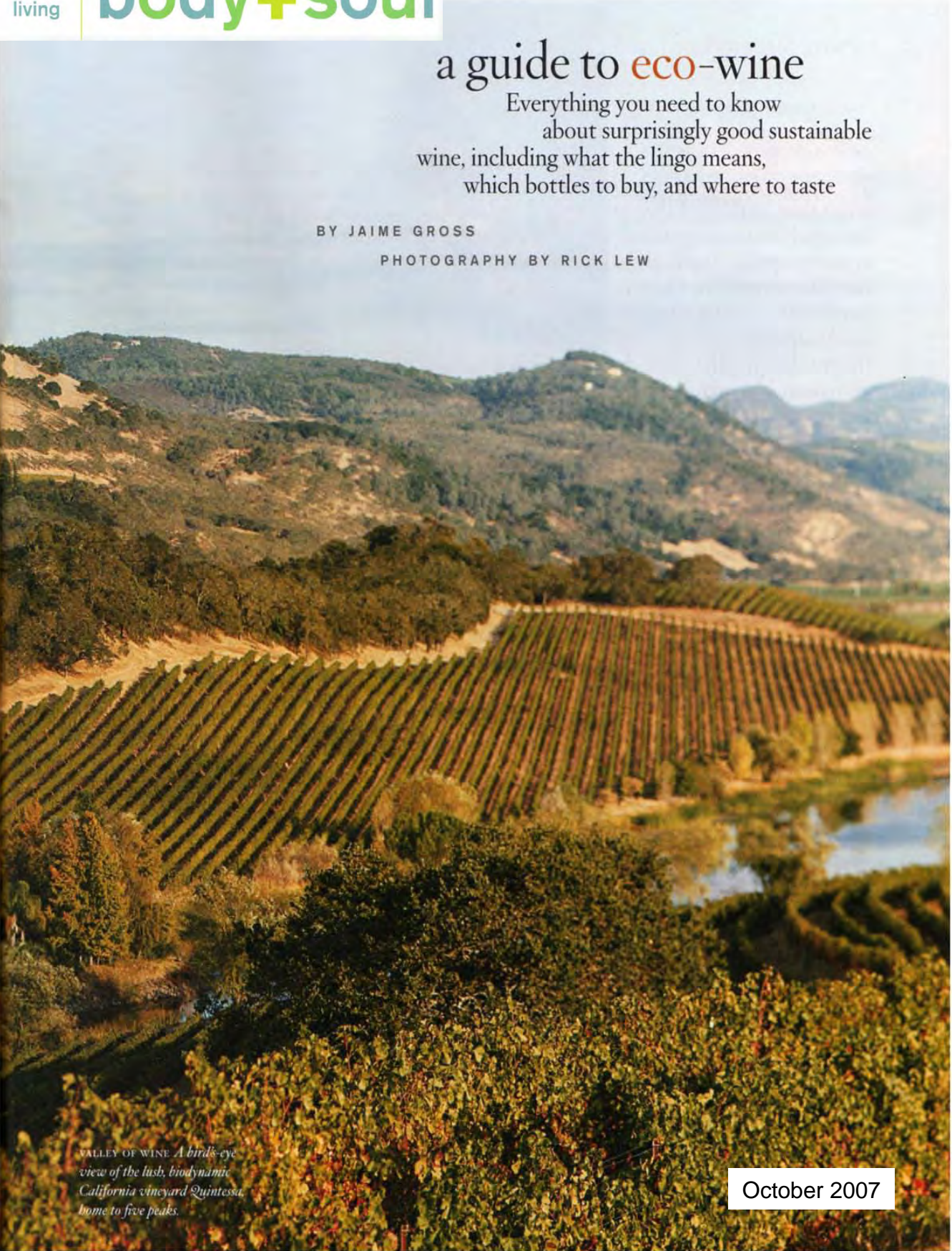
body+soul

a guide to **eco**-wine

Everything you need to know
about surprisingly good sustainable
wine, including what the lingo means,
which bottles to buy, and where to taste

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK LEW



VALLEY OF WINE *A bird's-eye
view of the lush, biodynamic
California vineyard Quintessa,
home to five peaks.*

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LABEL READING 101

Seeking out ecofriendly wines can prove more tricky than simply reading a label. Because organic wines are still overcoming their once-maligned reputation, some winemakers like Coturri Winery prefer to leave the O-word off the bottle altogether. Other small producers, such as Clos Saron, Gruet, and Lamos, don't bother with the time-consuming and expensive process of getting their fields officially certified, even though they grow and process the grapes according to organic or biodynamic principles. Often the only way to know is to ask your wine seller for guidance. But whether you get the scoop from the merchant or the bottle itself, it helps to know your terms.

"organic"

In 2002, the USDA established stringent rules for who can and cannot label a wine "organic." In addition to the exclusive use of organic grapes (grown without genetically modified seeds, fertilizers made with sewage sludge, or most conventional pesticides), a wine

bearing the "USDA Organic" seal or the term "100% Organic" must not contain any added sulfites (see top right), and the vineyard must be inspected annually to ensure compliance with government standards.

"biodynamic"

The most holistic and environmentally sensitive form of agriculture dates back to the 1920s, when the enterprising scientist-mystic-philosopher Rudolf Steiner first looked to the cosmos to cultivate his garden. Besides eliminating all synthetic inputs, biodynamic farmers plant, prune, and harvest according to the phases of the moon and cosmological cycles, and apply special compost teas to help "enliven" the soil. One element is what's called "preparation 500": cow horns stuffed with manure, buried in the vineyard usually when the moon is in Virgo, and exhumed around the spring equinox. The manure is then mixed with water and sprayed on the ground to stimulate root growth. Look for either the terms biodynamic or "Demeter," the global certification association.

"sulfites"

All wines contain naturally occurring sulfites, which prevent them from spoiling in the bottle. About 1 in 100 people are sensitive to sulfites, though, with reactions ranging from mild stomach cramps to nausea to asthma attacks (in rare cases it can be fatal). USDA-certified organic wines must not contain any added sulfites—a controversial requirement, as wines produced without added sulfites are less stable and more prone to spoiling unless stored at a constant 55 degrees. They also cannot age as long as typical wines; white wines from Frey, for example, should be consumed within 18 months of their bottling date (their reds can age up to eight years). Organic wines with added sulfites will say "Made with organic grapes."

"sustainable"

Winegrowers making a broad attempt at environmental responsibility (improving soil through the use of cover crops and composting) may refer to their vineyard as "sustainably farmed." Sometimes this indicates that the winery is transitioning from conventional farming to organic, though the more common term is "in transition." It's a self-policing policy with no standard regulations to follow, which means that farmers may revert to more invasive, toxic methods from time to time.

Did You Know?

Research has shown that drinking moderate amounts of red wine is good for your heart. It may also help protect against neurological diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, as well as inhibit certain types of cancer growth.





a biodynamic story

When Agustin and Valeria Huneus bought 280 acres in Rutherford, California, 17 years ago, the price tag was in the millions. But what they acquired was priceless: one of the last great undeveloped properties in the Napa Valley, its oak-studded hills untouched by chemicals or farm equipment for more than a century. They named the estate Quintessa for what they hoped to produce from it: a quintessential red wine.

Because the property was more or less virgin, the couple felt committed to act as stewards to protect its healthy ecological balance. They started farming semi-organically, managing pests with "friendly" predators and minimal spraying. But when a French winemaker told them about biodynamic farming—a beyond-organic approach that views the farm as a living organism intimately connected with its environment and the movements of the moon, sun, and stars—Valeria knew what she had to do next.

"I've always believed that nature is in direct communication with the cosmos," says Valeria, who has a doctorate in biochemistry. "To be able to integrate that into the way I farm was a must." In 2002, Quintessa converted four acres to biodynamic; when those vines thrived, they went fully biodynamic in 2005.

The benefits show up in everything from the grapes' flavor to the boom in wildlife around the estate. "Biodynamics is a labor of love," says Valeria. "But there's so much wisdom in protecting living things. The proof is in the wine." *Quintessa, 707-967-1601, quintessa.com*

GRAPE LIFE Valeria Huneus (top left), who owns Quintessa with her husband, oversees the vineyard, which includes getting the cow's horn (top right) ready for "preparation 500" as well as hosting the occasional wine tasting