

WINE COUNTRY *This Week*



Winemaker Profile: Judd's Hill

ART & JUDD FINKELSTEIN

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by Charles Neave

Winemaking at Judd's Hill in the Napa Valley really is a family affair, one shared by Judd Finkelstein and his father, Art, an architect who not only founded the winery, but designed it as well. Art also designed and started Whitehall Lane Winery, which he has since sold.

These days Art (who began making wine in his garage over 30 years ago) and Judd concentrate their considerable talents, energies and artistic sensibilities on two projects, the first being Judd's Hill. Their second undertaking, which they began about 14 years ago, is called Napa Valley Custom MicroCrush, which makes barrels (or a single barrel) of wine for private clients who put their own label on the bottles.

For these clients the Finkelsteins (Art and his wife Bunnie, Judd and wife Holly) do all of the bookkeeping, the complex government compliance work, and they make the wine from start to finish, bottle the final product and will even source the grapes for you. “Cabernet is far-and-away the most popular varietal we deal with, after all, this is Napa,” said Art with a laugh. “But we have done Zinfandel, some Pinot Noir, Merlot, even Nebbiolo and Dolcetto.”

“We have people from New York, Massachusetts, Louisiana, from all over making their wine here at Judd’s Hill,” Bunnie said. “Many people make special trips to visit their wine at ‘their’ winery, and often they bring friends with them.”

“We have almost a hundred custom crush clients that use our 3,500 square foot state-of-the-art facility close to Napa (which will also have a more formal ‘by appointment’ tasting room opening this spring),” Judd added.

Another important aspect of their operation is, of course, the hand-crafted, ultra-premium Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Petite Sirah and Syrah made under the Judd’s Hill and Judd labels, about 3,000 cases in all, and all of it highly prized by true wine aficionados.

“One of the reasons our Cabernet has become so coveted by people who love wine is its elegant style, a style that showcases the true nature of the Cabernet grape,” Judd said. “It’s an approachable wine – in fact we make all of our wines to be approachable upon release – yet they still have enough depth so that they can be cellared and aged for years.” As Judd has said, “Our philosophy of winemaking is that great fruit makes fine wine and we want that fact to show through. To that end, we use oak subtly, keep the alcohols at moderate levels and blend carefully... We let the grape shine, which results in wonderful wines of true varietal characteristics.”

Judd’s Hill is located on the Silverado Trail in the heart of Napa Valley. They are open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. but it is by appointment only. For more information call 1-866-438-5833 or look on the Internet at www.juddshill.com.