

WEBSTER

Cellars

In The Beginning.....



WEBSTER CELLARS was born in 2008 when I was accepted to UC Davis' wine production course, moved to St. Helena, California and bought my first crop of grapes. But, my foray into wine and winemaking began much earlier than that.

The son of a U.S. military officer, I grew up in Europe, just a short distance from my French godparents who significantly shaped my palate preferences as a result of drinking Bordeaux and other Old World wines.

After pursuing various careers, I landed in Aspen, Colorado with my love of wine still intact and began making wine in my garage. Admittedly, buying great wine grapes in Colorado was a challenge, but I was determined to realize my dream of making Bordeaux-style wines.

Eventually, I made the move to California and have followed my passion to produce wines reminiscent of my young adulthood, which ultimately led to the birth of Webster Cellars. As the culmination of my pursuit, I produce elegant wines with depth and character.

My wines are crafted to take you on a journey from the moment you uncork the bottle until you consume the last drop. They express an ever-changing scenery of the senses, evolving from shy and tight to open and embracing, like a love affair. There is a new discovery with every sniff of the glass and every sip of the wine; that, to me, is what fine wines should do.

The wines I create are balanced, integrated, delightful expressions of my love of the process and my desire to permit the true nature of the grape to manifest itself in the wine. Manipulation is kept to a bare minimum, additives are frowned upon and filtration is considered an unnecessary step. The result is a wine so complex and sophisticated, you could take it home to your parents!!

My hope is that tasting my wines will be like meeting the love of your life – that dance of experiencing the delight of knowing someone who, at first contact, is intriguing and who grows more and more connected to your soul with every kiss!

WEBSTER

Cellars

A guy, his dream, a heap of adversity and that damn day job!

How does one develop a taste for Old World wines and a passion for making those style of wines? From his earliest memories, Keith Webster's palate was shaped by his French godparents. The eldest son of a military officer's family, Keith lived within an hour of his godparents' home in France. He spent many weekends around their table, doing what Frenchmen do – telling stories, eating fresh foods and drinking wine, although he drank his with training wheels: half water, half wine. While still in Europe with his family, Keith visited friends in Italy and Spain, drinking local wines and sampling regional cuisine. He eventually began to alter the proportion in his glass – more wine and less water.

During his formative years of high school, now living in the U.S., Keith continued to expand his knowledge and experience by tasting wines imported from France, Italy and Spain. While his schoolmates were guzzling Budweiser, he was sipping Burgundy.

After high school, Keith moved to Houston, Texas, where he worked in the Arabian horse business. While there, he attended Texas A&M University and continued to eschew beer in favor of wine. Lucky for him, a friend managed a premium wine store in Houston, providing him with access to many wonderful wines and soon became enamored with the wines from California that had startled the French at the Judgment of Paris in 1976 such as Stag's Leap, Ridge, Inglenook, Heitz, Chateau Montelena and Chalone.

He paid for his wine habit by becoming one of the most sought after general contractors in Houston and spent all of his spare money buying, cellaring and sharing his wines with friends. Keith's friends remember him bragging about moving to California to make wine with "all those guys out there," all the while thinking he was joking, but in his heart, he knew that he really wanted it to happen.

In the mid-1980's, Keith co-launched a catering company that ultimately became Texas Tender, a prepared specialty food mail order catalog. As a result, he met many California winemakers at various dinners and would talk with them about his food and share his still burning desire to make wine in California. One of these winemakers was Jed Steele, at that time winemaker at Kendall Jackson, who invited him to come to California to talk to some winemakers about pairing his food with the wines they were making. These trips reinforced Keith's resolve to move to California's wine country one day and make his own wine.

Unfortunately, the food business fizzled, but he returned to the construction industry and was hired to build a second home for his client in Aspen, Colorado. Consequently, Keith moved his company to Colorado, putting his wine dream on hold. Business was good in Aspen, really good! He began to sock away some money to make the California dream come true and experimented with making wine in his garage, sourcing grapes from such "exotic" locations as Grand Junction and Paonia. They were not the best grapes in the world, but the wines were drinkable and even kind of good, inspiring him to keep making wine.

But, all good things must come to an end and that's exactly what happened in 2008, in lots of places. However, since Aspen was solely dependent on real estate and construction to drive its economy, the "end" in Aspen was pronounced and intractable. Keith went totally broke! He lost his house, his business, his retirement fund and his soon-to-be winery building in the mountains, which was to be home to his wines. He hung on as long as he could, doing day labor to pay the rent, but it wasn't enough to sustain him long-term. Yes, it sounds like a country song but, thankfully, he didn't have a dog that died.

Fortunately, a friend in California who had purchased an old house in the North Bay area knew that Keith could use the work and hired him to do the renovation, so he loaded up his truck and moved to Wine Country. He lived in the spare bedroom of the house, saved his money and knew that fate had brought him here for a reason. Keith began to explore the wine country on weekends and became obsessed with the "wine idea;" it kept him driven toward his ultimate goal. He enrolled in the prestigious UC Davis' wine program and began to study winemaking science.

While working on the house, several of his co-workers mentioned that they knew some folks with grapes for sale. Keith asked for an introduction and soon was the proud owner of a ton and a half of Diamond Mountain grapes. He paid what he thought was a fair price. It was, although it was almost double the Napa Valley average as he would soon discover. He had bought the Rolls Royce of Napa fruit – an expensive first venture.

Keith made the wine using a combination of his experience from Colorado and his book learning from Davis, nursing it until he tasted what he wanted from the barrels. He bottled about 100 cases of 2009 Claret, as he called it: a blend of Bordeaux varieties that was light, elegant, sophisticated, acidic and structured; all the things he felt he was after. Mission accomplished, but not quite; what was he going to do with 100 cases of wine? Perhaps he had purchased too many grapes.

Admittedly, Keith liked the wine; he just wasn't sure how long it was going to take him to drink it all. His problem was soon solved. A few friends were not only nice enough to ask about his "experiment," but they decided to buy some after tasting it. Then, they told their friends and within about 90 days his inventory had dwindled down to only a few bottles that Keith chose to keep to enjoy at home. And, people wanted more. But, while he wanted to devote more time to winemaking, he still had that pesky day job.

2010 came and went, but in 2011, Keith purchased more Diamond Mountain fruit as well as grapes from the up-and-coming Coombsville AVA and produced three different blends: the Cab-led Left Bank Blend, a Merlot dominant Right Bank Blend and his Reserve, which was made from a selection of his top barrels, aged for another year in oak and then bottled. He decided that to give his customers a fair opportunity to purchase his wines, he would provide an allocation to the original buyers. While many people questioned this strategy, it worked! The original group of buyers got their wines, some new folks were also able to purchase and he had enough to distribute his wines to some restaurants in both Colorado and Texas that requested them and is now sold out again. Lucky man!

Although Keith wishes he didn't still have to pound nails every day, the income from his day job has permitted him to increase production, albeit slowly. For 2012, Keith's production increased to a whopping 350 cases, including 65 cases of a new addition to the portfolio – a wonderful Dry Creek Valley Sauvignon Blanc. And, thanks to his advanced orders, he has been able to maintain his allocation strategy, while still ensuring that a portion of the wines go to new customers each year.

Keith plans to increase overall production minimally each year, but will keep the Reserve production very limited. His ultimate goal is to produce a total of one thousand cases annually in order to continue to work closely with the fruit. Since it is just him and his girlfriend doing all the work, he wants to leave time to enjoy some of his wine with his friends. And, one day he hopes to be able to take off his tool belt and focus solely on his wine. Maybe someday soon!

A real reinvention story, a Phoenix, as it were, rising from the ashes of the Great Recession to become a noted winemaker with a bright future. All he wants is to quit that pesky day job and make his wines. This is not your typical story about taking out your checkbook, buying a winery, hiring a big name winemaker and traveling around the country selling wine to all your friends at charity events. Nope. **It's a guy, his dream, a heap of adversity and that damn day job!**

If you would like further information on Keith Webster, his wines, his philosophy, his day job or his girlfriend's role in keeping him focused on making these incredible wines, please contact him directly:

Keith Webster
Webster Cellars
PO Box 812
St. Helena, CA 94574

Website: www.webstercellars.com

Email: info@webstercellars.com