



Written By **BEV STENEHJEM**

Lion Ranch Vineyard and Winery, San Martin

One of our newest wineries, Lion Ranch Vineyards and Winery, owned by Kim and Todd Engelhardt specializes in Rhone varietals. They are gaining a reputation for daring new wines. A recent example would be their Picpoul Blanc, a French varietal with a lip-smacking zing. Their estate grapes include Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah, Cinsault and Counoise. With a beautiful outdoor pavilion, their tasting area includes a bocce ball court and views of the local countryside and hills.

What did you do before you became owners/winemakers?

You mean, besides traveling and having more money? Seriously, Todd was and continues to be an Emergency Medicine physician. I was a social worker, working as an Adoption Specialist through the State of California. I also taught yoga for a few years. I am now gently getting back into the yoga.

How did you make the decision to get into the wine business?

Over a few glasses of wine, I'm sure! Todd has always been a "big ideas" guy. And, I don't really remember a time when one of his ideas didn't work out. So I trust him. And just breathe.

We were living in San Francisco, getting immersed in the food & wine culture, and enjoying every minute. I remember my first taste of Grenache Blanc. I was with some friends at a restaurant in the Mission District. The crazy server "primed" our glasses (pouring in a bit of our purchased bottle, then dumping it out before pouring a glass!!). I remember being so mad because it was so delicious and she had wasted some of it!

We knew we wanted to leave San Francisco. And we knew we wanted land to grow grapes on (like maybe 50-100 vines? — just enough for Todd to have something to play with and "zen-out." As many of Todd's great ideas do, this one snowballed and we decided to buy 5 acres and plant LOTS of grape—maybe just to sell. That's when I decided to start working the industry, make connections and to learn everything I could. Before we knew it, we were making wine and opening a tasting room. It's been a fun roller coaster (but you don't forget those moments when you feel like you're hanging on for your life!).

Do you have a degree in winemaking?

No. I apprenticed at another local winery for a few years, and took some online courses. We asked everyone we could about their mistakes and how they would do things differently.

What surprised you about being a winemaker?

How much my passion grows with each vintage, and the pride I find in sharing this creation that we've tended from the soil to your glass.

What goals in winemaking are you still working to achieve?

Trying to stress less about fermentation — deciding how to deal with balancing a minimal intervention approach with the cosmetic expectations of quality wine.



What is the biggest misconception about you?

That I'm too young to own a winery? We hear that a lot.

What do you find to be the hardest part of harvest?

The long hours? The heat? The heavy lifting? The wasp stings? The stickiness? The stress? The constant decision making? Trying to decide which of those is the hardest part?

What wines do you drink when you are not drinking your own wine?

I am an equal opportunity consumer of booze. I'll try anything twice.

What are your recent and your all-time favorite food and wine pairings?

Recent: Sparkling Rosé with corn & crab bisque.
All-time: Viognier with French style roasted chicken in cream sauce.

What kinds of wine do you specialize in?

Rhone/Provence varietals & blends. Tons! In 2016 we produced a 100% Picpoul Blanc and 100% Marsanne. Neither have been released yet. We have two different red Rhone blends aging in the cellar. Some plans for 2017 harvest include another rose, but will change the ratios of Grenache and Mourvedre this time. We'll add some other new options in the coming years, as well as the first harvest of our estate red Rhones (Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah, Cinsault, Counoise) in 2018. We're just getting started!

Favorite award or accolade that you received?

We received a gold medal on our first red wine, a Grenache Noir, from the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition.



Bev Stenehjem is a local wine enthusiast, author and freelance writer focused on the wineries of Santa Clara Valley. Bev wrote "The Wineries of Santa Clara Valley," a historical photo book published by Arcadia Publishing in 2015. Bev conducts occasional wine and food pairing events at the local wineries and through Gavilan College Community Education. She is passionate about shining a light on the world-class wines of

Funniest customer story?

Some of our guests wear the nuttiest things. On our opening weekend, there were the two women wearing headbands with cat ears. Last winter, we had a bus full of people wearing ugly sweaters. Then there was the young woman who came dressed in a bright green tutu—she was celebrating her engagement with a group of her girlfriends and everyone was wearing green because it was her favorite color.

What kind of vibe does your winery have?

Relaxed, welcoming, authentic. An afternoon vacation.

Why are your club members so loyal, what does club membership offer them?

An opportunity to be the first to know and taste what we're up to here. And the choice of any bottle of wine they want every six months at a discounted rate for a total of a case per year.

What recipe do you like to add wine to?

Most of them? I like to cook most meats in a little wine, or use the wine for marinating.

Which part of owning a winery do you prefer: farming, winemaking, tasting room/schmoozing with customers?

I love the variety and seeing the grapes all the way through the winemaking process—from soil to sales. Being in the vineyard gives me some pretty magical moments. Winemaking makes me think, and trust my decisions— always good practice. Being able to share all of that with our customers is surreal.

How do you two balance your busy lives with running a winery?

The nice thing about emergency medicine is that once Todd leaves the hospital, his work is done. So, when he's home, he's really present. Todd's shifts are also scheduled, there is no on-call, so we can plan more easily. He does all the farming work on his days off, and we work the winery together on those days as well.

As far as I am concerned, I'm not sure I do. I have great babysitters and friends who can help out with our four-year old son when we're in a bind. Sometimes I have to resort to the TV or tablet to afford me 20 uninterrupted minutes to complete that task or "put out that fire." We try to involve our son as much as he'll cooperate. We do the best we can.

Does your winery have a pet mascot?

We have babydoll sheep that graze during the post-harvest winter months. And a dog that occasionally is shocked by all the people in the tasting room and makes an appearance in the vineyard barking at everyone.

Worst disaster story at your winery?

Remember how we asked a lot of people about their mistakes? I made most of my major mistakes while apprenticing at another winery. All of our mistakes have actually turned around to make great wine in the end; we've been really lucky.

Best advice you received from another winemaker?


Plant what you like to drink because you'll be drinking a lot of it. And don't screw it up.

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