

# Ehren Jordan

*Winemaker, Turley Wine Cellars  
3358 St. Helena Highway North,  
St. Helena  
15,000 case production*

In 1979, Larry Turley founded Frogs Leap Winery with John Williams on land Larry owned in St. Helena. Eventually, John took Frog's Leap to Rutherford and Larry followed his compulsion to stay small and make Zinfandel. However, in 1993, Frog's Leap was still making wine at the winery north of St. Helena, so, consulting winemaker Helen Turley, one of Larry's sisters, made wines for Turley Wine Cellars at Napa Wine Company, Oakville assisted by Ehren Jordan. In 1994, the wines were made at what had become Turley, and a full-time wine-maker was on the boards. Ehren became wine-maker for Turley in 1995, with an office just off the crush pad. 2005 was his tenth vintage as winemaker.

Ehren grew up outside Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in a family that drank mostly beer. On his first trip to France in 1982, Ehren became fascinated by wine and food. When it came time for college, Ehren's parents said, "Study something you like." Ehren liked archeology so he chose George Washington University because the Smithsonian Institution was

nearby (and his physician grandfather was joining NIH). Ehren majored in classical archeology, minored in art history and, with his grandfather's help, discovered Washington, DC was a great wine market. Ehren got a job with Bell's Wine Shop unloading case goods and got invited to tastings. After college he became a sales representative for a wine wholesaler and moved to Denver, but the job didn't get him close enough to wine--there was no romance. So, Ehren took a job in an Aspen restaurant as wine buyer and sommelier. His roommates were from Napa Valley, taking a winter off from Tra Vigne. When they went back to Napa, Ehren followed and got a part-time job as tour guide at Joseph Phelps. He promptly moved all his stuff from Aspen.

The folks at Phelps were great. Ehren got into the cellar volunteering out of hours and weekends. Craig Williams was there. Bruce Neyers was there (winemaker since 1975); Bruce's wife, Barbara, was working at Chez Panisse and the Neyers had their own label. Ehren became a right hand to Bruce, in national sales and marketing, but what Ehren really liked was the cellar. When Bruce decided to leave Joseph Phelps, Ehren took stock. He was not married, he had no pets, and he knew France was where one learned the wine business from the ground up, rather than by taking a degree. So, he spent two full years in Northern Rhône, working a job he'd

wrangled in Cornas, a 90-hectare all-Syrah appellation, smaller than Phelps. He worked with consultant Jon-Luc Columbo at many chateaux, with family case productions of 1,500, and at Jon-Luc's own Les Ruchets.

When Ehren came back to Napa, he began working with Helen Turley at Marcassin in Sonoma. Bruce also offered him a job in partnership with Barbara in Neyers, which had started out at Rombauer as a custom crush (by then Bruce had bought out Joe Phelps). Ehren had been drawn to red wines in Washington, DC but he enjoys making white wine. His first vintage for Neyers was in 1994. Bruce's day job was national sales manager for Kermit Lynch (Ehren would go with him to translate when Bruce was in France); Barbara was still at Chez Panisse. Five years later, Bruce and Barbara built a winery, producing red wine in 2000, white wine in 2001. Two years ago, Ehren sold his interest in Neyers, but he is still its winemaker.

In 1993 Turley made Petite Sirah and Zinfandel. Petite Sirah and Zinfandel fruit came from neighboring Aida Vineyard, then owned by Deedee Brownell; Zinfandel from Bill Moore on Hagen Road, Napa; and Zinfandel and Petite Sirah from Hayne Vineyards, St. Helena. All the wines were single estate vineyard bottlings; there were no blends. The approach at Turley is terroir-driven. Ehren

keeps a list of old vine vineyards. In his work, he is always driving around and says "old vine" is easy to spot. He constantly samples fruit and is always on the watch, as grape contracts change. He calls it ten-year prospecting: who owns where the old vines grow. Turley both owns and leases old vine vineyards. Ehren calls Turley a partner in farming. Its growers' relationships are part of its success, its training. When Ehren finds good fruit, he says to the grower, "Keep doing what you're doing [for that quality of fruit]," sits back, watches, and only then asks questions.

Turley manages 210 acres from winegrowing to winemaking. It is able to be pro-active, to anticipate such divergent needs as a call for tight spacing, or mold, or when to pull shoots. Also, with leasing, the owner doesn't worry about lost income when you want to drop fruit or thin. Ehren says because Zinfandel is erratic in its flowering and fruit set, thinning gives a homogenous Brix. For its 15,000 case production, Turley's tonnage averages 1.6 tons per acre. In 2004, Ehren made 24 wines: one white wine, a blend of Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Rousanne, and Viognier; three Petite Sirahs; one Charbono (from a vineyard with Zinfandel); a Zinfandel port, and 18 Zinfandels--no Cabernet. Zinfandel is still considered an everyman's grape variety, according to Ehren, with pricing at \$20 to \$75 a bottle. Cabernet has this huge mystique of wealth, he



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“I could become a garagiste.” Zin is approachable to the consumer-would-be-winemaker. Ehren finds, with the current mentality, if he asks, “What do you want to do? Sell wine?” he’d advise, “Plant Cab.” But, “Make wine? Zin!” However, Ehren worries that Zin is a dying art, given today’s real estate values.

Turley began with one acre of Sauvignon Blanc, like Frog’s Leap, with the hottest spot full of Zinfandel, just across road and wonderful. Turley tore out its Sauvignon Blanc after the 1995 harvest, replanting in 1997 and has since added that vineyard across the road of six acres of Zinfandel and one of Petite Sirah. A Zinfandel vineyard with tight-spaced vines close to the winery is a project nursery. Since it is hard to tell if a vine has a virus when it is on St. George rootstock, cuttings are grafted onto de-vigorized rootstocks and watched for viruses. Budwood is taken from virus-free vines for new plantings. In a new Zinfandel block near the winery, vines are spaced the old-fashioned way, 10’x10’. Their cultivation Ehren characterizes as ‘informal.’ Vines are on hand-split redwood stakes and watered by hand, with a pierced five-gallon bucket. Between 108 and 120 acres of Turley are certified organic. Larry is committed to organic farming and it is a mutual interest of Ehren’s. The vineyard in Paso Robles was added in 2000. Since then, Ehren has become a pilot, like Larry, to keep up

up with the vineyards of Turley Wine Cellars.

The Barney's Backyard, Napa Valley Wine Library Petite Sirah Ehren calls a fun vineyard, very old-school in its thought. "You do not all see all the things that are there," he says. "The different flavors; it's from a different era: winemaking in the vineyards. The vineyard is planted to Alicante, Grenache, Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Burger, Sauvignon Vert, and Carignan. There are orderly rows now, but back then they had a much more visceral response to the land, a kitchen mentality."

Petite Sirah and Zinfandel ripen simultaneously, or one or the other is first. Yield is heavier, the later the pick. Turley picks into half-ton bins by hand, early in the morning. Vineyards are so spread out, they haul four bins at a time in refrigerated tractor-trailers to the winery. The fruit is brought to sorting tables. Originally these were hand built, with six or eight guys at a table. The fruit is already sorted by four guys on a flatbed in the field before being loaded into the reefer. Fruit goes into a destemmer and falls through to be pumped into a fermentation tank. Turley does 60% whole berry fermentation in tanks of various shapes and sizes. Ten ton fermenters are their biggest. There are no additions of sulphur, yeast, or malolactic bacteria.

Petite Sirahs have the shortest fermentations. To manage their tannins, Ehren gets new wine off the skins in ten to fourteen days. Zinfandels may go as long as 30 days—even 45 days once, as long as the cap hasn't fallen. Then the tank is drained, solids pressed and the press added—there'll be a sugar bump from the berries; the wine is barreled down in 60 gallon barrels to finish fermentation. Turley uses 75 percent French oak, 25 percent American oak, 20 percent new overall. Ehren finds Old Vineyard concentration doesn't need any additional profile from new oak flavor. It can stand alone. Barrel aging ranges from 14 to 18 months. Turley is a believer in letting wines take their time; nothing is forced. They bottled the 2003 in the fall of 2005 because Ehren says it needed the two years.

Turley's model is Burgundy, an incredibly parceled up vineyard area, where the parcels are bottled separately. Napa Valley has such different terroirs. Hayne Vineyards is creek cobble, its Petite Sirah textural; Moore, on the Coombsville bench, is cooler; Turley Howell Mountain is iron oxide-rich, with super-acidic soil. In Paso Robles, it is all limestone, sweet-tart. At Oakley, in the deep East Bay, it's sand. Each of the five vineyards is distinctive--like five kids. The fun is to get to know the vineyards and the experience of growers, the historical flavor profile. "What did that year bring to it?"



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In 1998 picking was a full month later at Hayne Vineyards, it was so cool--horrible for Cab, herbal. Yet, at Turley, they had already bottled and sold their Zin by the time Cab was picked in the Valley. Unlike Cab, the Zin had no rain--it was late, but beautiful.

The separate bottlings by vineyard are because of Larry's commitment to terroir, and its view of the future is from Larry's wife Suzanne's experience in importing French wines and representing California producers in Burgundy (with Chambers & Chambers). Her sense of French companies infuses Turley, where the outlook is slow, long-term--witness Turley eventually

becoming owner of its surrounding vineyards (and an olive grove). Are vineyard designated wines on the rise? Bill Collins, Moore, Hayne? Ehren points out that France first had to set Burgundy and *then* Romanée-Conti. He thinks appellations here in Napa Valley are just developing, where there could be as many as 15 appellations just on Howell Mountain. Ehren sees boundaries changing with definitions over the next 100 years, and consumers getting a better understanding of where wine is from.

Turley is very supportive of local educational endeavors. That's why the Napa Valley Wine Library Petite Sirah project is such a good one for Turley. The Wine Library donates Petite Sirah made by Ehren at Turley to various auctions and other fund-raisers in Napa Valley that benefit education. Ehren recalls the agreement to make the wine as a one-year deal that keeps being renewed, which makes him very happy. Ehren and his wife, Ann Marie, also have their own label, Failla, which they started in 1998. Its 3,000 case production is of wines made from both purchased and estate-grown fruit. Ehren and Ann Marie own vineyard in Sonoma County and current plans call for 2006 to be the final vintage made at Turley. Failla should be made at home, in its very own winery, in 2007.