

exploring wine with tim fish

Making Wine Not Child's Play for 'Toy Story' Creator

John and Nancy Lasseter are making serious wine in Sonoma Valley

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You may not recognize John Lasseter, or even know his name, but he's involved in your life, or at least your children's or grandchildren's. He is the mind behind the three Toy Story movies, Cars, Monsters Inc., Finding Nemo, Up! and the soon-to-be-released Brave.

Time magazine named Lasseter one of the 100 most influential people in the world last year. He is the undisputed master of animation and the chief creative officer behind Walt Disney Studios and Pixar Animation. With his wife, Nancy, he is also producing some outstanding wines from their ranch in Sonoma Valley.

As someone who grew up watching Disney and Looney Tunes, it was a treat to chat wine and animation with the Lasseters for my profile published in the April 30 issue of Wine Spectator. We even share the same favorite cartoon: "Rabbit Seasoning," the Bugs Bunny-Daffy Duck classic with the punch line "pronoun trouble."

Wine isn't a hobby for the Lasseters. They have 28 acres of organically farmed vineyards, a handsome new winery that currently produces 1,200 cases a year, plus a veteran winemaker in Julia Iantosca.

The wines are all blends rather than straight varietals, and stylistically they aim for grace rather than power. Paysage Sonoma Valley 2008 (90 points, \$40) is a vibrant and focused Merlot-based blend. Amoureux Sonoma Valley 2008 (89, \$40) is a supple and graceful Malbec blend. Enjoué Sonoma Valley 2010 (89, \$24) is a delicate yet focused Rhône-style dry rosé.

Nancy runs the winery, and while the demands of Disney and Pixar don't allow John to be hands-on, they are both involved in stylistic wine decisions. John particularly enjoys the blending trials for each vintage. "Just the cooperage and the wood decisions and then do we put in new oak or a barrel that's a year old or two or three years," he said. "One of the most exciting things for me is what a difference it makes."

There were so many things I couldn't fit into my magazine story. Actor John Ratzenberger, made famous on TV's Cheers and a frequent voice for Pixar movies, gave me several good quotes but I just couldn't find a place for them. "Lasseter wines come in a real glass bottle," he said sarcastically, or "Lasseter wine not only makes good food taste great, but studies have shown that it raises your I.Q. by an average of 28 points."

Considering their lives, you might think the Lasseters are larger than life and you'd be right, in a way. In part, they have larger-than-life personalities. But as winemaker Richard Arrowood told me for my story, "John will give you a handshake, but he'd rather give you a hug. John and Nancy are not the phony Hollywood types you sometimes run into. They're real human beings."



Alex Farnum

Pixar's John Lasseter is off to a good start emulating his film success in the vineyard.