

Search for the perfect location ends in Knight's Valley

By Rob Joyce
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Tom Eddy stands proudly on the future site of his winery, a knoll with a panoramic view that includes Mount St. Helena and the Palisades. "It took us 17 years to find this spot," he says with an excited smile as he gazes down valley over live oak trees. Eddy projects a genuine enthusiasm as he discusses his wine, the new winery, and the journey that has led him to this piece of land.

Eddy began his eponymous label in 1990, one step in a career he traces back to a moment when he was 14 years old. Filing index cards in a library, he came across the subject "enology" and was immediately fascinated. Already developing a passion for cooking, Eddy found the various aspects of wine and its production just as intriguing, and "all the more romantic."

A friend of Eddy's mother was a professor in UC Davis' enology department, and the teenage Eddy corresponded with him throughout high school. This included a conversation about the first wine Eddy remembers that sparked his interest as "different," a Beaujolais he had urged his father to pick out. Once entering Davis, he declared his major as enology during the first week, and from then on he absorbed everything he could, including extensive viticulture coursework. He counts Mike Martini, Tim Mondavi, and Eric Wente as lab partners while at Davis, and Eddy graduated in

many who taste the finished product. Eddy explains that there is a second phase of oak aging where the most oak flavor is evident; concerned winemakers may pull the wine from barrel at

this point. There is a third phase, however, and it is at this point that the oak tannins and the grape tannins integrate and the wine "smooths out." It is this integration, as well as acid for ageability, and above all, finesse and elegance, that Eddy wants for his wines.

Each year, up to 1400 cases of Tom Eddy Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon are produced. For the 1994 and 1999 vintages, less than one hundred cases of VSR (Very Special Red) were also released with one hundred cases of BSU (Barrel Select) released in 1997. 1999 also marked the culmination of a unique project, a 100 case production of Petit Verdot. Ten years ago, there were approximately sixteen acres



It took Tom and Kerry 17 years to find the perfect spot for a home and winery, but in 1999 they did, setting in Knights Valley.

1974.

A job at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars with Warren Winiarski awaited Eddy, but he declined the offer and chose instead to work at a co-op in the Central Valley, where he had the opportunity to learn "every aspect of the business." This enthusiasm even led him to work unpaid swing shifts to gain experience with winery equipment maintenance.

After stints at Inglenook and Souverain, where at 29 he became the general manager winemaker, Eddy came to Napa Valley to join Christian Brothers.

His five years there were an exciting time; production for the four Christian Brothers wineries increased from 12,000 cases a year to 250,000. Since then, Eddy has consulted on many projects, stretching from Walla Walla Washington to Paso Robles to Texas.

The 1991 vintage marked the first wine released under the Tom Eddy label, and from the beginning, the winemaking philosophy has been clearly articulated. Eddy sees hillside cabernet sauvignon vineyards from "different appellations that

exhibit different flavor profiles and make different wines." He employs the same winemaking techniques for each lot, so that differences are truly expressions of the differences in the grapes. These wines are married together before bottling to produce a "synergistically better blend of them all."

All press juice is sold off and does not go into Tom Eddy wines.

The wine is in new French oak, primarily Sequin-Moreau Margaux and Haut Brion for 28 months, a fact that surprises

Eddy looks forward to making his wines at his new winery just outside Calistoga. A discussion of the new 8,000 square foot facility begins not with blueprints and drawings, but a walk to the site where it will be constructed.

With obvious enthusiasm, he strolls around the knoll, indicating where each room will be, which windows will have which views, how the natural slope will be used to facilitate the gravity-feed systems. "We'll be managing the top of this hill like it's solid gold, to a factory," he declares. A few of the live oak trees will extend through the patio, helping actualize Eddy's vision of a winery that "melts right into the hillside."

The project hasn't been without some controversy. A lawsuit opposing the construction delayed the project, but Eddy sees two positive results from the delay. He had that much more time to get to know about the property that he and his wife, Kerry, moved to in 1999. The opportunity to learn more about the flora and fauna (including the reports of two different arborists)—as well as other seismological and biological information about the property—has proven invaluable. Another effect of the process, according to Eddy, is that he and Kerry met just about everyone around there; the result is that he feels more a part of the Calistoga community, and "now we've met all these great people."

(Tom Eddy's wines can be found in Calistoga at Enoteca, Brammann's Grill, and All Seasons.)