

{ california crus }

To Kalon Vineyard: the crown jewel of Robert Mondavi Winery.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBERT MONDAVI WINERY

A Rediscovery Tour

by Rich Manning

**THE TO KALON ON
THE ROAD TOUR
GOES IN-DEPTH
ON ROBERT
MONDAVI WINERY'S
CELEBRATED
PROPERTY**



Master of Wine Mark De Vere.

A SCENT OF sanded wood and faint earth hit me as I ascended the steps to The 1912, a stylish event space in Santa Ana, California. Metaphorically, it's an aroma of age and importance: My brain instantly connected it to the fellowship hall of the church I attended as a youth. It was an odd yet most appropriate olfactory memory for the occasion, as Robert Mondavi Winery (RMW)'s expressions of To Kalon Vineyard's sacred fruit awaited in the space's upper rooms.

Their presence supplied the heart of the To Kalon on the Road tour, a traveling riff on the To Kalon Certification program that RMW has hosted on its property for the past decade. "It's a bit of an evangelist's effort to teach wine professionals what sets these wines apart and to encourage them to share the passion of the converted with their communities," explained Master of Wine Mark De Vere, the event host.

De Vere carried out this mission with bold confidence, sprinkling selections from other revered wineries like Paul Hobbs and Penfolds amid RMW's To Kalon selections in the first two tasting sessions. This brilliant strategy provided ample evidence that the winery's crown jewel still shines brightly—a sentiment that flies in direct and necessary defiance of jaded consumers who purport to know better. This "rediscovery" of RMW's excellence represents a core tenant of the tour, according to De Vere. "We certainly hope that this program will remind people, and maybe inform a younger generation, that Robert Mondavi's legacy was his inspiration, vision, and passion to make California wines sit in the company of the great wines of the world," he said.

While pouring a Mondavi reserve vertical, De Vere shared To Kalon's rich history, touching upon details like Andy Beckstoffer's relationship with the vineyard and the circumstances of its founding by Hamilton Walker Crabb in 1868. The quintet of wines encompassed the pre-release 2016 as well as the 2010, 2006, 1996, and 1983 vintages, providing a study in the changes of viticultural expression; the decadent dark fruit of the '83, for instance, drank like a Port of Bacchanalian proportions.

Most importantly, the tasting spoke of the artistic potential contained deep within the struggling roots of To Kalon's renowned vines, making us pause to contemplate the importance of RMW's exquisite handiwork. De Vere sees this perspective as symbiotic. "My time at Robert Mondavi Winery and working with To Kalon has instilled in me an appreciation for harmony: the harmony of art and skills, the harmony of people and place," he said. One may be so bold as to call it a religious experience. **SJ**