



Armstrong Ranch: Background

LOCATION:

In the Diamond Mountain District west of Calistoga in the Northern Napa Valley at 30 Kortum Canyon Road, Calistoga, CA 94515

COORDINATES:

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FOUNDED:

The vineyard was first planted in 1984 by former Chicagoans, Tom Byrne and Jane Armstrong-Byrne. They established their home in the vineyard in 1992. Their love of wine coupled with a keen interest in food was the basis for developing a vineyard. Jane's professional food background brought her to wine early in her career. As an avocation she designed and led tours to the wine producing countries of Europe. Both Jane and Tom belonged to several wine organizations which further served to develop their goal to create a world class Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard.

MANAGEMENT:

Tom and Jane Armstrong-Byrne, Proprietors;

Craig Becker, Winemaker;

Rex Geitner, Vineyard Consultant.

VINEYARD and THE ESTATE:

The estate consists of 91 acres in the mountains above Calistoga, and 13 acres are planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. The 110R rootstock was planted in 1984 and it was grafted over to Clone 6 (original Tchelistcheff cuttings) in 1985 and 1986. The elevation of the vineyard varies from 850 to 1200 feet, and it has several facings, which produce five different microclimates. Because of this, harvesting must be done over several days. The thin volcanic soils are rock strewn and laden with the black volcanic glass. Because of these very thin soils, the vines have to struggle to survive, and produce less than two tons to the acre, about half of what valley floor vineyards produce. As a result the berries are very small and intensely flavored. The wine maker, Craig Becker explains, "To make a great wine, you need mountain fruit. Anyone can make a concentrated and extracted wine, but for depth of flavor, balance and the right elegant tannic structure, you need great mountain fruit." Rombauer Vineyards purchased their grapes for 10 years and made a separate bottling, labeled Napa Valley Diamond Selection Cabernet Sauvignon. Since 2003, St. Clement (a Beringer Blass winery) has purchased their grapes and made a vineyard designated (Armstrong Ranch) Cabernet Sauvignon. Jane and Tom chose to reserve a small tonnage to make their own wine, while continuing to sell the majority of their grapes to St. Clement.



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WINEMAKING:

Our Cabernet Sauvignon grapes are hand-picked and sorted in the vineyard. They are de-stemmed, crushed and pumped into a small open-top fermentor. A 50 degree cold soak precedes native wild yeast fermentation. The cap is punched down three times per day until dryness, reaching a maximum temperature of 82 degrees. The wine is macerated at an elevated temperature for three to five days and then drained overnight. The free run is put into 50% new French oak and 50% once-used French oak for aging 24 months.

CURRENT RELEASE:

2002 Cabernet Sauvignon.

PRICING:

The 2002 Vintage is \$65.00

HOSPITALITY:

Jane and Tom look forward to hearing from wine enthusiasts by phone, mail or email byrne@armstrongranchwines.com

DISTRIBUTION:

Direct, Napa Valley and Chicago.

THE PROPRIETORS:

Both hailing from Illinois, Tom Byrne is a retired Structural Engineer who got his degrees at Illinois Institute of Technology and the University of Illinois. After serving in the Army he worked for a Chicago architectural firm before joining Jewel Food Stores in 1964. He later became Vice President of Construction and Store Development for Jewel, and later American Stores after they were acquired. Jane Armstrong_Byrne is a Home Economist and Registered Dietitian. She studied at Iowa State University, and served her Administrative Dietetic internship at the Aetna Life Insurance Company in Hartford Connecticut. She was Head of Test Kitchens for the American Dairy Association, Director of Home Economics at the Wheat Flour Institute, and in 1966, she joined Jewel Food Stores as Home Economist. In 1971 she became Vice President of Consumer Affairs for Jewel, one of the first women VPs in corporate America. They were married in 1974.

WINEMAKER:

Craig Becker was born in Long Beach, CA and studied wine making at UC Davis. He began his wine making career as have many at Robert Mondavi Winery in Oakville. He moved in 1997 to Spring Mountain Winery as assistant wine maker and became wine maker in 1998. There he made 75 different wines from over 140 different blocks. He began consulting in 1999 and in 2003 he left Spring Mountain to pursue consulting full time. He now consults with many small boutique wineries along with making wine on his own. "My goal as a winemaker is to produce exceptional varietal wines which reflect the uniqueness of the vineyard and the microclimate," he explains.