

KERRY DAMSKEY  
WINEMAKER FOR DUTCHER CROSSING WINERY

Kerry Damskey bounds into a room and within moments, knows the names and affiliations of everyone present. He is charismatic, energetic and leaves a lasting imprint on everyone he meets. Kerry personifies joy and lust for life.

A self-described “mountain guy,” he is driven by the alchemy of great wines and a lifelong pursuit to capture the essence of hillside grapes through the artistry of winemaking. Specializing in small-lot wine production, his goal is to maximize the assets and uniqueness of each vineyard. At Dutcher Crossing Winery, he and proprietor Debra Mathy have established relationships with esteemed growers in Dry Creek and Alexander Valleys for the winery’s vineyard designated wines—all made from hillside fruit. “It’s the winemaker’s job to articulate a definable style for a wine, but you don’t create an identity—that must come from the grapes,” said Kerry.

A strong advocate of blending, Kerry is advancing a new category in California with his Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah wines. Although the blend has been done for decades in Australia, it is a new concept in California. “The brightness and aromatics of Syrah are the perfect complement to the rich denseness of Cabernet Sauvignon,” said Kerry. “At Dutcher Crossing Winery, our signature wine is a vineyard designated Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah blend, the first of its kind in Dry Creek Valley.”

“In addition to our vineyard designated wines, our Proprietor’s Reserve is a concept where we utilize more of our estate vineyards; where the sum of the individual varieties and vineyards is more interesting and full than any single one. These wines highlight the art of blending,” he explained. The Proprietors Reserve wines are artfully created from grapes grown on Dutcher Crossing estate vines and other carefully chosen valley floor vineyards. These wines are serious yet innovative and approachable.

With 30 years of experience as a winemaker, Kerry has definite preferences in addition to his unique blending techniques. “With our reds, everything is fermented in small, open-top tanks and punched down by hand. This gentle process eliminates the need for fining, resulting in elegant, full-bodied wines with soft tannins,” stated Kerry. He also believes in native yeast fermentations for most of his wines. “When wines that are fermented with cultured yeast are compared with wines made with native yeast, they are almost always more interesting.”

Like all the greats in their respective fields, Kerry has winemaking and the vine in both his blood and his family roots. Through a series of serendipitous adventures, including a stint of living in a former chicken coop while helping plant the original vineyards at what is now Matanzas Creek Winery, Kerry found himself studying in Davis, with all his enthusiasm and joy for life. Things have blossomed from there into many ventures in vineyards and wineries around the world. With Dutcher Crossing, it is a passion for the region in which Kerry calls home, the unique blending that Debra Mathy fully embraces, and the quest for those perfect mountain vines that intrigue him and keep him lusting for both life and the perfect glass of wine.

Kerry Damskey holds a B.S. in fermentation sciences from the University of California, Davis, is a graduate of the intensive program for small business at Stanford University School of Business, and is a candidate of the Institute of the Masters of Wine.

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