



For the Finkelsteins, making wine is a family affair

By David Stoneberg, STAFF WRITER

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Seated in their intimate tasting room, around a large square wooden table, interviewing Art and Bunnie Finkelstein and their son and daughter-in-law, Judd and Holly, a visitor gets a sense of excitement, although the 2006 harvest had yet to begin in earnest. Bunnie said all four are working "pedal to the metal."

Holly agreed, "We are all so involved in the business. I just laugh. This is the reinvention of Judd's Hill and the microcrush. I've never worked harder."

"This is the third winery we've built in 27 years," said the 64-year-old patriarch of the family. "The start-up process is the most fun as things are always changing." The new facility for Judd's Hill winery will be open Oct. 1, Finkelstein said, adding that although the building is done, the landscaping and egress and ingress from Silverado Trail need to be finished. Judd's Hill is located at 2332 Silverado Trail, just north of Trancas Avenue. Oh, and one more thing, Art said, the hand-painted sign needs to be replaced with a proper sign.

Make wine for growers

The 7,500-square-foot facility is home both to Judd's Hill and Napa Valley Custom MicroCrush. The family makes their own premium red and wine wines (tasting by appointment only) and, for growers, will also make wine from their grapes. For enthusiasts, the Finkelsteins can be hired to buy grapes, crush them, age the wine in oak barrels and finally bottle it. The clients are able to be part of the process, for example, tasting the wine from the barrel, and designing their own label. Bunnie said their clients love to taste from the barrel and some plan parties around the tasting in the cellar. "They send us Christmas cards with a photo of the barrel tasting party," Bunnie said with a smile. "I love it."

Napa Valley Custom Microcrush uses the following formula: one-half ton of grapes equals one barrel of wine, which is equal to 24 cases of wine. Cost is \$2,800 for the service.

Judd's Hill brand began in 1989 and three years later, they were producing 3,000 cases on their Conn Dam property. Art and Bunnie were no strangers to making wine, as Art and his brother bought a ranch and began Whitehall Winery in St. Helena in 1979. Art said he

sold his share when the winery got too big. Before moving to the Napa Valley, Art, who is an architect, made wine in the basement of his Los Angeles home.

A kick out of the action

His son, Judd, said he enjoying growing up in the Napa Valley. "There was always some sort of action for little kids to get involved in. I remember cleaning the tanks, I was small and they would lift me up to put me in the tank," he said. "I got a kick out of being around it all."

But as he grew older, Judd said he decided to try something else as his main interest was in video. He went to Arizona State University and the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication to learn media production. Afterward, he spent three years producing films in Hollywood. "The whole atmosphere gave me a new appreciation for the wine business," he said with a laugh.

Along the way, he met Holly, who earned an MBA from the Peter Drucker School of Management. After graduation she said she was doing grant work for nonprofits and thinking about going back to school.

Came home for crush

Even when he was in Los Angeles, Judd said he always came back to the Napa Valley during crush. In 1998, he brought Holly for her first experience. "I took a vacation from work for the harvest," said the daughter-in-law who had grown up in Los Angeles. During the crush, Holly "worked strange hours, wore grubby clothes and took right to it," said her proud husband. "She even rubbed grapes on her hands to make them black," Judd said. The two were dating then, but during that crush, Judd knew he had found the woman he would ask to be his wife. "I was driving the tractor, carrying a wagon full of pomace. Holly was shoveling the pomace into the vineyards in 100-degree heat. I knew then she was the woman for me."

Holly said working in the winery business is so different than what she had done before, which was working with nonprofits. "We are so small here, we all do everything," she said. "We're running the business and we all schlep hoses."

At one point Judd gave up his television career. He was still in Los Angeles but he was selling wine and working in the business. Art and Bunnie asked him to come home to help , and he accepted, asking Holly to join him. She did willingly.

Started business '92

The Finkelsteins started the small-scale custom crushing business in 1992, because one of Art's friends, who was a grape grower, said he wasn't getting paid enough for his grapes. He said his grapes could make better wine than what was being produced. The two discussed the idea and Art asked him to bring in a half-ton of grapes. The friend did, Art

crushed it, aged it and bottled it. The wine was good and Napa Valley Custom MicroCrush at Judd's Hill was born. The next year, Art took out an ad in The St. Helena Star and got 12 clients. The business has just grown and grown and currently, they have 100 clients with either one or two barrels of wine in the cellar.

It's clear Holly has a lot of respect for her in-laws. "They haven't been afraid to be themselves. I have to give a lot of credit to Art. He's not one to try the latest fad, he's taken a slow and steady approach, but still not afraid to take risks. Both Art and Bunnie have such a zest for life, I have to admire that."

In turn, both Art and Bunnie feel fortunate to work with Judd and Holly. "It's fantastic. We are so blessed to have them as overly competent co-workers," Bunnie said. Art added, "If not for these two here and their abilities, this transition to a larger facility would have been impossible. They share my passion of winemaking and they are incredibly talented, skilled and wonderful people. Use whatever adjectives you want to use to describe them and they're all true. Without them I would have never done this project."