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May Book of the Month – The House of Mondavi

Craving a good, wine-soaked soap opera? Enjoy watching the Biography channel or E!’s True Hollywood Story while sipping a California Chardonnay? Then you might want to tackle The House of Mondavi by Julia Flynn Siler. This is a complex family saga in which history tends to repeat itself.

Robert Mondavi was born to Italian Immigrants who settled in then-sleepy Napa Valley and worked to rebuild California’s wine industry after Prohibition. Unfortunately, like many family-owned businesses, the next generation (mainly Robert and his brother, Peter) could not work together and Robert left to form his own Robert Mondavi Winery, with its now famous Mission-style tower, as a legacy to his children.

Although Robert Mondavi became the foremost ambassador of California wines in the latter half of the 20th century, he was unable to keep from repeating the same mistakes with his sons as his own parents made. In pitting his children against each other, his whole family ended up losing their winery to a big corporation. Ironically, although Robert Mondavi always intended for his winery to remain a family-run operation dedicated to improving the quality of California wines, the Mondavi name is now synonymous with the new corporate arrogance of generic winemaking, as documented in the film Mondovino.

The House of Mondavi offers fascinating insight into the harsh aspects of the wine business, as well as the pitfalls of family dynasties. You can check out this book, as well as other wine themed selections, from our Rosen General Collection.