



Groth

A GROTH VINEYARDS & WINERY HISTORY

You might say this is a story of right time, right place. Dennis and Judy Groth came very close to realizing a dream, buying a premium vineyard in the heart of wine country. The vineyard had a reputation for world class grapes, and at last moment...the deal fell through. The vineyard was Les Pierres in Sonoma, known for its premium Chardonnay

“The moment that everything changed,” recalls Dennis “was when the phone rang and Napa realtor and grape farmer, Ren Harris, told me I had to drive over the hill before I made any final decision. Judy and I took his advice and we drove from Sonoma to Napa via the Oakville grade. When we reached the top, we stopped and looked down on spectacular sea of vineyards. Curiously the vineyard we bought from Ren is one that we saw that moment, and every time we drive over the grade we think of that day.”

The year was 1981. The 121 acre purchase was the Oakcross Vineyard planted by Justin Meyer and Ray Duncan from 1972 – 1974 to Cabernet Sauvignon, in the heart of the Oakville appellation. It was prime Cabernet Sauvignon land, planted by masters. Some of the grapes found their way to Justin’s Silver Oak bottlings in the 70s and to other successful Napa Valley bottlings.

“It was a life changing investment for Judy and me,” Dennis recalls. “We were not grape farmers, but we were serious wine consumers who loved and had consumed our fair share of Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon over the years. The greatest wine I had ever tasted in 1981 was the 1968 Beaulieu Private Reserve. Before we committed we needed confirmation that the land would produce something possibly that special.”

In 1978 a neighboring winery, Villa Mt. Eden had made a reserve Cabernet Sauvignon from the Oakcross vineyard. “We hunted down a bottle and opened it immediately. We knew at that tasting that if we could make a wine this good, we’d be happy.”

Dennis and Judy, natives of the south San Francisco Bay area had been married for twenty years when they bought “the farm” in 1981 with vineyard, farmhouse, and a barn. Dennis had worked up the ladder to partner at Arthur Young & Co., and was one of the key architects that built Atari, a consumer electronic company, into a 2 billion dollar company. In 1984 Atari was sold. In 1985 Dennis, Judy, and their three children moved from the Bay Area to the Napa Valley and never looked back. Home, and then the winery were built on the Oakcross ranch.

“We wanted to keep the business family owned and operated,” states Judy Groth. “What we couldn’t have anticipated is how much the kids now play a role in our business. Suzanne, Andrew, and I are as involved as Dennis, and all those who work here are like family to us. That is the way we like to do business.”

“I think that those who visit the winery in Oakville feel this,” adds her daughter Suzanne. “To this end we formed a Groth Wine Club, Team Red Stripe. They know us, follow the wines, and follow the efforts we take to continually evolve the quality of our wines. We were one of the early “cult” wineries and we have matured over the decades into a winery with a solid consumer base or following. Year in, year out they seek our wines.”

Dennis looking back admits, “Groth’s first vintages of Cabernet Sauvignons immediately put us on the map. Our first Cabernet was the top wine in its Class at the Orange County Fair, as was our Chardonnay. Robert Parker gave our 1985 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon the distinction of California’s first 100 point wine. Despite the acclaim, we have worked very hard to fine tune the quality of each of our wines over the last two decades.”

Michael Weis has been Groth’s winemaker since 1994 and in addition to crafting the winery’s Oakville wines each year makes small lots of wine that will never be commercially available. His method is to not only to stay on the cutting edge of winemaking, but more importantly to understand the estate vineyards.

“Great wines,” says Michael, “do need the influence of an experienced winemaking team. At Groth we have over 80 combined years of winemaking and winegrowing experience. But I also feel great wines are made in the vineyards...”

“To this end we have dramatically changed the way we grow our estate grapes,” concludes Michael. “Two decades ago the canopies were uneven, and the grapes were not as exposed to direct and indirect sunlight. Today we grow grapes that have richer flavors, darker colors, and frankly, make better wines. My job is to find the essence of our vineyards, then bottle it.”

“Making great wine takes a large investment of patience, experience, dedication, not to mention dollars,” states Dennis. “Between 1999 and 2003 we replanted all 54 acres of our Cabernet Sauvignon in Oakville.” Each block was replanted with new clones, rootstocks, new trellising techniques based on our twenty two years of experience, and the experience of world class viticulturalists. This year we are embarking upon rebuilding our barrel cellar, as well as our crush and fermentation areas. All this has one purpose - to making the best wine the vintage will allow.”

“These changes also made us reevaluate our commitment to quality,” says Dennis. “For instance, we decided that we would not make a Reserve bottling of Cabernet Sauvignon from our property until the new vines were on line and proved themselves. “

“We passed over the 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 vintages for the Reserve program. The lost income to the winery will exceed \$5,000,000. Yes, we could have labeled our best wine “Reserve” those years,” he admits, “but that wasn’t what the family wanted. They wanted a great wine, and were willing to make the sacrifices to get there.” Dennis smiles at this point. “And early tastings of the 2005 vintage says we’re on the right path.”

Dennis’s commitment to his winery’s success has extended to his industry’s welfare. The health of the family business, he has felt, depends on the health of the California Wine Industry. He has served as President of the Napa Valley Vintners and Chairman of The Wine Institute. This service included years as a board member of both trade groups, as well as a Trustee of the Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa, California.

Groth Vineyards & Winery was established in 1982 and produces Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay from Napa Valley’s Oakville AVA. In special years it will make a “Reserve” bottling of Cabernet Sauvignon from a small lot in their 121 acre Oakcross Estate. They also own and operate 44 acres Hillview Vineyard south of the winery, a prime source for the Winery’s Chardonnay and Merlot. From its inception the winery has been family owned and operated.