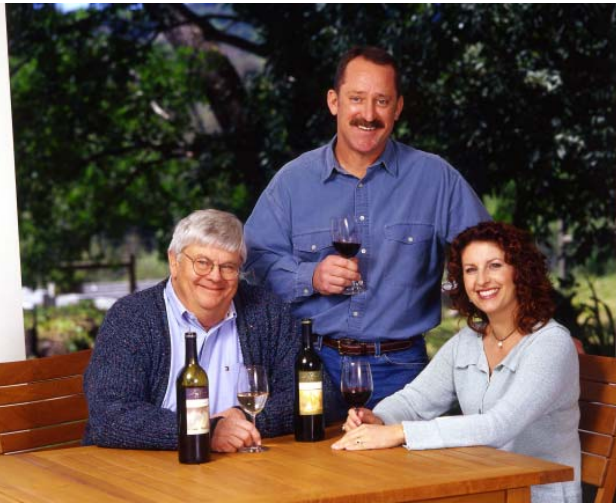


Issue Date: April 2006

Sonoma Pioneer David Stare Retires

David Stare with daughter and son-in-law Kim and Don Wallace.

By Steve Heimoff



David Stare, the ex-engineer who founded the first winery since Prohibition in Dry Creek Valley, in fact, in all of Northern Sonoma County, has announced his retirement.

“It’s time to let my kids take over,” the 65-year-old said. “I’m hanging it up, after 35 years.”

Stare, who had engineering degrees from Northwestern and M.I.T., was working for a railroad company in Boston when the wine bug bit him, and he and his then-wife decided to try their hands at winemaking in California. “In 1970, I’d gone to France on vacation, and just after I came back, there was an article in the Wall Street Journal about what a great wine future California had. So I went west.”

Dry Creek Vineyard started its life as a 70-acre “run-down prune farm” when Stare purchased it. He bulldozed out the fruit trees and planted the Loire varieties he loved: Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc, making the first wines at Cuvaison, in Napa Valley. Later came other varieties, including Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. Stare built a production facility on the property in 1973, and named his winery Dry Creek Vineyard.

Today, the winery is perhaps best known for various bottlings of Sauvignon Blanc, which Stare early on decided to call Fumé Blanc, a name that had been invented by Robert Mondavi. Asked why he decided to label his wines Fumé Blanc, Stare says, “I was having lunch with Barney Fetzer [founder of Fetzer Vineyards], and he said, ‘Dave, Fume sells better than Sauvignon.’”

Reflecting back on his long career, Stare observes how Dry Creek Valley has changed since his arrival. “Back then, the average valley resident had been born and raised here. Now, it’s someone from L.A. or San Francisco who moved up for the lifestyle.”

Stare’s daughter, Kim Stare Wallace, and her husband, Don Wallace, will lead the winery. As for Stare, he says he’ll have more time to concentrate on his new passion: painting. “I’ve become an amateur artist. I’m actually having my first gallery show.”

