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## Winemaker Jean Hoefliger on the Interaction of Multitudes

Wine is diverse—it's why we love it so. It encompasses concepts that otherwise seem worlds apart: business, art and science among a myriad of others. Winemakers use art and science to make wines but maintain an eye for the bottom line. Jean Hoefliger, who planned for a career in international finance before beginning in wine, has been described as “part artist, part mad scientist,” and is the embodiment of a winemaker who exists in the space between the business, science and art of winemaking.



Hoefliger has worked the world over, beginning at his godfather's estate in Switzerland; at [Château Lynch-Bages](#) and [Château Carbonnieux](#) in Bordeaux; [Meerlust](#) in South Africa; [Hartford Court](#) in Sonoma and [Newton](#) in Napa. He currently oversees 18 projects as winemaker or winemaking consultant in several countries including the U.S., Italy, France and Spain. In California alone, he works for a multitude of wineries including the new [AXR Napa Valley](#) in St. Helena, [The Debate](#), [Clark Claudon, MR](#), Michel Rolland's first Napa Valley wine, and [Alpha Omega](#), where he has worked as winemaker since its opening in 2006.

“In the beginning, working on multiple projects was mainly a way to work faster,” he explains, as we discuss his career in his Alpha Omega office. “I could follow the vegetative cycle of the plant with multiple sites, equations and variables. You can learn more by following the cycle this way.” Over the years, he has been able to apply lessons learned from one country to another—like using knowledge of the low-pH, slaty soils of Priorat to maintain acidity in his Napa Valley wines.

Is it possible, working on so many projects, to have one overarching philosophy of winemaking? “A winemaker who says ‘always’ is a stupid winemaker,” Hoefliger tells me. “My role is purely to translate the site with my philosophy, which is: who do I make wine for?” Here the intersection of art and business becomes apparent. “We never have the power to erase the characteristics of an appellation or terroir, and that's the greatness of wine. But when you're making large amounts of wine, you have to accommodate your customers' tastes. When I worked at Newton, I was aware that most people drink the wines within 48 hours of purchasing them. I have to accommodate that. I don't take the same risks with larger projects that I do with smaller ones. With smaller projects, you can play with the variations. So you have to adapt.”