



THE MARK WINE  
**NEWS**



**TANK TALK**  
**DIGGING**  
**INTO WINE**  
MERRYVALE'S  
**ANDREW WRIGHT**

## TANK TALK

Digging into Wine  
**Merryvale Vineyard's  
Andrew Wright**

MERRYVALE

2010

*Cabernet Sauvignon*

NAPA VALLEY

EST. 1983



# MERRYVALE VINEYARDS

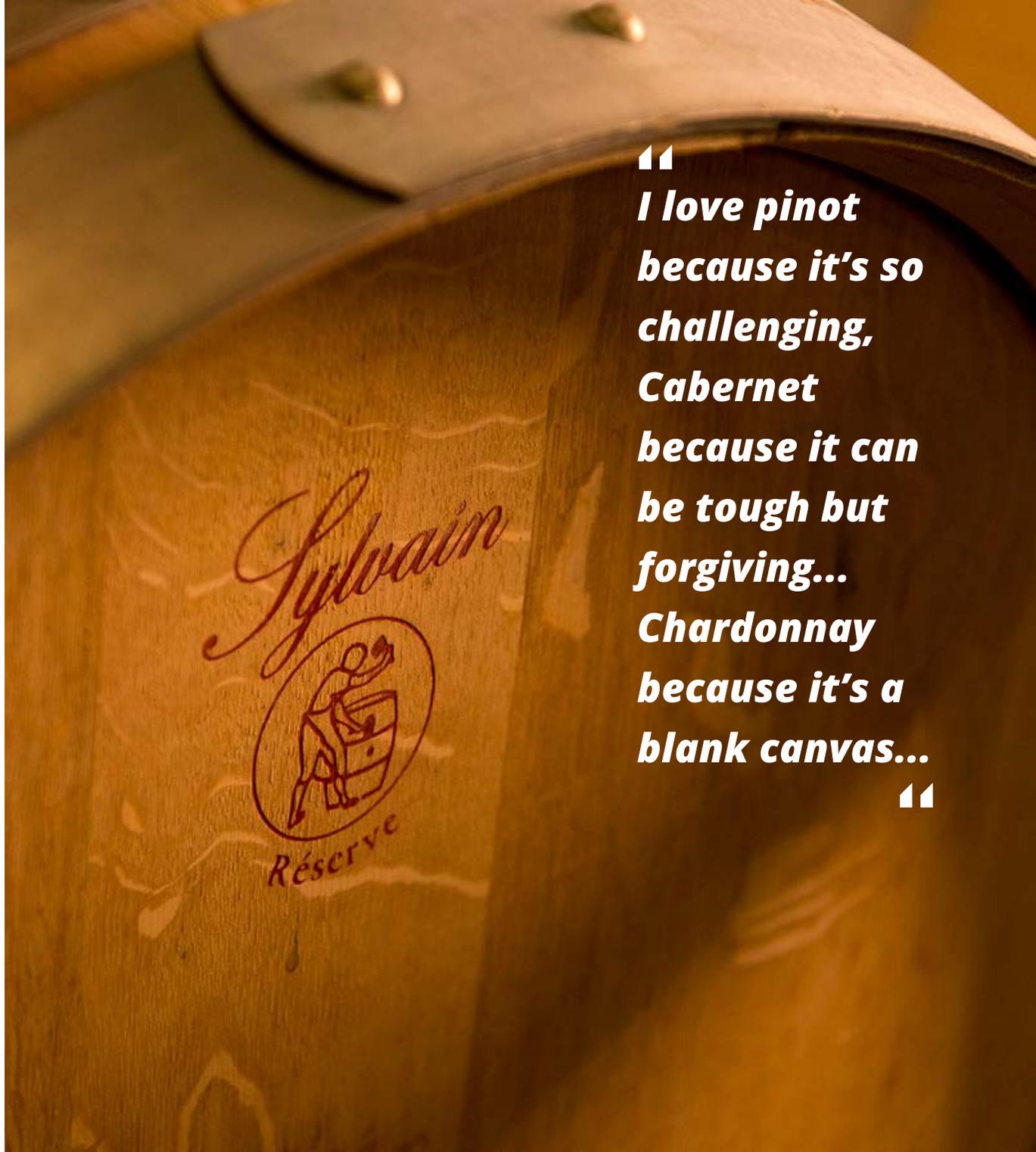
EST. 1983



The Sonoran Desert stretches from La Paz in the Baja Peninsula of Mexico up through the very southeast tip of California to the Southwest of Arizona and down to the Northwest of mainland Mexico. This also happens to be where Merryvale winemaker Andrew Wright grew up. “Hot and dry and never enough white wine,” is how he describes it. “My mom was a schoolteacher and my dad, was a transit planner for the local government” he adds, which also played into his original career aspirations. “I always wanted to be a lawyer, with pipe dreams of some powerful elected position where I could bend the world towards social justice.” Wright attended the University of Arizona in Tucson. “I have a B.A. in History,” he says.

The interest in wine, well, it was all about a girl. “I started to become interested in wine during college because the girl I liked drank wine,” he says and slightly chuckles. “I’d be the guy at the house party drinking





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Yellowtail Shiraz out of the bottle because I thought it was cool and mysterious. I have regrets,” he adds. Thankfully it’s all been up from there. A chance encounter with the Finger Lakes region of Upstate New York on a post-college road trip awakened him and he devoured volumes of wine literature and the wines they described, expanding his palate and shaping his philosophies. Wright arrived in Napa in 2012 and went to work for the Harlan group “I spent eight vintages working in the vineyards and cellars - doing everything from counting vines to managing barrel fermentations and pressing decisions, and ultimately to running one of their cellars as the Assistant Winemaker at The Napa Valley Reserve.” he says of his first foray in Napa.

Wright joined the Merryvale team last year and is a perfect fit as winemaker for the historic St. Helena winery according to Proprietor René Schlatter. “With his winemaking pedigree, knowledge and experience, we will continue to fine-

# Winemaker, Andrew Wright



tune our focus on our Profile and Stanly Ranch Estate vineyards and crafting distinctive wines that are amongst the best that Napa Valley has to offer.” This is due in part to the unique qualities of the region. “The soil diversity and microclimates are unparalleled in the world and create so many amazing and distinct wines and wine styles,” adds Wright.

This winemaker is also very impressed with his new post and its place in history. “The most interesting thing that most people don’t know about Merryvale is that the Mondavi brothers both learned how to make wine at the Merryvale building- the first winery built post-prohibition. “We are classic,” he adds of the phrase that perfectly describes Merryvale wines.

Wright is also pretty happy with the folks he gets to work with. “I love the camaraderie among the crew during harvest; the energy can be electric. Everyone must set aside ego and work together to create the best wines possible, and all at an incredible pace.”

As far as winemaking, he is pretty specific about his philosophy. “For me, the most interesting and challenging thing about winemaking is determining the potential of young wines and making important blending decisions based on initial sensory impressions. We can never be sure what’s going to happen to the wine in the future, which amplifies every decision we make in the present.”

Wright started his winemaking career not far from where he grew up. “In the vineyards of Arizona,” he says, “where the high desert has a similar climate to Mediterranean wine regions.” What I found most interesting about that time was what Wright did as a side gig. “I used to play cello in an indie band back in Tucson; working the vineyards during the day and playing the clubs at night.”

After working those Mediterranean like vineyards in the Sonoran Desert, Wright did have a chance to visit two of them; Spain and Italy. “I love to travel. Few things in life are more exciting to me than experiencing another culture’s food, wine, music, people, and architecture. I love Sicily and coastal Mexico because they’re the perfect combination of food, wine/tequila, ocean, relaxation and seclusion. Plus airline food and drink has really come a long way, which helps.”

And while that’s true, airline food cannot hold a candle to the many restaurants in Wrights back yard or the ones a little further south. “I love all types of cuisines, if they’re prepared properly! I’m a stickler for execution. With all the fantastic California cuisine in the valley (not to mention the world class French and Italian food), I do find myself craving Asian foods, so we will often make a day trip to San Francisco and stuff ourselves with Chinese dumplings.”



My mouth is literally watering as I hear this. Of course, I was wondering what he likes to drink with his favorite foods. “Although I tend to drink Pinot Noir and Chardonnay most often at home. I’m a big believer that there are different varietals and wine styles for all seasons and occasions- most of the fun for me is pairing how I’m feeling with what I’m drinking. Nothing I’ve had beats a slow roasted chicken with aged white Burgundy.” As for the grapes he likes to work with.... “I love Pinot because it’s so challenging, Cabernet because it can be tough but forgiving, and Chardonnay because it’s a blank canvas that really reflects small decisions in the cellar.”

How about the decisions on how and where to put that wine? “Cork for anything I want to age and evolve, Stelvin for my rosé, all day. And I’m a huge fan of wine kegs, especially for crisp whites and lighter style reds,” he adds.

And before the wine even makes it to the bottle... “I try to check in on every wine in barrels at least once a month, and more frequently if they are

tasting good.” And even before that, before the grapes are picked and sorted and soaked, Wright is deep into it. “Walking the vineyards is not only necessary for wine quality, but it’s great exercise and the perfect place to conceptualize how you want to make the wine coming from those grapes.”

When Wright isn’t walking the vineyards, working those comrade bonding harvests, barrel tasting or doing any number of winemaker related things, he is usually at home with his family. “My wife and I have been together since we met in 2014 at a bar during happy hour,” he says, adding, “and out of all my friends, we are the last couple to meet in real life and not online!” And life at home is equally engaging. “We have two daughters, 3 years old and 9 months old. It’s very entertaining. And we have a dog, an English Shepard named Leo. He loves vineyard walks and bone marrow, is low key and the fanciest dog in Napa Valley.”

When they are not driving into San Francisco for dumplings or hitting the famous Napa Valley

haunts, they love sharing space in their home kitchen.

“We both love to cook, so a night in cooking together with good music and a couple bottles of wine is ideal. I also love to hike, which I do whenever possible.” Lately Wright has found a new hobby. I’ve been watching a lot of European soccer lately because it’s on early when I’m up with the baby. I’ve become a big fan! I also read a lot; all non-fiction. Mostly anthropological or science-y stuff.”

I also love to read. I like non-fiction, but definitely tend to the historical fiction and am wondering if maybe the book that just arrived today; “The Lost Vintage,” could interest this winemaker. It traces a family’s history to a vineyard in France during World War II and the Resistance movement.



**Merryvale's Historic Cask Room is often cited as Napa Valley's most spectacular setting for special events.**

