

Gregory Graham

Winemaker

How does someone who was raised in a suburb of Cleveland get into the wine business? In Greg Graham's case, the love for viticulture began on his family's 10-acre Concord grape vineyard, where he worked as a youth.

After military service in the 1970's, Greg earned a degree in mechanical engineering and worked in the Cleveland area. During that time, he began to make home wine using local grapes. His desire to improve the quality of his wine increased quickly, but he knew that great wines required a climate that Ohio was never going to provide, so in 1980, Greg moved to California.

There he earned a bachelor of science degree from the University of California at Davis, one of the world's top viticultural schools. He completed the winery internship at Freemark Abbey Winery and began working at Rombauer Vineyard as assistant winemaker in June 1983, when Koerner Rombauer was finishing construction of the winery.

In 1985 he went to work for Robert Mondavi Winery, where he controlled barrel inventory and was involved in the production of "Opus One" and Mondavi varietals. Koerner Rombauer hired Greg back in July 1988, as head winemaker. Since then, Rombauer has had its greatest successes: the steady evolution of their Chardonnays, the wide recognition of their Merlots, and, most recently, the popularity of the Rombauer Zinfandels that now have all of the original Zin makers chasing. Besides producing wines for the Rombauer label, Greg is responsible for the winery's custom winemaking, which accounts for the balance of their production.

Because grape selection and production are critical to making a great wine, Greg spends a tremendous amount of his time working with growers. Prior to harvest he is in the vineyard daily, sampling and tasting to determine optimum fruit ripeness for his wines. He feels that much of his success comes from his efforts to personally select the grapes that he wants.

"The grapes can actually tell you what they need and when they're ready to be picked," Greg explains. "Once the grapes are picked, the art of winemaking begins as you coax and guide the wine to its fullest potential."

Greg has come a long way from that vineyard in the suburbs of Cleveland where his love for viticulture began. Since then his experience, his high standards and his passion for making great wines have brought awards and recognition. Now he is applying those qualities to producing superb wines under his own label.