

WINERY OF THE MONTH



WINERY from cover

live in Mendocino County, except for one brother who is over the mountain in contiguous Lake County. Clearly, they were all sufficiently rewarded by their lives together on the farm that no one felt the need to escape into urban life.

During Danny's career at Fetzer, he was responsible for building design and development along with running construction crews. Part of what interested him in the Jeriko estate was its potential. The vineyards needed replanting, and the buildings begged for remodeling. Today, the view from Highway 101 is a stunning suite of low-rise Mediterranean buildings with red tile roofs, white flags fluttering above the columns that mark the gated area on the 180-acre estate, all surrounded by 120 acres of bio-dynamic vineyards. The original architecture for the main house was colonial, which he says is similar to Mediterranean style, especially the same sloped hip roof. He converted to a Mediterranean theme because the materials would hold up better to the elements, particularly hot summers and wet, cold winters. Stucco is maintenance-free, and tile roofs are fire-proof and last forever. The 7,000 square-foot, six-bedroom, two-story house is now the V.I.P. center where the winery hosts events. Guests enjoy high ceilings, tile floors, a pizza oven in a gracious kitchen, elegant dining and living room, balconies beyond upstairs bedroom suites, with courtyards and pool outside.

Constructed in 1999, the visitor center and winery mimic the Mediterranean theme that began with the V.I.P. center. Inside, soaring glass walls enclose the barrel room where

stacks of wine barrels are visible from every angle. A large tasting room features polished concrete floors, and the curved bar is topped with the same rustic but elegant material. A giant fireplace warms visitors during cooler months. In order to encourage agricultural tourism, Mendocino County recently revised its tasting room restrictions and now allows wineries to serve wine by the glass and to remain open until midnight. Danny is renaming the tasting room "The Pressroom Wine Bar Lounge" and looks forward to making better use of this beautiful venue. "For me, the experience of tasting through a bunch of wines, buying a bottle, and leaving is a little boring and not a good way to display what we have here at Jeriko. I want to create more of an experience here, where we can offer appetizers, wines by the glass, and let people enjoy the estate for as long as they want to, rather than bouncing from tasting room to tasting room."

But more extraordinary than the improvements on the estate, the vineyards, which at first were organic, are now bio-dynamic, a system of farming that is totally self sustaining. "You look at your property, your estate, as a living organism, so your goal is to be as self-sufficient as possible when it comes to composting any inputs in the vineyard. The goal is to produce it all on the property." In other words, whatever elements are necessary for a balanced soil and healthy plants are grown on the property with cover crops, so that the system is free of external and unnatural additions. Since monoculture is itself unnatural and encourages disease and pests, bio-

dynamic farming mandates diverse crops on a given piece of land. Sheep and goats graze around the vineyards, and ducks and other wildlife live in the ponds, contributing to the balance. Originally, only the vineyard in Redwood Valley was bio-dynamically farmed. Danny converted the main Jeriko Estate ranch from organic to bio-dynamic recently so that he would have to deal with only one certifying agency, Demeter USA. "One of the big challenges is that you have to keep up with all the paper work," he says.

Danny chose the name Jeriko for the winery, evoking the ancient city of Jeriko in Palestine, where plants and animals were supposedly first domesticated. The family was prohibited from using the Fetzer name commercially after Brown-Forman purchased the business. But Danny says that even though the Fetzer name has a lot of credibility and history in the wine industry, it is also a super-market brand now and doesn't correspond to what family members are currently doing in their small wineries. Jeriko Estate produces just 10,000 cases a year of mostly Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and a little Syrah, Merlot, and Sangiovese. Danny is especially proud of his Jeriko Estate sparkling Brut. He has two other lower priced organic brands, the San Francisco Wine Press and the San Greal, which he makes for Trader Joe's. He'll soon be bottling a Port under a different label. He says that he gets burn-out from sales trips around the country and wants to remain here on the farm. "I prefer to stay here and bring people in to entertain them and show them the wines rather than traveling around the country. That's my goal anyway."



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Winery of the Month



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Sitting outside the event house beside the pool, Danny Fetzer remembers something his father used to say, "You plant a vine, and you get entangled in its roots." It's approaching noon, and the temperature is rising. Even under the umbrella, it's hot. Danny looks beyond the pool, a cool blue rectangle. His eyes sweep the vineyards, cross Highway 101, close enough to hear an occasional car motor. On the other side of the highway, he has other vineyards. Then his eyes move up to the foothills of the Mayacamas Mountains. The sweep of green from vineyards to mountain oaks and then a wide blue sky with a few stubborn clouds fools the mind into thinking that the heat is less than it is, on the high side of the 90s. This is mid summer in Mendocino County, exactly 95 miles north of San Francisco, according to the highway sign.

Soft-spoken and relaxed, Danny Fetzer projects tranquility. At 45, he seems to have had a seamless life. The youngest of 11 Fetzer children, he was raised a few miles away in Redwood Valley on a remote 950 ranch that his parents purchased in 1957. While his fa-

ther Barney was the visionary, every family member played an important role, working as a team in the vineyards, the winery, and in the business itself. "My father depended heavily on child labor," he laughs. They all worked at an early age, before school, after school, and on weekends and continued to work in the family business into adulthood. When his father died suddenly in 1981, the company was producing 180,000 cases of wine annually. Between then and when the family sold to Brown-Forman in 1992, it had boosted sales to 2.1 million cases. The Fetzer family farmed as much as 2,000 acres organically, at that time the largest organic holdings in California. "No, I wouldn't trade it for anything. I thought it was great. At the time, I thought 'Oh, my friends are playing ball and I've got to go home and work. But no regrets. That's how I learned what I know.'" All but two of the Fetzer children now have vineyards of their own, six with wineries. Only two have different but tangential interests. One owns a cattle ranch, and the other is a financial planner. All of them

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