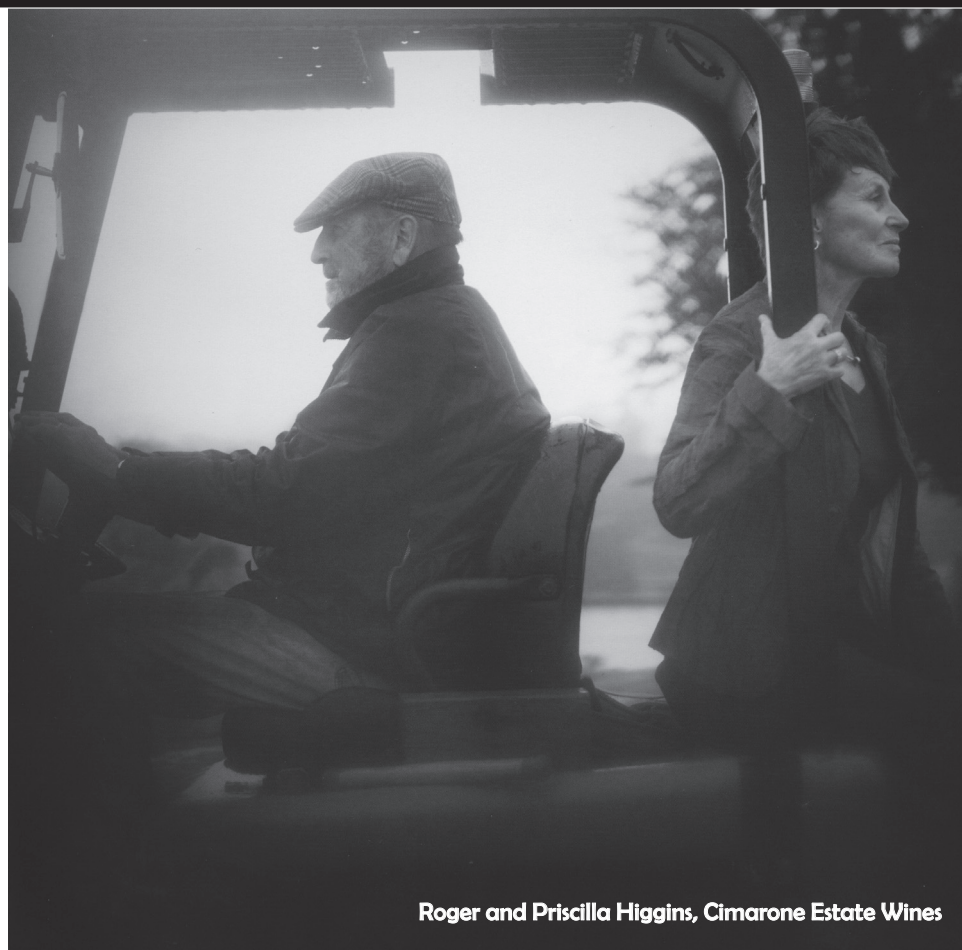


Wes and Chanda Hagen, Clos Pepe Vineyards and Estate Wines



Roger and Priscilla Higgins, Cimarone Estate Wines

# SEEING WINEMAKERS IN SEPIA

Vintners Shine in Mark Robert Halper's Photography Book *Sunlight and Water*

by Matt Kettmann

**S**ay what you will about the visual appeal of red or golden juice swirling in your glass, but when it comes to the sensual joys of wine, the eyes get the shortest shrift. The ears enjoy the cork pop, the fingers gracefully grasp the glass, the nose captures the wafting aroma, and the tongue takes center stage, but the eyes—usually our most stroked of senses—are relegated to the rear. But that's all about to change, at least for the wine sippers of Santa Barbara County, as the forthcoming collection of winemaker portraits titled *Sunlight and Water* by photographer Mark Robert Halper provides the visual feast required to satisfy this fifth of senses.

The product of numerous weeklong photo shoots from August 2009 to February 2010, *Sunlight and Water* features 110 portraits of vintners in their element, from Jim Clendenen of Au Bon Climat under the basketball hoop and Louis Lucas of Lucas & Lewellen looking regal in his silk-kerchief-adorned suit, to Bill Mosby under a boar's head, Iris Rideau in her straw hat, and Thekla and Richard Sanford of Alma Rosa Winery sharing a warm embrace. "Initially, many people thought they would be doing a smiley shot and holding a glass of wine," explained Halper of his project. "But very intentionally, there is not one person in any way holding a glass of wine. I wanted to stay away as much as I possibly could from clichés." Taking on a serious shade of sepia and shot with imperfections intended, the photographs look old and important, giving these often boisterous characters a new serious side.

But the fun certainly isn't stopping, for the book's official release party this weekend at Avant



Paul Lato, Paul Lato Wines

**4.1.1**

Mark Robert Halper's *Sunlight and Water* is available at the Book Den, the Book Loft, Tecolote, Chaucer's, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Santa Barbara Historical Museum, and 10 venues in Los Olivos where it's on sale through February. The photographer and a number of his winemaker subjects will be toasting the book's release with a gala event on Saturday, August 14, in Los Olivos. See page 45 for more information.

in Buellton is shaping up to be the wine bash of the year, with many of the winemakers personally pouring their wares. Then the portraits will be hanging at eight tasting rooms, the Los Olivos Café, and the Fess Parker Wine Country Inn in Los Olivos for six months, offering visitors a reason to walk around the town as they eat and drink their day away. On top of that, there are 20 events planned during that time period, from book signings to tasting-room anniversaries, as well as a tie-in with the month-long epicure.sb event in October.

The centerpiece of the hullabaloo, however, remains the book, the Los Angeles-based photographer's first. "I wanted to take the picture that a better photographer would take," said Halper, who spent 20 years as a commercial photographer before delving into artistic portraiture two years ago. "It's an interesting way to challenge yourself." The sepia and soft-focus elements were all in the plans. "I love bad optics," he said, divulging that he used a Hasselblad digital camera, but not sharing any of his techniques. "I love when things flare and distort and when the world gets changed by glass. Photography is much more interesting when it's done in a way that shows us about what photography does. It's the opposite of that camera phone." As such, Halper intends to enhance what's before his lens, not just capture a moment in time. "To me, the worst photographs are always sunsets," he said. "They can't help but be less of what you're taking a picture of. I want what I'm creating to be different than what the eye sees."

Having achieved his goal with the images, Halper believes his project is already a success. "There's nothing I've done in my life that I'm as proud of as the book," he said. ■