

THE KEN BROWN STORY

In the late 1960's I was struck by a deep fascination for wine that turned a lucrative career at IBM and real estate development into a pursuit that would lead me on a path of discovering the wonderful world of wine. As the journey progressed, I became more determined to learn all I could about grape growing and winemaking, and by 1974 it overshadowed all other career interests. I knew it was time to take the next step. I enrolled in the viticulture and enology program at Fresno State and became involved in the research program in the university vineyards as well as directing the winemaking program at the school winery.

Being at the right place at the right time paid off when I was asked by some of the earliest vineyard owners in Santa Barbara County to make wines from their vineyards at the Fresno winery. The goal was to see if there was commercial potential for grape growing in both the Santa Ynez and Santa Maria Valleys. The early wines from these new vineyards clearly signaled there was very good potential for the cooler climate grape varieties, especially Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Based on the success of these first wines, I was asked to start a new winery for one of these pioneering growers in the Santa Ynez Valley, Marshall Ream. In 1977 my commercial winemaking career was launched as founding winemaker of Zaca Mesa Winery. The first wines were produced in 1978 and were an immediate success. Production grew rapidly over next few years.

By 1984 I felt inspired to go off on my own and start a new winery up the road from Zaca Mesa in the Santa Maria Valley to further explore the potential for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. My wife Deborah, my partners and I named the new winery Byron (my given first name). My focus to produce top quality Chardonnay and Pinot Noir was quickly realized as these wines from our Santa Maria vineyards began to show considerable promise. Our neighboring vineyard was sold to the Mondavi family, driven by Tim Mondavi's interest in establishing a foothold in the Santa Maria Valley to have access to high quality Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Tim and I quickly became interested in pursuing our mutual passion for Pinot Noir. In 1990, we sold the Byron Winery to the Mondavis so we could pull our resources to fully explore the potential for Pinot Noir. Over the next 14 years we accomplished many of our goals and felt that the Pinot Noirs being produced from the Santa Maria Valley were clearly some of the best in the New World.

In 2003, with the blessing of the Mondavi family, I again set out on my own and started a small winery, Ken Brown Wines. I wanted to further explore the prospects of other outstanding vineyards in Santa Barbara County. We have seen huge leaps in the quality of Pinot Noir from the early days of exploration to the consistency and extraordinary quality of the Pinot Noir being made today. I feel privileged to be making Pinot Noir from some of the very finest and most consistent vineyards in our area. I believe that even better quality Pinot Noir from Santa Maria Valley and Sta. Rita Hills will be made in the future as our newer vineyards develop more vine age and we continue to fine tune our understanding of the growing and making of top quality Pinot Noirs. My wife, Deborah and I continue to run Ken Brown Wines as a small, family owned winery producing only 3,000 cases annually of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah and Sauvignon Blanc.