



## George J. Vierra Jr.

December 11, 1945 - December 20, 2024

On December 9, 2024, George J. Vierra accepted the diagnosis of a sudden terminal illness with the utmost grace. He died peacefully at age 79 on December 20, 2024 with his wife, Bobbie, and his brother-in-law, Josh, by his side.

George was born in 1945 in the bucolic setting of the Santa Clara Valley in California to George J. Vierra, Sr. and Mildred (Petric) Vierra. All of his grandparents emigrated to California in the early 1900s, and he grew up in a family steeped in European traditions centered around food and festivities. An all-around athlete at Leigh High School in the Campbell Union High School District, he was also an active leader in student government and received the outstanding student award in his senior year. He graduated from San Jose State University with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering and the high honor of being asked to join the engineering honorary, Tau Beta Pi.

Moving to Corvallis, Oregon in 1968, George started working on his PhD and that same year married a fellow San Jose State University graduate, Barbara “Bobbie” D. Bagby. They were fortunate to have a wonderful marriage that lasted for 56 years.

His PhD in Chemical Engineering secured, George moved with Bobbie to the Napa Valley in 1971 after taking a three month car camping trip to Europe.

They settled in St. Helena and stayed there for 47 years.

George began his notable winemaking career at the young age of 25 at Charles Krug Winery, where he was appointed production manager and head winemaker, serving until 1978. From late 1978 until 1980, he was general manager of Robert Mondavi Enterprises, responsible for the startup of Robert Mondavi Woodbridge. He also participated in the Opus One negotiations in France.

Starting out on his own in 1980, in the next 13 years George established two boutique wineries, Vichon and Merlion, and brought many innovations to the U.S. wine industry. He introduced “sur lie” aging of white wines as well as extended maceration of red wines. He coined the term “food wines” and worked tirelessly to promote wines with crisper acidity and lower alcohol which would complement, not overpower, foods. He introduced the first proprietary blend in the U.S. wine industry, Chevrignon, a delicious blend of Semillon and Sauvignon blanc. He was a founding member of the winemaking group which developed the Meritage class of wines. He was the driving force behind the movement to legalize interstate sale of the 500-ml wine bottle, the perfect December 11, 1945 - December 20, 2024 size for two people to share in a restaurant. He designed a professional tasting glass known as the Merlion glass.

When economic troubles impacted the California wine industry around 1993, George changed course and became a consultant to small wineries, growers and distributors throughout Europe, Asia and the U.S. as well as a wholesaler of premium wines. For a year he was Executive Director of the Livermore Valley Winegrowers Association.

George was a man who was motivated to seek out knowledge and share his discoveries with others. For 20 years he was a respected and popular adjunct instructor of various wine classes in the Department of Viticulture and Winery

Technology at Napa College.

In retirement, George and Bobbie moved back to Corvallis, Oregon. Around 2021, George rekindled his love for bocce ball by offering to teach a course for the Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department. In St. Helena, for 20 years he had been an enthusiastic member of the Friday night bocce group at Crane Park. He also was an active volunteer for the Corvallis Academy of Lifelong Learning, researching and seeking out lecturers to present their scientific findings to the group. In Oregon, George also continued his walking regimen, his tomato gardening, and sought out cultural activities and opportunities to be in Nature.

Throughout his career and in his personal life, George has led with his huge heart, his quick intelligence, his beaming smile, his generosity and kindness, and his ever-present curiosity and eclectic interests.

George leaves behind his wife, Bobbie, brother-in-law, Josh, sister-in-law, Jan, two nephews and numerous cousins and their children, and a wide circle of friends. He requested there be no memorial service.

Donations in his memory may be made to Greenbelt Land Trust, PO Box 1721, Corvallis, OR 97339, or to the charity of your choice.

# Tribute Wall

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“ Met George a few years ago when I joined his bocce ball class in Corvallis. He was a great and dedicated teacher of the game. Knew he had a fondness for wines but did not know how his level of knowledge and involvement in the industry. Will greatly miss him.

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**richard hill** - February 17, 2025 at 12:46 AM