

PICK & CHOOSE

JUST RED? JUST WHITE?
JUST CALIFORNIAN?
JUST ITALIAN?
HOW ABOUT A
COMBINATION?

CALIFORNIA WINES

Artisan Series –
\$29.50/month, a red and a white
Winemaker Series –
\$59.50/month, 2 reserve reds
Artisan red–Winemaker red –
\$46/month

ITALIAN WINES

Artisan Series –
\$32/month, a red and a white
Winemaker Series –
\$62/month, 2 reserve reds
Collector Series –
\$112/month, 2 collectable reds
Artisan red–Winemaker red –
\$48/month
Winemaker red–Collector red –
\$87/month

CALIFORNIA–ITALIAN COMBINATIONS

CA Artisan red–IT Artisan red –
\$33/month
CA Artisan white–IT Artisan white–
\$29.50/month
CA Winemaker–IT Winemaker –
\$62/month
Alternate CA & IT Artisan Series –
\$29.50/\$32/month
Alternate CA & IT Winemaker Series–
\$59.50/\$62/month

DOUBLE UP

You can also receive more than two bottles per month. California sales tax is included. Shipping is extra.

cause we had to. People would come in, and the place would be jammed, so they would turn around and leave. Now we're renovating the old tasting room building and turning the downstairs into a reserve tasting room and an area for private dinners. We sell most of our Barbera locally in Sacramento, and we sell in 15 or 20 states that have reciprocal trade agreements for alcohol. But in all those tough states, no, they made it such a hassle. Some of our out-of-state markets are really phenomenal. There's an interest out there across the country for drinking more wine. It's becoming more and more accepted as not just a special occasion beverage but as a food to go with the rest of the food. We're looking for new markets because we don't want to be totally concentrated in Sacramento, except that it's one of the fastest growing regions in the country. That's our bread and butter. Sacramento people consider the Foothill wineries their own, just like San Francisco has grabbed onto Napa. We export some wines too, but we don't do it to make a living. We do it as an excuse to go to Europe. Right now, we're exporting only to Germany. It used to be that the Germans were always trying to get the lowest price possible from us because our bottle of wine over there cost four times as much as most of their wines. Now, they'll say, "Great, we'll take all you want to ship." We like the dollar low against the Euro and also the Australian dollar because it makes their wines more expensive relative to ours. So it really helps. Of course when we want to buy new equipment from Germany, it costs twice

as much. There are pluses and minuses. We wouldn't want to make more than 40,000 cases a year. Right now, we're at 20,000. Like our Barbera, that's what we're known for, and we've got to hold it back because it sells out too fast. It's gotten to the point where I'm watching the cases go down, and I'm tasting the wine in the barrels, and it's not ready to bottle. We have a 20-acre vineyard, and we're planting an additional six acres this spring. I'd like to double our production just in Barbera. I'd like to grow 10,000 cases and target it to certain varietals, Barbera in particular and some of the Italian varietals because they do really well for us.

What at Boeger makes you most proud?

What we really pride ourselves on is that we grow 95% of our own fruit, so we have direct control of it. We thin more than 50% of the crop, down to whatever it needs to be in order to have the highest quality. We have that luxury because we're not selling the fruit. We're selling the wine. Obviously, when people make their living selling fruit, they need good quality, but the threshold is a little lower. The quality may not be as good as it would be if they cut off half the crop, but if it's not that much lower, they can make twice their money. I do love being up here and making the wines. We've been around for so long, and we have a real loyal customer base. I can't think of something better that I'd like to be doing with my life. I think we make some of the best wines up here.



YOUR ACCESS TO OUTSTANDING WINES FROM CALIFORNIA AND ITALY



California

Winery of the Month

The Right Son at the Right Time

Boeger Winery



CelebrationsWineClub.com

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner
75 Pelican Way G1
San Rafael, CA 94901

1-800-700-6227

celebrate@
celebrationswineclub.com

April 2005

Justin Boeger is a son that any parent would be proud to claim, but his father Greg Boeger has a special reason to be grateful. Justin is smart, energetic, and respectful, not unlike his father, but more than that, he's a winemaker. In 1972, Greg purchased an 80-acre property in Placerville, El Dorado County, one of four wine-producing counties in the Sierra Foothills, which shared the same fate. By the early 70s, almost all traces of a once flourishing wine industry had been destroyed over time, at first by the gold rush bust that diminished the population, then by the long years of Prohibition that destroyed the vineyards, and finally by isolation in what had become a remote and sparsely populated region. Grandson of Napa winemaker Anton Nicolini, Greg Boeger was the first to envision a revival of the region's bountiful viticultural past, the most highly developed in California during the gold rush decades. Today, El Dorado County alone has 40 wineries, and Boeger Winery has grown to producing 20,000 cases of premium wine a year. At this point, Greg alone would no longer have been able to manage all facets of the business, viticulture, winemaking, business management, sales and marketing, and serving on the county's agricultural commission, as he has done for 30 years. Justin was the right son at the right time. Five years ago after completing an enology degree at the University of California at Davis and an internships at wineries in Germany's Franconia region, Justin joined the winery as winemaker, and his father could then concentrate on viticulture, his most compelling interest, and gradually share with Justin the other tasks that the business mandates. Our conversation is repeated here with minor editing for clarity. ➤

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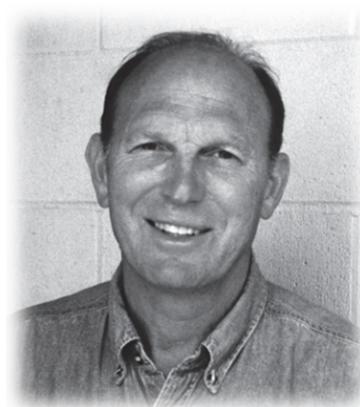
Did you always expect to be a winemaker?

Obviously, I grew up in the business at Boeger. From the time I could walk, I worked. My parents used to say that I worked for room and board. Once I wanted to have money, I'd work for my Dad, and they'd pay me. I remember the minimum wage being \$3.33 at some point. By the time I graduated from high school, I never wanted to see another grape for as long as I lived. I enrolled at U.C. Davis and wanted to explore other interests. I've always loved languages, so I studied German and Spanish and creative writing, and history and geology. About my third year, I thought well maybe I would take one of these winemaking courses. I really did like it, so I took more winemaking classes and decided that's what I really wanted to do. Once I made the decision, I needed to get experience in some other places to see if there might be other ways to do

things. Davis was teaching me the science, and one of my professors said it great. "We'll teach you the science of winemaking, and then you'll go out and learn the art of winemaking. You need to have a balance." I always joke with people that a scientist makes a great, clean wine, but it has no character. An artist makes a wine with tons of character. You just can't drink it. That's probably not universally true, but you could establish some trends based on that idea. So then I went to Germany and interned in a couple of different wineries in the Franconia region in the very northern part of Bavaria.

What were the most important lessons that you leaned from the Germans?

Germans are known for their efficiency. It took just the minimal amount of physical work to get the actual work done. At one winery estate, I worked in the dungeon of the bishop's palace. I would get to work at 6:30 in the morning before the sun came up and work underground until 4:30 in the afternoon, when the sun would be down already. This particular harvest was the latest in 15 years and didn't start until the middle of November, so I literally didn't see the sun for three weeks. But the way they crammed the machinery into this 15th century dungeon, and the way it worked flawlessly was just great, like being in a well-oiled machine. I learned a lot about organization, and I learned how to deal with bad fruit. That year, they



Greg Boeger, father and vineyard manager

had tons of bad fruit, some of the worst I'd ever seen, mildewed and botrytized, with all kinds of diseases, fungus, and rots that you can find. I got to deal with all of it. I had never really seen much of that here in California. I also did all of this grunt work, like scrubbing barrels, which I didn't do as much of when I was working for my parents. By the time I was at the age when I could do hard physical work, I was in school. So I got to really go from the ground up and really learn what every worker has to do and what it's really like. So when I came back here and had guys working for me and wanted them to clean ten tanks, I knew from having done it that it's physically possible but really excruciating, and maybe they should do only five per person per day. It was good to see what new equipment was out there too.

Did you learn particular winemaking techniques?

Winemaking is essentially the same, but each place has a little different spin. Over there, I definitely learned how to manipulate the juice to get a wine with the desired outcome. For example, they like their wines to be less aromatic, relatively dull on the nose. They would consider an aromatic wine too flamboyant. But on the palate it's wonderful. And they tend to drink white wines really cold. They make a lot of Pinot Noir, and



Justin Boeger, son and winemaker

I loved it. They were some of the best Pinot Noirs I've ever tasted. But I've incorporated the opposite. What I've learned is that I don't like to manipulate the juice and the fruit as much. I really like a wine to show the fruit that it's based on. Not to say that I don't do any manipulation, but I use a really minimalist approach. I don't do hardly any fining. Many people will fine wines to make them softer. I don't do that at all for the most part. In the end, I didn't like what these manipulations did to the wine in terms of my personal style and also what I perceived the California market wanted. Basically the experience made me realize that there were different ways to do things. When I came back here, I wasn't afraid to experiment or think that I had to stick with tradition. Of course, when I came back to work with my father, he's very traditional, and I'm the young guy, the student who thinks he knows everything and wants to make changes. So I definitely made a transition and was gradually able to make more changes. Now I can't even get my father to taste the wines. "Hey, Dad, I'd like your input. Would you taste these wines?" He'll tell me that it's too early, because he now wants to taste them only when they're finished.

What changes did you want to make that your Dad resisted?

I use oak barrels in a different way. He definitely had an oak program, but barrels cost money, and if you buy them all from one guy, you get a lower price. I wanted to diversify and used several different coopers, different forests, and tailored each barrel program to the particular grape variety or vintage even. I re-evaluate each vintage because each year the fruit is different, and the wine turns out a little different. So it's a year-to-year evaluation. Not all the wines have the same amount of oak in them, and the oak is different, so this diversity adds more uniqueness, a little more variety, especially when you make as many wines as we do.

Have you influenced any changes in the vineyards?

When I came up here, all of our trellising was either head pruned for the Zin, and that's typical especially for old vines but even for new ones, and the rest was what one of my professors at Davis called "California sprawl," just a simple by-lateral cordon. It's called "sprawl" because the shoots just go out and come down in the middle of the row and shade the fruit. So I encouraged vertical shoot positioning in a new vineyard, which was a relatively new trellis system at that time. The goal is to keep the shoots in tight and grow them straight up, which allows the fruit to hang out to the side and be exposed to the maximum amount of sunlight from the earliest point in the growing season. That's really crucial for developing flavor and color and intensity, having sunlight exposure from bud-break on. And then what my Dad had always done, and I just encouraged him to do more, was using hand labor to pull leaves, thin crops, actually trim whole shoots off to open up the vine to get sun in there. I've seen a dramatic increase in the quality of the fruit, but of course I get all the credit for it, because people are evaluating the wine. But my Dad deserves

tons of credit because he's giving me this marvelous fruit to work with. As long as I don't screw it up, we'll have great wines.

Did you drink wine from the time you were a little kid?

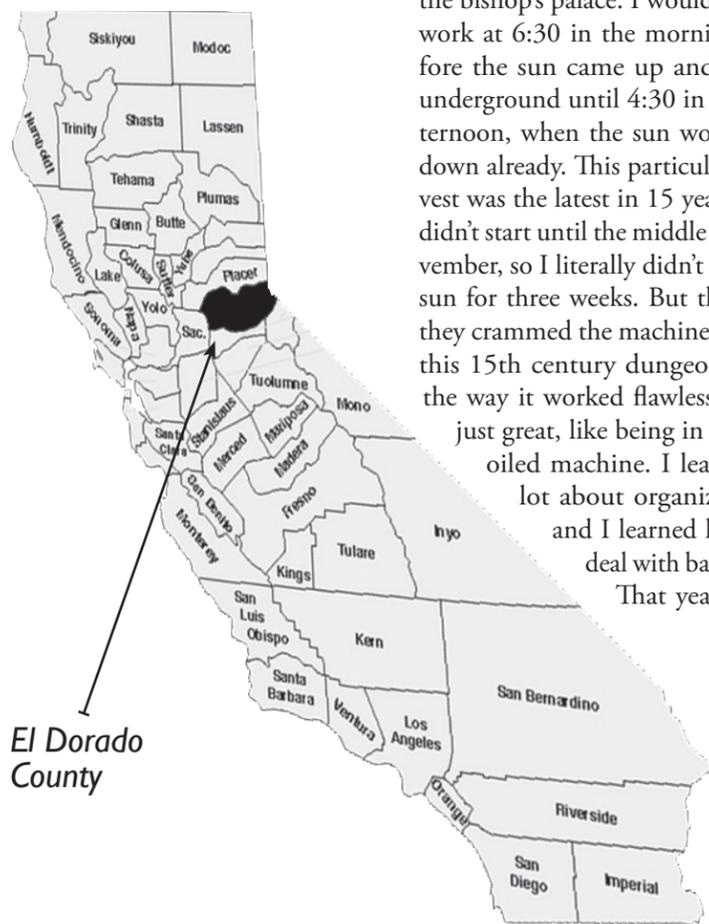
It was always on the table, and my Dad would give me a sip out of his glass when I was younger. As I got older and wanted to have a glass of wine with dinner, I could. I can remember it always being in my life. I didn't have my baby bottle filled with wine, but it was never prohibited. When I was in High school, and all my friends wanted to do was party, I ended up being the designated driver more often than not, because I didn't have the need to drink, because it was never prohibited. It would be like getting excited about going out and drinking water. "OK, well I'm not really thirsty right now." I never had a need to go overboard with it. Especially in Placerville, that's what high school kids do. They drink and get drunk somewhere. Once in a while, I'd go to somebody's house with friends, and we'd play cards or whatever, and we'd have a drink, but we weren't going anywhere. So it was never a problem.

In Placerville, where winemaking is the most important economic activity, did kids drink wine instead of beer?

Oh, no. None of my friends had a taste for wine. They'd go buy a bottle of rum or beer or whatever. But now at my age, I don't have any friends who don't drink wine or enjoy it with dinner. Maybe part of it is that I give them good deals. But I know so many people now, who drink wine rather than other drinks.

Where do you sell your wine?

We sell as much as 38% through the tasting room in some years. We built a new tasting room three times the size of our old one be-



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Each month we send to your table, two or more different bottles of hand-crafted California or Italian wine made by gifted wine makers who are passionate about producing outstanding wines.

Select wine options from the "Pick & Choose" menu on the back page.

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