**Bordeaux 2016 Abstract Submission**

**Title**
Exploring Diversity as a Business Strategy, and as a Marketable Experience in itself

**I want to submit an abstract for:**
Conference Presentation

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**Keywords**
American Heritage Grapes, Diversity, Lomato, Norton, Lenoir T.V. Munson, grape diversity, typicity

**Research Question**
Given customary channels of marketing wine as a recognizable, consistent, content-branded commodity, is it possible to market participation in the “Exploration of Diversity”, and its fruits, to a new demographic?

**Methods**
Articulate and deploy the “exploring diversity” message on multiple levels and through multiple communication channels, and monitor results

**Results**
Lessons learned: audience propagates slowly through personal connections and word of mouth, which takes time – but the audience endures.

**Abstract**
The many forms of Agriculture are developing along two divergent paths – Commodity Agriculture, which seeks to produce consistent, reliable, safe, and economic foods, and Value Added Agriculture, which values uniqueness, specificity, and often integrates foodstuffs with intangibles such as brands, context, history, or story.

Vox Vineyards has been engaged in an exploration of the latter path, building on a history of American Heritage Grapes (AHG), by which we mean varietals bred from genuses of grapes native to the North American continent. This is closely intertwined with current thinking about wine chemistry and technology, as well as cultural trends that value locally-sourced products. Younger consumers not only enjoy rethinking traditional categories of tastes, but also the ways in which personal selections are made; choices are increasingly shaped by trusted individuals.
rather than mass marketing channels. We are exploring how to cultivate an audience wishing to develop fruitful connections with our grape growing and winemaking efforts. We recognize the need to encourage a sympathetic, supportive, and viticulturally-informed audience. As part of this we aim to foster a nascent wine-appreciation culture that will seek out a product with a specific story and distinctive taste. We are defining our “product” first as the wine itself, and secondly as the history and narrative framing the wine.

Our process has been one of discovery and exploration of grape diversity. The proprietor’s initial question was “what kind of wine can be made from unknown native varietals (our Heritage Grapes)? There was a brief exploration of these grapes by TV Munson around the turn of the last century, but for some reason, possibly to do with discouraging factors like Prohibition, these varietals were never commercially successful regardless of desirable traits such as hardiness, regional adaptability, phylloxera resistance etc. What might Munson’s wines have tasted like? After all, an AHG Norton was awarded Best of Show at the 1873 Vienna World Exposition. Would these wines have market appeal today?

After some 20 years of experimentation and refinement of these native varietals, the questions have become more complex. The initial consumer, the proprietor, having decided that the exploration is worthy of sharing, must develop a market.

- To what extent is the “story” of the Exploration of Diversity a part of the aesthetic experience of the wine?
- Who makes up the receptive community? Are we looking at building an audience that is region-centric vs. interest-centric and possibly not local to us. Are locavores in fact local to our location? Does the story of regional specificity play out in a region that is not widely recognized for its wine?
- How to define “typicity” for a given varietal, given small diverse data-sets. The number of different and distinctive lots (more than 40) is not congruent with current marketing wisdom: therefore, how do we connect with audiences via marketing and branding. Will selling the concept of “Exploration of Diversity” to a potential audience?
- How to develop a grape growing/winemaking workforce and culture that responds to the unique requirements of dozens of varietals with different vinicultural characteristics?
- What is the benefit of, and appropriate procedures for exploring the diversity of varietals in a given geographic setting relative to lessons learnable by the wine industry. What should our response be to anticipated climate change?
- What are the grape growing decisions that draw out the specific character of diverse cultivars?
- What are the particular harvest metrics and procedures that draw out the specific character of individual cultivars?
- What are the winemaking practices that will draw out the clearest expression of each varietal?
- How do you encourage consumers with palates accustomed to traditional vinifera varieties such as Pinot Noir or Chardonnay to truly taste and appreciate the distinctive and unfamiliar American Heritage grapes?

The consumers who then purchase the wine is, of course buying into the story as much as they are buying the wine, but are they also, like the founder, underwriting the exploration? Will the consumers agree with their dollars that the wine is worth it? Can a premium be charged for the opportunity to participate in an exploration not offered at other venues?

We recognize that in the nature of our enterprise some questions might take longer to answer (ie “does the varietal Lomanto make a good wine?” may take longer than “does the varietal Hidalgo make a good wine?”) We also recognize that as a business it will be important to herald successes along the way to create a bandwagon effect to increase the willingness of customers to invest in further exploration.

Our exploration at Vox Vineyards has made us increasingly aware that we are asking our audience to be more than just customers who purchase a unit of wine value for a unit of money. We encourage them to join us as
engaged investors prospecting on uncertain, but promising enterprises. Thus far, the positive response to our exploration of diversity leads us to believe that this model of charging the “curiosity premium” will be advantageous.

American Heritage varietals that are part of this investigation:

- Albania Amerbonte
- America Atoka Beacon
- Bell
- Brilliant
- Captain
- Captivator
- Carman
- Chamanelle
- Cloeta
- Delicatessen
- Ellen Scott
- Extra
- Favorite
- Last Rose
- Lenoir
- Herbemont
- Ives
- Jeager 40
- Lukfata
- Lomanto
- Manito
- Margaurite
- Meunch
- Neva Munson
- Norton
- Ronaldo
- Rommel
- Starkstar
- TV Munson
- Hidalgo
- Volney
- Wapanuka
- Wetumka
- Wine King