



NEWS

# Exclusive: Napa Valley's Arborum Purchases Vineyard from Neighbor, Vineyard 29

A family-owned small winery devoted to philanthropy expands its estate vineyard holdings in St. Helena



Caren and Nick Orum had not planned on starting a winery, but fell in love with the land that became Arborum. (Suzanne Becker Bronk)

By **MaryAnn Worobiec**



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**Arborum** winery owners Caren and Nick Orum have purchased a Napa Valley vineyard from the McMinn family that was part of the estate of their **Vineyard 29** winery. The 24-acre acquisition includes 7.4 acres of vines, adjacent to Arborum's Hidden Key Vineyard just north of St. Helena. The sale does not include the Vineyard 29 winery facility or other assets, which remain for sale. The transaction is anticipated to close in July, 2026. The purchase price was not disclosed.

"We're really excited about the opportunity to invest in our home and in the Napa Valley," says Caren Orum. "We are firm believers in Napa's very long-term success. We're invested in Napa for the long haul."

Teresa Norton and Tom Paine founded Vineyard 29 in 1989. They named it after the address—2929 State Route 29—just north of St. Helena on the east-facing slopes of Spring Mountain.

Chuck and Anne McMinn acquired the property in 2000, simultaneously purchasing the nearby Aida Vineyard to expand the winery's vineyard base. Under their leadership, Vineyard 29 grew to produce about 10,000 cases annually. The McMinn family also completed a modern, 17,000-square-foot winery in 2004, designed by local architect John Lail. The property also includes 13,000 square feet of caves.

Over the years, several of Napa's most prominent consulting winemakers worked with Vineyard 29, including Gary Galleron and Heidi Barrett. Winemaker Keith Emerson joined in 2005.

Chuck McMinn announced his retirement in 2022 and that Keith Emerson would take over as president and CEO; the McMinn family retained ownership. In 2025, the McMinn family listed Vineyard 29, including all 38 acres of its vineyards, the winery, caves, two brands, inventory and a residential building with a \$65 million asking price.

In January of this year, the McMinn family decided to list the various parcels separately after receiving feedback on the original listing.

"Caren and Nick are wonderful people, and exactly the type of people that I would have hoped to take over a piece of Vineyard 29. They are young, have a long-term focus and are right next door," Chuck McMinn told *Wine Spectator*.

McMinn says his sons were unable to take over the winery, and he believes the property needs new owners to secure its future. He points to the Orums' plans to replant as an example. "I'm 74 right now, and it's not prudent for me to make an investment [in replanting] that wouldn't pay off until I'm 84."

McMinn also believes now is a good time to buy vineyards, wineries and brands, given the number of high-quality properties currently on the market. He also thinks fresh energy is needed to attract new wine consumers.

"New customers want experiences that differ from those of their parents and grandparents, who make up the majority of wine buyers today," he said. "Let's pass this along to someone with the vision, passion and experience to make that happen."

Potential buyers of other vineyard parcels have expressed interest in selling grapes back to the McMinn family, a move that could allow the Vineyard 29 brand to continue production beyond the 2025 vintage. Beyond the winery, Chuck remains active in Napa Valley as founder and board president of the **Napa Valley Vine Trail Coalition**, which is nearing completion. "We're not going anywhere. We love it here," he said.

## A Lost Vineyard

The Orums founded Arborum in 2019. Winemaker Andy Erickson consults on the project, which focuses on organically and regeneratively farmed Cabernet Sauvignon. The winery currently produces about 1,000 cases annually. The vineyard purchase expands the Arborum estate to 44 contiguous acres, with 10 acres under vine.

Caren grew up in Arkansas and Louisiana, and Nick is originally from Austin, Texas. They met in New York City while working in finance and later moved to San Francisco. In 1999, they purchased a home in Calistoga.



Arborum's Hidden Key Vineyard on the lower slopes of Spring Mountain was once abandoned and forgotten. (Suzanne Becker Bronk)

"We were living in the city. I'm from the south. It was the summer. I was cold," Caren recalls with a laugh. "I said, 'This is not summer.' So we started looking for homes, and we focused on wine country, in part because we were intrigued by wine."

They initially bought a remote property off Petrified Forest Road, but later began searching for a home closer to town and started considering vineyard potential. In 2013, they purchased a 20-acre property just north of St. Helena near the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. At first glance, the land appeared undeveloped.

Underneath the overgrown swaths of poison oak were signs of a Pre-Prohibition era vineyard. With help from the St. Helena Historical Society, the Orums traced the property's history back to 1871. They discovered a connection to Hannah Weinberger—believed to be the first female winemaker in Napa and a silver medalist at the 1889 Paris World's Fair—which deepened their sense of stewardship.

Planting began in 2019 with 2.5 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon on steep slopes, farmed by vineyard manager Oscar Renteria. "The average slope of this property is 26% so it is hand farmed," Orum explains. "We planted the rows pretty tight. If we wanted to do something with a machine, there's no way to do it." They also uncovered 1.5 acres of heritage olive trees.

## A Wine For Philanthropy

From the beginning, the couple set clear intentions. "We were really careful that this just wasn't an ego project," says Orum. "Napa makes a lot of beautiful wine. Do we need another high-end Cabernet Sauvignon? And so we really felt like, if we were going to do this, we wanted it to have a greater purpose."

They committed to donating 100% of net earnings to charitable causes, including local needs and environmental conservation. Before releasing their first wines, they donated \$1 million to demonstrate that commitment.

Arborum produced its first vintage in 2021, yielding about 80 cases of estate Cabernet Sauvignon. The couple initially did not plan to expand, but that changed when Vineyard 29 came on the market.

"It's quite large, but then we understood it was being sold in parts," says Orum. "We got excited about the opportunity to expand our estate. We share a fence line with Vineyard 29."

A key motivation was being able to make all their wine with their own fruit. The plan includes transitioning the new vineyard to certified organic and regenerative farming, along with phased replanting to Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Musqué and Sémillon. The long-term goal is to produce exclusively estate-grown wines.

Currently, Arborum produces three wines. The lineup includes a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon and a Cabernet Sauvignon sourced exclusively from their estate.

"We've been eyes wide open about what we're doing, but we are really building this for the long term," says Orum. "That's another reason we really didn't want our name on the label, because we would love Arborum to be around well after we're around. If you have a long-term vision and the wherewithal to stick with it, it can be wonderful. It feels really good to invest in a part of the country that we care about."