


5 Rookie Winemakers to Watch

First-timers say it's all about inspiration, overcoming obstacles, mentors... and the love of creating



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Posted by Roger Morris, Special Contributor 



Most winemakers learn their craft through a combination of the new and the old-fashioned – by taking technical classes at a university, then dragging hoses and cleaning out barrels as apprentices under the eyes of experienced winemakers as they work their way up the ladder. Then comes that moment where they are in charge of creating the wines, either at large wineries or as owner and winemaker of their own brands.

We asked five impressive rookie winemakers to tell us in their own words about how they got their starts, their winemaking styles, obstacles, mentors, and the tastes of their first creations.

Ryan Moreland, owner and winemaker, Corvallis, St. Helena, Calif.

“On the edge of my family’s vineyard in Rutherford there is an old redwood plank table, surrounded by a canopy of trees. It was the memories I made in this spot that I think had the greatest impact on my decision to become a winemaker.”

“I’ve always thought of wine like a table with many legs, each leg representing a different component, things such as alcohol, tannins, fruit, acidity, body, and so on. What’s important is making sure your table is balanced, so that each leg supports the whole.

It doesn’t matter whether your table is 2 feet tall or 10 feet tall, so long as it’s all in balance. My 2010 Rutherford Runway Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc is a wine that I am very proud of. I have made every single vintage from this vineyard since it first began producing fruit in 2007. The vineyard is especially personal, since it was planted by my family, and I was able to be a participant in training the vines onto the trellises and watch them grow before my eyes.”

“One of the most challenging ancillary activities for me has been sales, especially in this overcrowded recessionary market. It has challenged me to go outside of my comfort zone as I learn to connect and create relationships that will sustain my ability to make great wines. But this is exactly the reason I am enjoying it so much, because it’s like a real life MBA, it has allowed me to continue to grow and learn, and I’m very proud of what I’m doing.”

