

UCLA MAGAZINE

Print View - [Return to Normal View](#)

The Fruits of Their Labor

By [Bekah Wright](#), Photos by [Jan Sonnenmair](#)

Published Jul 1, 2010 8:02 AM



Wine country near Santa Rosa, Calif.

Ah, wine. The inspiration for sonnets, igniter of passions and, dare we say, uniter of mankind. With summer vacations upon us, so, too, is the opportunity to savor some of California's best vintages. Our itinerary suggestion for the perfect vacation road trip (adults only, please) — a wine trail to Bruin vineyards and wineries, starting in Southern

Bruin Wine Country: A Tour Guide

So many wineries, so little time. Here's a [comprehensive-as-we-can-make-it list of wineries](#) owned by UCLA alumni, or in which graduates play a prominent role. You can follow the route from UCLA all the way north to Napa!

Still thirsty? Here are the stories — and locations — of four more wineries in the UCLA family, in the article [Cheers! Another Pour from Bruin Vintners](#). This exclusive web extra gives you details you won't find in our print magazine!

California and easing up into Northern California's famous fields.

Can't make the trip? That's OK, too. Many companies ship wine for enjoyment at home. While lingering over certain notes and textures of a varietal, we thought it would be nice to share the stories behind the wine.

So pop a cork, settle back and spend some quality time with our world-class alumni winemakers.

Bob Kelly '88 - Owner, Pacific Ridge Vineyards

Though unplanned, Kelly's studies at UCLA were on track with those he'd need for the postgraduate winemaking program at UC Davis. "The life sciences chemistry and biology classes gave me a good basis for understanding vineyard, winemaking and plant biology issues that are essential in the winery and viticulture industry," he says. After graduation, though, his career took a different direction when he joined the Navy and began flying combat missions over Iraq from an aircraft carrier. To deal with the daily stress, he found a calming touchstone.

"I had a calendar in my stateroom with peaceful, California scenes on it," the pilot, still an active airline captain flying out of Los Angeles Airport, recalls. "A vineyard was one of them."

Inspired by that image, Kelly turned his attention to some family land in Ventura County after his tour was up. There, he planted a Syrah vineyard and set out to learn as much as possible about the wine business.

Pacific Ridge Vineyards' first harvest was in 1996. With winemaking operations based in Buellton, the winery has been producing artisanal wines ever since. "Pacific Ridge wines are typically fruit-forward, rich, New World-style wines," says Kelly. "Instead of having a single concentrated growing site reflected in the wine, I believe that more complexity has been achieved in these wines."

When he's not airborne, Kelly occasionally performs custom vineyard installations. Other days, he can be found pouring in the winery's tasting room and leading private tours that feature calendar-worthy views of the Santa Rita Hills.

Kimberly Pfendler '92 - Founder, Pfendler Vineyards

This country girl from Minnesota headed west to pursue a life on the red carpet in Los Angeles. After graduating from UCLA's School of Theater, Film and Television, she worked as a creative executive at studios like Warner Bros. and MGM.

Her path did an about-face after meeting and falling in love with fellow UCLA alum Peter Pfendler '66. The pair married in 2004 and Pfendler left Los Angeles behind for her husband's ranch in Petaluma. "He planted his first vineyard in 1992 and grape-growing became one of his passions," she says. "I, too, immediately felt a strong connection to the land."

The following year, the couple's son, Nicholas, was born. The family expanded even further when Pfendler's parents,



brother and sister-in-law moved to Petaluma. Then, in 2007, Kimberly Pfendler tours one of her Peter passed away. Pfendler's focus on the vineyard changed vineyards near Petaluma, Calif. as a result. "I wanted to carry on his legacy and foster a love of our vineyards and ranch in our son," she explains. And so, Pfendler Vineyards was born.

The business has since expanded to include four separate vineyards on different sites of the ranch, from which Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and a Rosé of Pinot Noir are produced. Of course, producing is something Pfendler relates to. "The creative process is similar," she concludes. "Both fields involve starting a project from scratch and following it through to fruition."

Shari Staglin '66 and Garen K. Staglin '66 - Owners, Staglin Family Vineyard

This remarkable couple met on a blind date during their junior year in Westwood. The budding romance included a shared passion for wine. "We began taking day trips to Napa Valley in 1966 when there were only six wineries," says Garen, and the two set a goal to both live and make wine there one day. "All we had then were student loans and a lot of ambition," remembers Garen. "So we had to do a few things before we could make our dream real."

Shari and Garen married in 1968 and soon after departed for Yokosuka, Japan, where Garen was stationed while serving in the Vietnam War. Thus began a series of moves for the young couple that they turned into opportunities to sample wines around the globe. A particular favorite: a 1959 La Tache from the wine cellar of Buckingham Palace. Says Garen, "We tasted it with the sommelier for the queen, which made it even more special."

In 1975, the Staglins moved to the Bay Area and one step closer to their Napa Valley dream. Garen was doing finance and merger work with companies in the wine business like Oakville Vintners and Callaway Vineyards. Shari was focused on health-care management. In 1984, they sold a business and their dream started taking shape.

Shari began an intense search for the right property. In 1985, the perfect site in the Rutherford Bench presented itself — land formerly owned by the granddaughter of Georges de Latour, founder of Beaulieu Vineyard. Shari left health care and devoted herself entirely to the emerging Staglin Family Vineyard, enrolling in graduate school at UC Davis along the way.

This year, Staglin Family Vineyard celebrates its 25th year in business. The company has grown exponentially, with son Brandon coming on board as the winery's marketing and communications director, and daughter Shannon working with the vineyard's trade and consumer relations. Today, guests can tour the vineyard with its 164-kilowatt solar panels and 24,000-square-foot underground winery and caves where Staglin-certified organic wines are produced.

The vineyard is also the site of the annual Staglin Music Festival for Mental Health. "In the last 15 years, we've raised about \$95 million," Shari says of the event. The Staglins' alma mater is a major beneficiary of their efforts, with charitable funds going toward the establishment of UCLA's Staglin Center for Cognitive Neuroscience and the Staglin Music Festival Center for the Assessment and Prevention of Prodromal States (CAPPS). In its 16th year, the festival brings together several of the Staglins' passions and is in keeping with the vineyard's motto — "Great Wine for Great Causes."

Beth Novak Milliken '83 - President, Spottswode Estate Vineyard and Winery

When Milliken was entering middle school, her doctor father, Jack Novak, turned 40 and changed career directions, trading in his stethoscope for a tractor. The family of seven moved from San Diego to Spottswode, a St. Helena-based estate vineyard property established in 1882. When most teens were getting jobs babysitting, Milliken was working in the wine industry. "I was a tram girl at Sterling Vineyards one summer and worked in the tasting room at Cuvaision Estate Wines in another," she recalls.

Milliken then packed her bags for UCLA to study economics. She spent her junior year abroad in Salzburg, Austria, and rekindled her love of the grape. "At that time, Salzburg wasn't a quality wine-producing region, but one imagines one is sophisticated when one is in Europe at that age and can legally drink," she says. "The thought of working in the wine business professionally began that year."

After UCLA, Milliken worked as a sales representative for a wine brokerage company based in San Francisco. In 1987, her mother, Mary Novak, phoned, asking for help with the family vineyard. Jack had passed away 10 years earlier at 44. Intent on carrying out his vision, Mary was making a go of producing Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc from the Spottswode Estate. Milliken answered her call, working for the company in various capacities and eventually becoming president.

Today, the business continues to thrive, producing four wines through organic farming, something of which Milliken is proud. "We make wines that honor the vineyard," she concludes.

Chris Costello '97 - Managing Director, Kosta Browne Winery

One thing Costello knew for sure upon graduating from UCLA was that "I wanted to emulate my father. He'd been successfully self-employed for as long as I can remember." To learn from the source, Costello partnered with his family in a commercial real estate business. In 2000, he and his younger brother, Casey, developed their own partnership and "although real estate was our focus, we would goof around with the idea of investing in totally unrelated projects."

About that time, a family friend introduced them to Dan Kosta and Michael Browne. Their vision: a "virtual" winery specializing in world-class Pinot Noir. Costello was hooked. "I was intrigued by the idea of a company that strived to be the best at its craft."

Costello helped to hone a business plan investors could get behind both financially and emotionally. Over the next several years, Kosta Browne received the financial support it needed to blossom into a successful winery. As the company has progressed, so has Costello's involvement. "My role in the partnership has gradually evolved from a purely financial one to an operational one as the needs of the business have grown."



Beth Milliken in the barrel room at Spottswode Estate Vineyard and Winery in St. Helena, Calif.

Kosta Browne purchases grapes from about 20 different vineyards in the Sonoma Coast, Russian River and Santa Lucia appellations, Costello notes, adding that "we craft our wines making sure each represents the character of its respective vineyard and appellation."

Costello's favorite Kosta Browne wines — Kanzler Vineyard Pinot Noir and Koplen Vineyard Pinot Noir — derive from another source of inspiration. "The talent and dedication Steve Kanzler and Dennis Koplen devote to their respective vineyards give us the opportunity to create wines that are the cornerstone of our offerings," the realtor-turned-vintner says.

Ben Sharp M.B.A. '99 - President, Captûre Wines

"A great wine is a doorway that makes you think creatively and often leads to a memorable experience," says Ben Sharp. He should know. Sharp's life changed while sharing a bottle of 1994 Château Latour brought to a dinner by its winemaker, Denis Malbec. At the end of the meal, the eight people gathered around the table had cemented a partnership that would lead to the birth of Captûre Wines.

Sharp says his education from the Anderson School of Management prepared him well for the endeavor because, "I was focused on consumer products with a concentration on entrepreneurship." As fate would have it, "shortly after moving to the Bay Area, I met Jess Jackson [of Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates] and was offered a position as 'the apprentice.' How do you say no to that?"

Sharp left Kendall-Jackson after a three-year stint to consult with several wineries and consumer product companies. His goal was for him and his wife, Tara, to hang their own shingle one day. And he didn't have to wait long. Nine months later, Captûre came together.

The grapes of Captûre's vintages are grown at Tin Cross Vineyards on Pine Mountain, up to 2,400 feet above the Alexander Valley floor. The first of the company's Bordeaux-style artisan wines made its debut in 2008, a Sauvignon Blanc called Tradition. Sharp says Captûre continues to gain momentum, with three new wines debuting in 2010 and three reds coming on board in 2011.

Mario M. Rosati '68 - Proprietor, Rosati Family Winery

After earning a degree in history at UCLA, Rosati entered law school at UC Berkeley. In 1971 he joined the law firm that would one day become Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich & Rosati. One of his first clients was the acclaimed Ridge Vineyards. It was the beginning of a relationship that would span more than 15 years, with Rosati also serving as a director on Ridge's board of directors.

In 1987, when Ridge Vineyards was sold, vineyard co-founder Dave Bennion paid a visit to Rosati's 1,500-acre, Hopland-based, Russian Cove Ranch. "He took cuttings from Jimsomare Ranch at Monte Bello Ridge and planted them on 10 acres," says Rosati. "That's where our 100% Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon wines come from."



The industrial complex housing Chris Costello's Kosta Browne winery in Sebastopol is stacked with loaded oak barrels.

The year 1991 was a good one for Rosati — he met his future wife, Danelle Storm, and the ranch produced its first vintage a year later. "We weren't skilled winemakers, but it was fun," he recalls. By 2000, the vineyard was producing between 500 and 1,000 cases of wine. "My barn and basement were filling up," says Rosati.

Later, Danelle suggested they have a blind wine-tasting. When their wine won the tasting, she began marketing it in the Bay Area. Later, Danelle suggested they meet with Zelma Long, one of the first women to study enology and viticulture at UC Davis, who'd forged a stellar career as a winemaker, starting with Robert Mondavi Winery. Long came on board with Rosati Family Winery as a consulting winemaker.

"We've taken up our wine several notches," Rosati says of the partnership. Indeed they have, with their 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon winning a gold medal in its first competition, the *Dallas Morning News Wine Competition*. For the Rosatis, though, the wine business isn't about accolades and awards.

"Our whole family has gotten involved," says Rosati. "It's not a business, it's a passion."

And who wouldn't drink to that sentiment?



Mario Rosati at his winery in Southern Mendocino Country with his grandson, Benjamin