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## Silicon Valley Chief Creates Wireless Winery



© Cypress/Mel Linstrom | *Inside the U.C Davis winery; the wireless fermenter; benefactor T.J. Rodgers*

A wine-loving philanthropist has invested in a revolutionary production facility.

By [Rebecca Gibb](#) | Posted Tuesday, 29-Jan-2013

T.J. Rodgers has come a long way since he put on his graduation gown and collected his doctorate from Stanford University in California in 1973. His Silicon Valley semiconductor company, Cypress, is now valued at \$1.5 billion on the NASDAQ exchange, allowing him to drink Champagne "four nights a week."

Rodgers is one of the world's overachievers: he has won more awards than most mantelpieces can accommodate. Now, blessed with more money than he can spend, he's turned to philanthropy. And the wine world is benefiting from his generosity. Rodgers has kitted out the winery at the University of California, Davis with revolutionary equipment, at a cost of \$3.5 million. But he didn't just sign a check. Instead, he built the world's first wireless fermentation system for the campus's wine school.

Rodgers' passion for wine stems back to his student days when he wore "polyester pants and track shoes." These days he looks dapper in shirt and tie, but he fondly remembers those earlier times, and his first encounter with wine.

"When I crossed over the California border on my way to Stanford, I traveled through wine country for the first time. Other than some junk wine in college, I never drank wine. In retrospect, my first wine experience was pretty ugly: I drove through Gilroy, south of the Silicon Valley, and stopped in a place that had some fruit wine – blackberry, apple, yada yada yada – and that got me interested. I then went up to Napa, when it was very rural and funky to visit, and I got into wine there."

The wine bug has bitten hard. In addition to presiding over a company with more than 3,000 employees, Rodgers has started his own Silicon Valley-inspired wine label, Clos de la Tech. He grows pinot noir on three sites in the

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[Santa Cruz Mountains](#). The fine detail and exacting standards that he imposes on his vineyard and winery leave you in no doubt why he has been a successful businessman. "I could have afforded any winery equipment that I wanted but nothing met my standards," he says. "So I designed my own equipment."

His engineering brain goes into overdrive and Rodgers describes the heights and diameters of his tanks and his unique coffee plunger-type press in head-spinning detail.



© Cypress | One of T.J. Rodgers' vineyards in the Santa Cruz mountains

His innovative ideas have given U.C. Davis students a winery like no other. The facility sports 152 student-sized fermenters, affectionately known as "TJs" (the initials by which he is known). The 200-liter tanks are each equipped with four internal computers, which take various measurements and transmit them to a central computer, which Rodgers compares to "a nuclear control panel."

Firstly, there's an automated temperature-control sensor, which will cool a tank when it needs cooling and heat it when it needs heating – all without human intervention. Temperatures are monitored every minute of the day, which is a far cry from a cellar hand climbing up a ladder and sticking a thermometer in the tank at the start and end of a shift, explains Rodgers. "A winemaker is lucky to get three temperature measurements a day but we can measure every minute, 24 hours a day."

There's also an automated system for pumping juice over the grape skins in red-wine ferments "so you don't need to come into the winery late at night and do it." Winemakers can program the computer to pump as many times a day as they wish. It's also possible to instruct the computer to pump cooler liquid from the bottom of the tank over the solid mass of grape skins that float to the top of the tank (the cap). If the cap becomes too hot, it can cause a ferment to stick.

"A cap in a red-wine fermentation can be 8° or 12° higher than the must," says Rodgers. "You can set limits for cap temperature and when it reaches a certain level, it automatically turns on. You find out that a pump-over can cool an entire tank within a minute." Likewise, brix – a measurement of sugar content in the must – are calculated by each tank's computers every minute and transmitted to the control room.

As a result of this computerization, there's now only one place that a winemaker needs to be to check the progress of a multitude of fermentation tanks.

The logical consequence of this is fully automated wineries, consigning the

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Young guns may be snapping at their heels, but there's little change to the established order of Australia's top-end wines.

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### **Is Yeast the Answer to Lower-Alcohol Wines?**

A combination of two yeasts provides an unprecedented

temperature-taking, brix-reading cellar-hand to history. Rodgers is not convinced, and to prove his point, he cites the 1970 war movie "Patton," depicting the career of the controversial World War II general.

"It's one of the best movies I have ever seen," says Rodgers. "There was a scene where one of the soldiers envisions the day when war will be fought by machines. Patton answers that he hopes not to live for the day when valor and honor and bravery don't matter in war."

Indeed, without humans, there would be no wine – but with such technological advances, a working winery without people is not so difficult to imagine.

reduction in alcohol levels.

By Rebecca Gibb | Posted Wednesday, 22-Jan-2014

### 1 Wine Dude Shares His "Poor Man's Feast"

Joe Roberts reveals his signature roast chicken recipe.

By Claire Adamson | Posted Friday, 17-Jan-2014

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Joseph wrote:  
30-Jan-2013 at 03:31:30 (GMT)

wait till someone hacks into the network..... no thanks.

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