this was not an innovation, but simply the way it was meant to be.

The difference between sustainable vineyard owners and everyone else is that they see a tangible benefit to their bottom line by working in concert with nature. Since vineyards are farms, land is their natural capital; to preserve the health of the land is a long-term investment. "Is conservation the right thing to do? Absolutely. But green practices at Honig are integral to our business because they help us run a more efficient operation and help us produce a better product," Michael says. Honig's critically acclaimed wines are a testament to this fact.

Michael's strategic and pragmatic brand of sustainability has appeal for executives from other industries too. Honig has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, and Michael now finds himself inspiring companies in other industries to consider sustainability by giving speeches around the country. "We believe in leading by example," he says. "Our goal is to become one of the greenest wineries in the world."

Another leader in sustainability is DeLoach Vineyards, a certified organic winery known for its high-quality yet affordable wines and biodynamic farming, a "beyond organic" approach that ensures that the growth of a fruit or vegetable is in tune with the larger environment. The vineyard is located in nearby Sonoma County in the Russian River Valley, which wine experts consider "America's Burgundy" for producing the best Pinot Noir in the country. *Wine Enthusiast* magazine named owner Jean-Charles Boisset "Innovator of the Year" for 2008. I asked General Manager Lisa Heisinger to explain why. "Well, Boisset has a long history with sustainable viticulture," she said, "but I think the area in which we've provided leadership as a company is in sustainable packaging."

Lisa presented several of Boisset's greener innovations: wine in a plastic bottle embossed with a geometric design; wine in a lightweight aluminum bottle that chills rapidly; and

a half-liter of wine in a recyclable cardboard container called Tetra Pak, a packaging that, when combined with ultra-high-temperature processing, allows liquid food to be packaged and stored at room temperature conditions for up to a year. This means perishable goods can be saved and distributed over greater distances without the need for energy-consuming refrigeration. These packaging alternatives are less energy-intensive than heavy glass bottles. They also require far less transportation.

This attentiveness to green packaging is not a marketing initiative but a company policy called the Boisset 70 Percent Rule. "More than 31.2 billion bottles of wine are consumed on earth each year," owner Jean-Charles Boisset says. "Seventy percent of that wine retails for less than $10 per bottle. Within that 70 percent, at least 70 percent is consumed between 28 minutes and 3 hours of purchase. Seventy percent of the cost of that wine is the packaging (bottles, corks, capsules, and all other dry goods), shipping, and other related supply-chain costs. The vast majority of the environmental impact of wine comes from the production and disposal of the packaging and from shipping the heavy merchandise around the world. We know that wine meant to be enjoyed young can be kept fresh and flavorful in a variety of packaging formats. Why not offer this wine in lighter, more environmentally friendly packaging that will reduce its carbon footprint and cost less to ship, yet still provide the high quality that customers demand?"

I asked Lisa when she thought Americans would come around on greener packaging for wine. "The wine market in America may well change because of the millennial generation," she said. "They are used to choices and adventure. We call it the Starbucks effect. Our grandparents just ordered coffee; today we choose from thirty different menu items at the coffee shop." She went on to explain, "One of the big things that woke us up was the success of Yellow Tail. The brand is affordably priced and fun. A whole new array of brands

arose from this. We call them 'critter brands.' They are playful and fly in the face of the historical snobbish French-wine tradition."[11]

As consumers develop a taste for more "playfulness" in wines, a willingness to accept eco-friendly packaging may be next. For my part, I love Boisset's innovations now that I understand their purpose. And upon returning from my trip to California, I found Boisset's French Rabbit wine in eco-friendly cardboard containers on sale at Target. Thinking that Target's customers didn't understand the gems they were passing up, I took the opportunity myself to stock up on this eco-friendly quality wine at a great price.

While greener packaging is an important step, it is just one potential area of focus for a vintner who considers himself sustainable. There is no "one size fits all" approach that will be profitable for everyone. And, as Michael Honig quipped, "Sustainability also means 'sustaining your business.'" Since the most important feature of wine is its taste, organic practices would be worth little to the wine industry if they didn't actually enhance the product's quality. And quality is what we tasted on our sustainable wine tour. We sampled Pinot Noir, in which "ripe raspberries lift from the glass with aromas of strawberry-rhubarb tart," and Zinfandel, in which "violet perfume mingles with soft hints of barrel spice and walnut." Well, those were the descriptions we heard while tasting. We'll have to practice more to fully appreciate the subtleties. All I can say with assurance is that these wines tasted good!

The Beauty of Local

While tasting wines at DeLoach Vineyards, we dined on food prepared from their garden of over sixty varieties of vegetables and herbs, which is adjoined to a small farm with chickens, sheep, and pigs. Like the wines, the farm and gardens are tended according to a biodynamic philosophy. Mike and I

were bowled over by the taste of our carrot–red lentil soup seasoned with cumin, curry, coriander, and ginger; the winter onion tartlet made with farm-fresh eggs and thick bacon; the organic herb salad; and a scrumptious trio of cheeses made with milk from goats, sheep, and cows. The delicious, delicate flavors of the locally and organically grown food transformed the simple menu into haute cuisine.

Back in Dallas I told my friend Julie about our experience. "I know what you mean," she said. "We just joined an organic produce co-op, and eating the vegetables is such a treat. I don't think it's my imagination that they just taste better."

Julie and I are having the same awakening that others across America are experiencing: where eating well is concerned, natural prevails over progress any day of the week. Enjoying good food with friends and family is a big part of living the good life. What a relief it is to know that it can be the best part of living the green life too.

Going Local

Locavore was the 2007 word of the year for the Oxford American Dictionary. Locavores, a group of "concerned culinary adventurers," formed in the Bay Area in 2005. Challenging themselves to eat food sourced within a 100-mile radius for one month, they sparked a worldwide movement.

For more information, visit www.locavores.com.