



Winemaker Profile: Martin Ray Winery

BILL BATCHELOR

BY SUE STRAIGHT, THE WINE WENCH

How does a guy who studied anthropology, film and photography end up as winemaker in one of Sonoma County's premier wineries? Ask Bill Batchelor, Martin Ray Winery's Winemaker and he'll tell you – and it's an inspiring tale, at that.

Bill was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area and attended school at Sonoma State University. He started out studying anthropology and art. He really got into film and writing scripts – some of his scripts were even used for TV miniseries! He could've easily moved to Los Angeles to foster his career in film, but Sonoma County was where his heart was and he chose to stay. Around this time, some of Bill's friends were working for wineries and they urged him to consider a career change, so in 1996 he switched gears and went to work at Preston Vineyards in Dry Creek Valley. It was a seasonal, entry-level position, but that's where the winemaking bug first bit Bill. He told me "My first job at Preston Vineyards was soaking barrels. Each barrel took a few minutes to fill, so I read every wine publication I could get my hands on as the barrels were filling. I also asked lots of questions!"

After his stint at Preston Vineyards, Bill went to work at Ace Cider as "Cidermaster," where he got a crash course in fermentation. Ciders ferment quickly and don't need any barrel aging, so he got to oversee each batch and learn how to deal with all the quirky things that can happen during fermentation – it was quite a learning experience!

In 2001, Bill went to work as Production Manager for Blackstone Winery in Kenwood and in 2003 he went to work at Martin Ray Winery. He became Senior Winemaker at Martin Ray in 2009.

Local winemaking legend Kerry Damsky is Bill's mentor and the Consulting Winemaker at Martin Ray Winery. Last year, Megan Hill was hired as Assistant Winemaker.

Bill is an interesting guy. He's raising two daughters (ages eight and ten), makes beer and cheese at home, and to really relax, tends his Bonsai trees. Bill is also an avid fan of music. If you were to walk into the cellar or the lab, chances are you'd hear everything from classic country western to punk and hard rock blasting from the speakers attached to his iPod.

When asked what his favorite thing about his job as winemaker at Martin Ray Winery, Bill told me "I love the variety and unique challenges that each vintage brings. It is always different and I (and the rest of my winemaking team) have to think on our feet, be flexible and use a good mix of intuition and practicality."

When he has the time, Bill loves meeting tasting room visitors and giving tours of the winery. Take my advice – go by Martin Ray Winery, taste their wonderful (and reasonably priced!) wines and say hello to Bill. Tell him "the Wine Wench sent me."



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