



Salute Santé! Makes “Liquid Gold”...

...from tons of grapeseeds

“Turning trash to gold”? Some call it that. Napa resident Valentin Humer, co-owner with his wife Nanette of Salute Santé! Grapeseed Oil, likes to think he’s keeping the Napa wine industry green. He uses its biggest waste item—pomace—to produce a grapeseed oil sought out by chefs and home cooks everywhere. He calls it “liquid gold.”

Grapeseed oil has a light flavor, half the saturated fat of olive oil and a high smoke point compared to olive oil’s low smoke point. In a 1993 study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, grapeseed oil was shown to be the only food to significantly reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease—by simply incorporating two tablespoons into your diet daily! With heart disease as the leading cause of death in the United States, killing more than 500,000 every year, Valentin felt this oil must be made here in America.

A Napa Valley grapeseed oil fits in perfectly with the resurgence of interest in eating local food. That, and the popular Slow Food movement, are convincing food retailers as big as Walmart to meet new standards. Grapeseed oil is as green as you can get: made from a local by-product, and requiring no water or land resources. Even the byproduct of the oil-making process, the “cake” of pressed grapeseeds, will be turned into flour, good for all sorts of baked goods. Valentin’s journey started in 1990 with

meetings with the best European-trained chefs and health professionals, researching equipment in Europe and, finally, presenting his idea to prominent Napa winery owners. His hope was that producing grapeseed oil from Napa-grown grapes would produce the highest quality. When financing proved impossible for the little-known product, Valentin imported a European-produced grapeseed oil instead. Salute Santé! Grapeseed Oil has created an American market that is finally ripe for a locally-produced version. (Salute Santé! means “To your health!” in both French and Italian.)

This past fall, Valentin reconnected with a German equipment manufacturer called IBG Monforts. Valentin asked them back in 1991 to come up with a press just for grapeseeds, and they perfected the process using his California seeds. They remain to this day the only equipment manufacturer able to process grapeseeds. Familiar with the success that cold-pressed grapeseed oil was enjoying in Europe, IBG Monforts was impressed with Valentin’s continued dedication. A plan was drawn up to offer Napa wineries the special presses and the know-how. Inspired by Robert Mondavi’s philosophy that “all boats will float when the river fills,” Valentin sees this as a win-win approach.

Anyone who has talked to Valentin about his goals for a Napa grapeseed oil production, will tell you he is passionate about his plan, and a

perfectionist who explores every possible detail.

What changed since those early days when Valentin tried to convince vintners to begin a new industry? “The seeds,” says Nanette, Valentin’s wife and business partner. “As much as I would have loved this to happen years ago, the timing wasn’t right. We couldn’t get anyone to take on the task of preparing seeds to Valentin’s quality specifications. Now we are talking to many potential seed sources who see the value in the effort.”

She describes their challenge as a puzzle. “Years ago, there were too many pieces missing—but now, with buzzwords like ‘green,’ ‘sustainable,’ ‘local’ and ‘resource conservation,’ wineries recognize the wisdom of transforming one of their by-products into a premium resource.” Now the puzzle pieces are on the table—and all Valentin has to do is put them together.

Historically, grapeseed oil emerged during war times when resources were scarce. Since there was always wine produced, there were always grapeseeds available. It’s no surprise that today, with the difficult economy, wineries are exploring their options.

Delicious, full-flavored and with heightened health benefits, the first cold pressed grapeseed oil is now flowing out of IBG Monforts presses right in downtown Napa! In the meantime, Salute Santé! To your health! And the healthy, green economy of the Napa Valley.

Opposite page: Valentin and Nanette show off a one-ton bag of prepared grape seeds. Below: Grape seeds being milled with the oil flowing into the saucers. The tube of brown “cake” comes out the front. Valentin toasts Dirk Skuras, Managing Director of IBG Monfort, maker of the oil press.

