

## Stacy Clark

Winemaker, Pine Ridge Winery

590I Silverado Trail, Napa

90,000 cases

Winemaker Stacy Clark has been with Pine Ridge Winery for twenty-five years and for the last twenty years has lived in St. Helena, yet she unhesitatingly recommends travel in foreign climes. Says Stacy, “Travel settles

the mind. Everybody should travel. It helps perspective.” Stacy began her travels the first year she was with Pine Ridge, in 1983, when she spent five weeks with a family in Traben on the Mosel in Germany. She characterizes that summer as “an all-Riesling, but an out-of-the-country, experience” arranged by the then founding owners of Pine Ridge, Nancy and Gary Andrus. Stacy has since been back to Germany a few times and made many, many trips to France. In early April of this year, she had just returned from a ten-day Pine Ridge wine club cruise on the Mediterranean with stops in such ports as Venice and Dubrovnik aboard OCEANIA.

Stacy grew up in San Mateo. Her parents were from Minnesota and only drank wine on very special occasions. In high school, Stacy discovered she liked biology. She had always noticed whatever smelled good and biology classes felt right to her. So, Stacy went to college at UC Davis for biological sciences—field biology. She realized it was pretty challenging. It would mean taking chemistry and the rest of the life sciences requirements. However, in her dorm Stacy overheard a couple of her classmates talking about their classes in wine and decided to take the introductory course. Once in it, she quickly decided: “I can do this.” Stacy says the wine program at UC Davis provides technological support, but it’s up to the



student to find hands-on, actual vineyard and winery experience. Stacy spent the harvest before her senior year at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars.

After graduating in 1983, Stacy went to work at Pine Ridge as an enologist. Back then Pine Ridge was a 20,000 case winery beneath an old farmhouse. Stacy became its assistant winemaker in 1985 and winemaker in 1988. Gary Andrus was the winemaker before Stacy came on board. While Gary’s business plan for the winery called for growth, the wine industry is capital intensive, so the winery was built in stages, pretty much on site, and Stacy’s career grew along with it. Since 1985, she has been assisted by Jose Plancarte, cellarmaster.

Gary began his program at Pine Ridge in 1978, its outline, style, and harvest parameters. Stacy says Gary came in with a Bordelaise perspective: “that the land is something there.” From the outset, Pine Ridge sourced fruit from a number of different appellations. When Pine Ridge began bottling, it started with an appellation designated Cabernet, an innovation at the time. A Pinot Noir vineyard appellation was common but not for Cabernet (although this is changing with consumer education). Gary was definitely a mentor to Stacy. His winemaking had a ripple effect, in part

because winemaking is hands-on; it is an easy immersion.

In addition to learning at Pine Ridge, Stacy was also a part of winetasting groups both at UC Davis and Napa Valley and still is, some for 20 and 30 years. She says the tasting groups help you learn to identify what you like and do not like, your range and stylistically what you prefer. You learn the effects of certain techniques, what enhances the fruit; it's very "seat of the pants." Stacy acknowledges that winemaking is an old science but says interpretation changes so there is always a vibrancy. The marketplace changes, the vintages change. Former Pine Ridge founder and owner Nancy Andrus is in the business of getting into the wine business—Nancy Andrus and Associates. She knows about falling in love with a business, how the inside and outside evolve so much. Stacy says it is always an amazing moment when things go well. There is always something one can do better.

Today, 225 of Pine Ridge's 300 gross acres are planted to vines in five appellations: Howell Mountain; Rutherford on Whitehall and Manley Lanes; Oakville on Skellinger Lane; Stags Leap District on both sides of the Silverado Trail; and Los Carneros off Cuttings Wharf and Buhman Roads. At first, Merlot was all over the place, but

Rutherford and Oakville were too warm for it so Pine Ridge moved to Cabernet. Its Chenin Blanc and Viognier used to be in the Stags Leap District, along with some of its Chardonnay.



Chardonnays are very important at Pine Ridge. Currently it makes two, a Dijon clone Los Carneros and a Le Petit Clos Stags Leap District. It used to grow the older UC Davis clones both in Stags Leap District and Oak Knoll. When it acquired

land in Carneros, Dijon clones were planted. They bear a smaller cluster and berry than the older clones. The vineyard is now a lot more hard work requiring more passes, however, quality has evened out. It's easier to mitigate off-effects by pulling leaves, repositioning shoots. You need an attitude of "no surrender." Besides the new clones, there is a closer spacing of 4' x 6' on Double Guyot, a French pruning technique with spurs always on new wood. Stacy says its mature head and trunk is more challenging but may assist in disease control. The Chardonnay fruit is very aromatic, tropical. She finds the changed fruit structure amazing. It takes the oak differently. Initially, the Carneros fruit couldn't or wouldn't go through malolactic fermentation, so it was barrel fermented. Now, both Chardonnays go early into French barrels for malolactic fermentation and ageing *sur lies*. This slowed process gives a creamy texture to the wine and a little bit of barrel character.

Pine Ridge used to do lot of skin contact in a drainer tank for 7 or 8 up to 24 hours, then press to barrels, inoculate with yeast, and then inoculate in barrel for malolactic fermentation. Native yeast fermentations were Gary's idea. It was his company, so he found a way to make it work, but only for the Chardonnay. Now there are fewer phenolics in the Chardonnay. Pine Ridge

presses whole cluster; there is little solid, little fruit in the must that goes through a ten-day native fermentation. Malolactic isn't a worry; the wine spends 8 to 10 months in barrel, and then is bottled in-house. Stacy says there is a lot of pushback in terms of barrel. In Stacy's opinion, Chardonnay is so neutral it lends itself to a variety of wine-making styles. The Pine Ridge Chardonnay has very nice aromatics—tropical, lemon, a little creaminess and a back impression of toast from its oak long finish; and fruit comes back (it's not woody). She recommends a glass after work or with any dish with a cream sauce.

Pine Ridge's first Chenin Blanc production was in 1979. It was 1.7% residual sugar; light, fruity, low in alcohol, and popular. In the 1990's Pine Ridge reduced residual sugar for a different style. In the late 1990s—early 00's Viognier was added for its pink grapefruit to complement the melon and pear of Chenin Blanc. Today, it is still popular. All the fruit comes from Clarksburg on the Sacramento Delta. The Chenin Blanc benefits from the moderate climate and Viognier is very similar to what Pine Ridge used to grow in Stags Leap District. The Chenin Blanc is picked at 18° to 20° Brix, as a fruit salad aroma begins to develop. Viognier is picked at 24.5° to 25° Brix for its fruit profile. The must is cold fermented

in stainless steel to .6 or .7 residual sugar. Stacy says it is as fruity in the mouth as its nose seems. At 12.7% alcohol, it's a lunch-type wine. Until it's bottled, she checks on its production at a custom crush facility in Napa each morning before coming to work on the Trail. Stacy says Pine Ridge has plans to increase its 45,000 case production of this wine to 60,000 cases.

At Pine Ridge, vineyard care is based on an as-needed basis for the health and life of the vineyard rather than by any rigid or formal processes such as Biodynamic. Thanks to UC Davis there are clean, cost-effective products and there is more hands-on labor. Close spacing of vines means more shovel labor to avoid tractor blight, and vines suffer too much water stress if the cover crop isn't mowed. Stacy thinks “sustainable” has a wide definition, but that it is a commitment in Napa Valley. Everyone looks at land differently, true, but Stacy says everyone shares a desire to protect it. And, whatever the practice, be it organic, biodynamic or holistic, fruit and texture are better quality, and so is the wine. Better blending and better bottling have also improved the wines.

For Stacy, even when you are having a tough day there's always something that is stimulating—a problem solved—and that feeling of freedom, of confidence. It may be

a fine tuning (keeping in mind the expense) such as picking more often, which gives flexibility, or small lots treated as reserves to maximize what you get. Picking at night, under lights, keeps fruit cool and gets it to the winery quickly and loads are easy to schedule. More and more vineyards are picked this way in Napa Valley. Pine Ridge has done it since 2002. At harvest Stacy says her day begins at 3:30 or 4:00 a.m. when all the lights in the vineyard look like UFO landings.

And what about the future? Stacy says she loves Malbec. She's used it for blending for ages but there was extra in 2005, enough to be bottled by itself. When this happens, there are so many decisions to make as you consider the personality of the wine. There is so much going on, but there is plenty of opportunity to work with the blocks involved, to fine tune them after they have been picked down to here. There are many vineyard blocks at Pine Ridge and many more opportunities for Stacy to find “something unusual, something compelling that lies ahead.” ■