

## WINEMAKING BY THE GENERATION

Located in Cienega Valley, DeRose Vineyards was founded on land rich in winemaking history. Since 1854, when French immigrant Theophile Vaché began hauling his wine to market in San Juan Bautista, the property has survived two major earthquakes, the age of prohibition and several changes in ownership. Prized by generations of vintners for its temperate climate and great soil, it is an ideal location for growing wine grapes.

William Palmtag, a German immigrant, acquired the estate from Vaché in 1880 and produced wine of such quality as to win silver medals at the 1900 World Exposition in Paris. Run by only a handful of people over the next 50 years, it was purchased by Almaden Vineyards in 1953 for its red wine production. The wine industry giant changed its focus in the early 1980s and sold the property to Heublein Inc. in 1987. It lay dormant in Heublein's hands and was soon put on the market.

The DeRose and Cedolini families of San Jose, whose ancestors have been making wine for over 10 generations, purchased the vineyards and cellars in 1988 along with partner Ernie Miller. Pat DeRose immediately left his career in sales and took on all vineyard and winemaking responsibilities. "Opportunities like that only knock once or twice in a lifetime," he says. "Acquiring this land was like inheriting a piece of history. The old vines, the buildings, the cellars ... and a legacy of winemaking that dates back to the 1850s."

Pat DeRose rescued 100 acres of abandoned vines from the clutches of tall weeds and thistle, including about 40 acres planted before 1900. Most of these vines are dry-farmed in deep sandy-loam soils on terraced hillsides. Besides revitalizing the vineyards, the DeRose and Cedolini families downsized the large operation into an ultra-premium artisan producer.

Cienega Valley is an elevated pocket in the Gabilan Mountains 50 miles southeast of San Jose. The region's warm, dry conditions are interrupted each day by cool air flowing from Monterey Bay, 25 miles west. The Gabilan Range is high enough to protect vines from direct contact with the cold coastal air, but low enough to allow breezes to mitigate the heat of summer afternoons. Further inland, the Diablo Range shields Cienega Valley from the fiercely hot San Joaquin Valley.

With elevations over 1,100 feet, vineyards enjoy moderate temperatures and one of California's longest growing seasons. The warm, sunny days help build deep colors and desired sugars; the cool nights ensure the development of ample acids. Rainfall averages about 15 inches per year while fog is rare.

The winery was built directly above the San Andreas Fault and lies in one of the most active earthquake areas on the planet. DeRose is one of only a few wineries anywhere to have a major fault line dissecting its main cellar. The building was designated a Registered Natural Landmark by The National Park Service in 1965 while University of California seismologists have installed instruments to monitor movement.

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DeRose has vineyards planted on both sides of the infamous fault. Soils east of the fault contain fragmented granite and crumbled sandstone, while those west of the line are mostly granite and limestone. Relatively young in geologic time, these soils contain very little clay and are absent of unwanted hardpan layers, promoting thorough drainage.

Vines are aggressively pruned to attain precise balance, often with two or three growing seasons in mind. Leaves are removed in the fruit zone, contributing more skin color, and consequently more flavor, to the exposed clusters.

The proverbial “baton” has already been passed to the next generation of the DeRose family. Al DeRose has been sharing the winemaking responsibilities with his father Pat since graduating from California State University Fresno with an enology degree in 2001.

Growing up on the DeRose estate introduced Al DeRose to the seasonal aspects of winegrowing. “Early on I knew I wanted to be a winemaker,” he says. “I watched my dad prune in the winter, disk in the spring, leaf in the summer, and finally harvest and crush in the fall.”

DeRose produces estate-grown zinfandel, negrette, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, viognier, chardonnay and Port. The property’s distinct combination of mild weather, old vines, altitude, topography, geology and cultural practices imparts unique fragrances and flavors to each wine. Drinkable upon release or with proper cellaring, they possess the necessary fruit and structure for enjoyment at any level of interest.

This winery truly has it all — history, climate, soil and most importantly, a family dedicated to producing wines their ancestors would be proud of.