

Martin Ray

VINEYARDS & WINERY



COURTNEY BENHAM OWNER

ABOUT COURTNEY

Courtney Benham grew up in Bakersfield, California, one of six children, on the tree-nut farm his parents owned. Courtney and his siblings experienced the rigors of farming almonds, pistachios and other nuts first-hand. After graduating from the University of California, Berkeley, he spent a few years in the professional tennis circuit. By that time, his father had added winemaking to his agricultural interests and Courtney went to work for his father's label, Lost Hill. That experience gave him the springboard to pursue a career in the wine industry.

After years in the custom-crush winemaking business, Benham's entrepreneurial spirit took over with the creation of Blackstone, his first major label. Benham built Blackstone into a category leader in under a decade, then sold the brand in order to pursue a new acquisition, Martin Ray.

While searching warehouse space in San Jose, Benham stumbled upon 1500 cases of library wine from pioneer California winemaker, Martin Ray, in 1990. He purchased both the wine and the name and has spent the last few decades pursuing a simple philosophy to make consistent, terroir-driven, 100% single varietal wines, worthy of the historic name.

To establish roots for the Martin Ray brand, Benham purchased one of California's oldest, continuously operating wineries in the Russian River Valley, Martini & Prati. Since 2003, he has been updating and transforming the property into a modern-day production facility and tasting space. While implementing these updates, Martin Ray joined the Sonoma County Sustainability program and is currently working toward 100% sustainability.

Driven by experience and intuition, Benham has always directed the course of his brands through assessment of the market, love of fine wine, and the value of quality. He continues to push the boundaries of great winemaking with true varietal character for the discerning masses. His business model brings together a unique blend of terroir, modern-day craftsmanship and hospitality. These qualities allow him to create consistent top-tier wines, inspired by the historical significance and philosophies of Martin Ray.