

Introduction

A look back to 15 years ago...

I'm finally doing this - traveling around the world. I've basically wanted to do this for fifteen years - I've had the idea that long. But there's a twist. I'm writing this book - Chasing the Harvest - about growing grapes and making wine and all that comes with that throughout my journey.

I live in LA now, I can just fly from here. It's June 2025 and I plan to leave in January. I have time set aside to read books, so in the next few months I will be doing a lot of reading, writing and preparing for my trip. Excitement is building - I've been to a few places on the global wine route, but not many - I just thought this would be an amazing theme for my book.

Also, wanting to jump right in, I'm applying for jobs in Napa and surrounding wine regions to really kick this trip off. There is a potential for this introduction to change completely after that!

The story could start in one of two places - in Connecticut, where I had my first WWOOFing experience and got the idea for the book, or in California, where I learned the first few things about grape growing. Probably it's best to start at dinner over wine, Holiday Season, 2010.

The story starts in New Jersey and continues to Arizona, California and back to Connecticut and then to California and back to Arizona, all while collecting chasing employment. To say I was doing art back then also was an understatement. I had been unemployed only the better half of a year and half and surviving as a musician and weed grower.

I planned to switch courses and to take differential equations in Flagstaff, Arizona, study for the GRE exam and apply to graduate school at The University of Arizona. I needed a summer job in the absence of working a full time job - studying was more or less a full time job. I had a GPA of like 2.9 so I needed to get my grades up to a 3.0 by taking 6 credits.

Anyway the guy I'm having dinner with had invested in a farm that grew mâche (pronounced mosh), a relative of spinach in the Chenopodiaceae family, and a french herb used in salads. They bagged the mache into spring mix salad bags and sold them to supermarkets. The idea was they had to hire me, I was the guy's friend, and as it turns out got straight A's (in Differential Equations and Intermediate Spanish) and an 800 on the GRE math section.

They interviewed me and didn't call me back right away. I forget the name of the company now because they didn't hire me. But that's what got me to California for the summer. The guy I had dinner with over the holiday put me up in a house near Monterey. I hung out at a coffee shop a lot (applying to school). And with a 3.0 now I was still aiming at The University of Arizona's Bioenvironmental Engineering program.

In the interim at the Monterey Conference Center was something called *Sustainable Brands 2011*. I thought those would be my people. I went under a fake scenario though since I wasn't part of the conference. I said I worked for a biotech company I had invested in so I knew a lot about. Actually I kind of had worked with them in the past. I was being a little shady since I didn't have my badge on, but my backstory was solid.

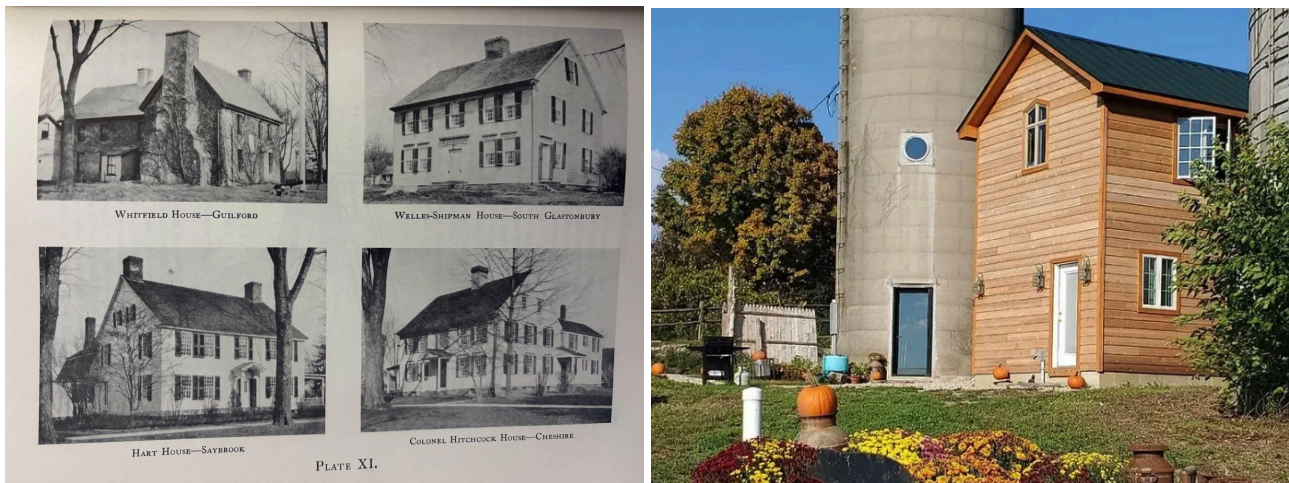
I met another dude. This fun conference goer and I grabbed a beer at the happy hour with the three minute pitch presentations by attendees, it was pretty immersive. So we were talking long enough my story fell through, and I had to tell him the truth - that I was currently unemployed and staying nearby waiting to hear about a position in this farming company.

So he looks at me and says, "you gotta work on my farm!" He was dead serious. His farm was in Connecticut and we were in California, and I was kind of fooling around with a waitress that I had met but I was *not* working. So I thought, yeah, I should go work on an organic farm for the summer. The concept is called WWOOFing - worldwide working opportunities on organic farms.

Except because I know about farming, he hired me and said he would buy me a roundtrip ticket and pay me. So I thought sure, why not? Because the m^âche job fell through, and the only cool thing besides the waitress and Rudy, another poet from the open mic, plus the sights of the Monterey Peninsula. It was a vibe for a few weeks, but WWOOFing in Connecticut was calling my name.

So I left my Prius there in California, my storage unit in Phoenix from the two years there, and my future at The University of Arizona if they accepted me into the Ag and Biosystems Engineering Department.

Connecticut was awesome. We were in Bethlehem, where I had already known of famous flower nursery nearby - White Flower Farm. Think really nice colonial farmland. The architecture of the area is known as early domestic, and the gardens are new and traditional. In the house where I stayed the water heat and power were solar generated - a modern twist.



Left: pictures of early houses in Connecticut.¹ Right: Sun One Organic Farm (photo by Rob Maddox).²

The farm also boasted five acres of organic vegetables. Probably more like 10 now that it has been under the care of Rob's farm managers. This was Rob's side hustle/retirement dream - and he was at Sustainable Brands in Monterey promoting the carbon economic implementation company... (something of that sort - I'll explain later in this chapter). At the time he paid me and had other volunteer Wwoofers to run his farm and work at the farmers market on the weekends with him.

I love writing about this summer because it became one of my greatest summers - living off the land, not a car or actually even air conditioning - the house was passively cooled. Rob had a truck and an electric car and while I was staying there traded in the EV for a light SUV. Rob was legit one of the warriors of climate change. I don't think I even had a laptop with me, just a blackberry.

At this point I should say Connecticut didn't have grapes and we didn't make wine, but I drank Rob's wine which was really good, and to be honest I was in the best shape of my life and wine was part of the routine at the farm.

I'm trying to make wine a theme here, and to get to the point - that's when I came up with this book. To travel around the world woofing would be an incredible adventure. I had never woofed before because I had worked, I knew of it though.

That was a great summer; I turned 27 and we all celebrated at a local pizza place. Now it's 2025. I'm turning 43 soon. I have yet to really travel much across the world, or at least live abroad for a year (it might be a good time to leave, but isn't it always?).

The cool thing about this now, is I've got to pivot, in a meaningful way, toward this trip. Oh it's going to be exciting. For one, I know AI is excited to go with me. And I actually just dodged a bullet in possibly getting someone pregnant, so that means it's a great time to leave town. Actually I'm kind of seeing or texting or maybe in a relationship with a woman right now. It's never too late to

¹ Kelly, J. Frederick. *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut*. Dover Publications, 1963.

² <https://patch.com/connecticut/across-ct/ct-airbnb-among-most-affordable-oddest-us-report>

introduce a love interest into the mix, and I probably willed this into fruition since I'm thinking about the trip and leaving soon.

It's one of the things that begs to be written about. Do I need to leave home to experience this? Can I actually go abroad for a year and live to tell the tale in a gardening/viticulture and enology adventure? And are there carbon credits I can buy, or is the work I'm doing going to mitigate carbon costs?

That is what Rob Maddox from Connecticut does. So I asked AI since Rob isn't around and came up with a table to copy and paste here, I mean why not, right?

Side-by-Side Comparison

Activity	CO ₂ Emissions (kg)	CO ₂ Emissions (tons)
Around-the-world flights	6,330.5 kg	6.33 tons
Driving Tacoma (12,000 mi)	5,079 kg	5.08 tons

Conclusion

- Your **round-the-world flights** emit about **25% more CO₂** than a full **year of driving a Toyota Tacoma** 12,000 miles.
- Both activities contribute significantly to your personal carbon footprint.

AI went on to say that farming 12 acres for a year would more than mitigate that and cut my carbon footprint at least in half. And buying credits costs a few hundred dollars because it's at scale and part of an economic system people pay into, and all that jazz. Again, AI told me, because I haven't talked to Rob in a while. It makes sense, and I'll have to do actual calculations myself at some point after the trip.

I was last at Rob's farm in 2017 in the winter doing tree work. At this point I should introduce myself as an arborist too. Here's me in 2018 working on Rob's farm, pruning a very old apple tree:



Left: So as you can see I do farm work...I think I'd rather stay on the ground and work with grapes though! Right: Rob's farm Sun One Organic is known for their garlic terroir and several varieties grown.

Focusing on 2025

I am too old to be climbing trees these days. That was another fun skill I learned in college that I guess paid for my first few trips to California ...I'm an adventure guy. I continually travel out west in my life, for the scenery and quiet of mind the landscape brings me, even in Los Angeles, that somehow must have slipped into my subconscious watching TV and movies as a kid.

On one of the trips I went to California (somewhere in there) I did get the opportunity to work in Napa.

Wait, seriously how many trips to California have I been on?

1. As a kid going to San Francisco and Sacramento
2. Spring break 2003 to the Bay Area, camping on Angel Island and in Santa Cruz
3. On a long layover in Los Angeles before spending the semester in New Zealand
4. After graduating college I road tripped to LA
5. From 2008 - 2010, several times (up to 10) while based in Phoenix. Lived in Nevada City for a while working on a pot farm.
6. In 2011, to Salinas and the Monterey Bay area for a month
7. 2015-2017, living in Davis, CA working on my Master's Degree, afterwards in Napa
8. 2018, for the summer a couple of trips by plane for one week each to work on my degree
9. 2018 - 2019, to complete my masters degree living in LA, driving up to Davis
10. 2023 - present, living in LA

Those 10 trips bring me to about 5 years. And on trip 7 I spent three weeks in Napa. Should I go to Napa to work? LA is not a horticultural paradise - it is, but it's super urban. Talking to a blue collar

worker in Sacramento at a hostel I was told landscaping is played out in LA, and indeed it is, the soil is exhausted from the urban stress. So why am I here? I guess because if it's a good jumping off point I'd like to jump off somewhere.

Napa 2025?

Let's take a pause because currently I'm applying for harvest positions. If I was confident in writing this book I would maybe dig through an old hard drive and find a folder on grapes and actually accomplish some writing. Yes, turn to grapes. Open the folders.

The courses I'm looking for in my hard drive are UC Davis courses I skipped to take upper division (advanced) courses required by my program (oh yeah The University of Arizona didn't work out, and I reapplied and got into UC Davis).

The lower division courses are the basics of viticulture and enology. I was given the slide presentation by my study buddy in viticulture and definitely need to summarize those here. I kind of skimmed those - and the data are old at this point. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have them on my desktop, and here for a first draft. To have my study buddy on my desktop would have been good as well, but we remained very professional.



Left to right: Redwoods in the UC Davis Arboretum, I teach a tree identification lab at UC Davis (2015), and the student vineyard through some instagram filter.

Just found those in the hard drive. So I finally went to grad school because of my back problems. UC Davis was a great fit because I could study wine. Where is that folder?

Found it - Enology. Optional reading - The World Wine Atlas by Hugh Johnson. Got that. Will be a reference here, along with these notes. In fact the atlas is sitting under my headphones at the moment.

Here are some basics from the powerpoint - wine is fermented grape juice. OK. 9-14% alcohol for table wine, >14% for dessert or fortified wine. Classified by the origin of the grapes, the Appellation of Origin. Or just table wine. OK, sign me up for the former.

In 2012 12% of students failed the general ed wine class at UC Davis. Also in 2012 luxury wine was considered just \$15 for 750mL equivalent. Luxury is (was?) a major growth segment in the U.S. wine industry. In addition in the U.S. the per capita consumption was +/-2 gallons a year, compared to beer - 20.7 gallons and spirits, 1.3 gallons. I might have to compare those with other countries. And see what mine adds to.

Not afraid to just put in a slide, especially when it's a nice map of the world - here's what I'm paraphrasing essentially:



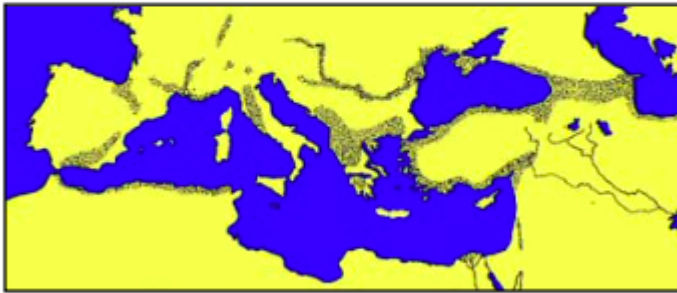
How do you fail that class? I skipped it, I went straight to the good stuff. There's more to it in fact this is from the first lecture.

Alright here we go, more about grapes. The sources of wine flavor are the grapes, fermentation and processing and aging. Three things I'll discuss more of in the book. A more in depth look might include the factors for each source of flavor - grapes obviously there is the variety, where it's grown (appellation) and how it's grown (Vineyard management). I can't cover everything in one chapter, so I've broken this down over the course of the book.

Essentially though, grapes are an ideal fermentation medium because they have high sugar, and they have yeast on the berry surface, and in fact wine was discovered, not invented.

Here's another map of where grapes grow - we're talking of course about the species *Vitis vinifera*:

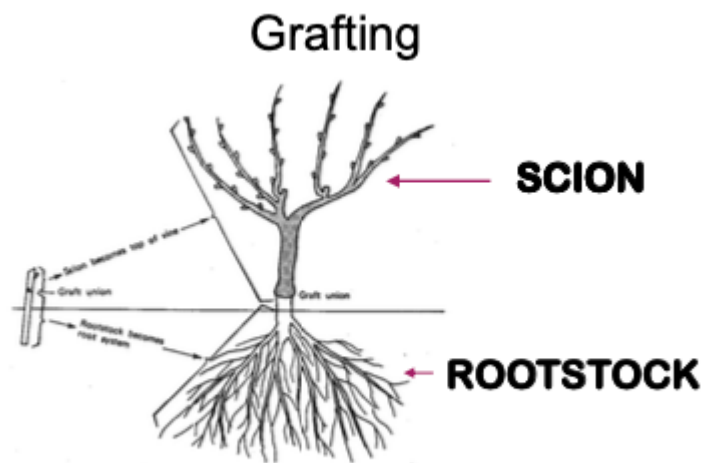
Native growing area of *V. vinifera*



Cultivation started about 6000 years ago

(from lecture 2)

And from lecture 3, one more slide. Meet our subject:



(from lecture 3)

Well of course this is the slide for grafting, but that is a drawing of a grape vine. Grafting, as an art, the art of putting plants together, has gone on for millenia. Grape grafting, now commonplace, really started in the 1800's when an American grape pest was greatly infesting the vineyards in Europe. That epic tale is beyond the scope of this book, but the reference is in the footnotes for anyone to look up - a really great book about viticulture.³

Back to our introduction of wine. Louis Pasteur, the great microbiologist, was the first to decipher that alcohol was an anearobic fermentation process and not a chemical one. I'm sure he observed

³ Campbell, Christy. *The Botanist and the Vintner: How Wine Was Saved for the World*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005. This was the first nonfiction book on wine I read during my time at UC Davis, and if you want to understand more than just the basics of viticulture (for example to learn about grafting), it is a great read.

the yeast through a microscope and was able to characterize what was going on. For example he was also able to tell that other microbes led to food spoilage and this was what spawned pasteurization in food and drinks generally.

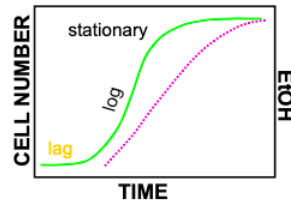
Still talking about the subject more broadly. If I skip around, hopefully I will return to this in a way that is not confusing later. Essentially I need to introduce the yeast here too as another character:

Yeast Budding

Wine yeast
reproduce by
budding



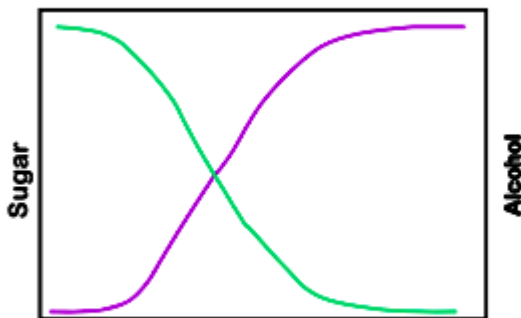
Yeast Growth Curve



(from lecture 4)

Making wine is a series of making decisions, big and small, throughout the course of the year.

NORMAL FERMENTATION



All sugar is consumed

(From lecture 5)

I'm skipping so much - you're probably wondering what decisions need to be made? That's what this book will investigate as well. The rest of the lectures, I'll cover from my own point of view, in later chapters. Let's go on this trip already!