



## Lindsay Austin of Kings Hill Cellars Wine Country Personality

Lindsay Austin

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Some experts maintain that the best training for a contemporary vintner is a background in any field other than winemaking. If that theory holds true, then Lindsay Austin's 30-year career in the innovative high-tech laser and optics industry makes him the ideal candidate to run Kings Hill Cellars, a new breed of winery where club members craft fine wine with the help of the industry's best.

Located along the Mayacamas Range between Santa Rosa and Calistoga, Kings Hill Cellars accommodates aficionados interested in creating non-commercial brands from some of California's finest vineyards.

Austin was born and raised in Colorado, living in Grand Junction until age 13 when his family moved to Seattle, Washington. His teenage summers were spent with his grandfathers: one a sheep rancher in Colorado, the other a wheat farmer-dairy rancher in Oklahoma. These profound experiences spawned his interest in the agrarian lifestyle.

His formal education began with bachelors and masters degrees in aeronautical engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle, and continues today at UC Davis in a distance learning winemaking program.

Austin began his professional career as an associate scientist at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. Yearning the challenges of the commercial sector, he relocated to California for an applications engineer position at Chromatix. He moved to Germany to become their European manager where he met his wife Kirsten of 30 years, and developed an interest in German white wines. He continued his career in California at the senior management level of other laser and optics companies including SpectraSwitch, JDS Uniphase, Coherent, Lambda Physik and Spectra Physics, and is currently the chairman and cofounder of Pavilion Integration Corporation.

Austin has a longstanding fascination with wine, fermenting it for a high school chemistry project from rehydrated raisins and again in college using kits. He furthered this interest after moving to the wine country in 2001 when he began processing grapes with modern winemaking techniques.



He participated in Germany's 2003 crush with a group of wine enthusiasts who had formed a winemaking club. "This team approach was not only a lot of fun," said Austin, "but it also provided the inspiration behind the membership concept of Kings Hill Cellars."

Austin returned from Europe in search of a winemaking club that allowed members to assume an active role in the making of their non-commercial wines. Not finding one that suited his needs, he decided to establish a winery that would.

Unlike firms that produce wine or operate "virtual" wineries for customers in absentia, Kings Hill Cellars provides members with the opportunity to participate in most phases of production: from sorting and destemming, to crushing and pressing, to blending and bottling. An in-house graphic artist helps them design logos and private labels.

Kings Hill Cellars also accommodates small vineyard owners interested in making wine from their own grapes. "Many growers have good fruit, but don't have the expertise or equipment to make great wine," said Austin.

Wanting to make cult wines, Austin hired Richard Mansfield to help him design the winemaking practice and facility. With over 30 years of winemaking experience, Mansfield assists members through all critical steps, leaving them free to learn and enjoy the process.

Kings Hill Cellars sources most of its fruit from vineyards in Dry Creek Valley, Knights Valley and Green Valley (east of the City of Napa) with established reputations.

Its state-of-the-art production facility is designed to make small lots of handcrafted wine. The hardware is engineered to be safe, clean and easy to use as well as gentle on the wine while allowing minimum exposure to air.



The crush pad features Vasin Bucher hardware while a McClain ozonation system sterilizes cellar equipment in a chemical-free, eco-friendly manner. Using primarily French oak barrels, wines are aged in a cut-and-bermed cave with a climate control system. Inert gas racking, filtration systems, and a fully stocked lab help members produce the best wine possible. A mobile bottling line with all stainless steel machinery is contracted when needed.

Members have the option of making a 30- or 60-gallon barrel of wine that yields 12 or 24 cases respectively. The price includes grapes, a tutorial and consultation, the use of equipment, staff cellar practices (racking, topping and monitoring), and standard packaging (750ml bottles, cases, corks and labels).

The winery crushed its first fruit in 2006 with friends and family, and now is making memberships available to others. Visit [www.kingshillcellars.com](http://www.kingshillcellars.com) for more information.

Austin has turned his passion into a venture that gives wine enthusiasts the chance to make their own brand — or as he puts it — "immerse themselves in winemaking". It certainly fulfills his goal to work hard, play hard and savor wine with friends.

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