

## BEST MERLOT

# St. Francis Winery & Vineyards



*"We couldn't grow or make wines like these anywhere else." —Christopher Silva*

St. Francis Winery has been artfully crafting award-winning wine for three decades, and 2014 represents the second year in a row it's been chosen "BEST Merlot" by *NorthBay biz* readers. "It's a tremendous honor to win this award in consecutive years," says President/CEO Christopher Silva. "It celebrates our new generation of winemaking and our focus on sustainability that preserves our land, air and water for future generations. This is an incredibly exciting time for all of us at St. Francis."

A fifth-generation Sonoma County native, Silva was raised in a family of Petaluma dairy farmers; after a successful career as an attorney, he retired from practicing law to join St. Francis and became CEO in 2003. Under his leadership, St. Francis has become as well known for its world-class wines as for its environmental practices. It's taken aggressive steps in water and creek conservation, recycling, eco-friendly packaging and has created an onsite organic vegetable and herb garden to support its culinary programs. Both its winery and vineyards are certified sustainable by the California Sustainable Wine Growing Alliance, and Vineyard Manager Jake Terrell was one of the authors of the state Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Practices.

From the ground up to the vine down, the St. Francis team feels deeply rooted to the terroir that infuses its prized portfolio. "Sonoma is a magical place," Silva says. "We couldn't grow or make wines like these anywhere else."

While the enchantment of Sonoma County is an unmistakable if intangible ingredient in the winery's signature Merlot, which is 100 percent Sonoma Valley Estate grown, there are other factors that have been critical components of St. Francis' success.

"Our greatest asset is the people who work at St. Francis and their passion for all things Sonoma," says Aura Bland, director of consumer sales and marketing. "We live and work at St. Francis because we love it here."

St. Francis' founder, Joe Martin, was the first grower to plant Merlot in Sonoma Valley. His dream was to create a single-varietal Merlot in the tradition of the great French Bordeaux wines. When former winemaker Tom Mackey joined St. Francis in 1983, he became renowned for elevating both the quality and style of Sonoma Merlot as an ultra-premium,



Winemakers Katie Madigan and Chris Louton



stand-alone varietal, earning him the distinction of "Master of Merlot" by *Wine Spectator*.

Earlier this year, St. Francis was rated "No. 1 Restaurant in America" by OpenTable diners, who sampled its Zagat-recommended "Wine & Food Pairing," and it received its first ever 95-point score from Robert Parker for its Cabernet Sauvignon. It also recently launched another food and wine program called Sonoma Tastemakers. One Saturday each month, St. Francis hosts a different Sonoma artisan producer in its tasting room to share products such as cheeses, pies, jams, sauces and nuts all paired with St. Francis wines—and accented by some of the most stunning views in Sonoma Valley.

What's next for the award-winning team? "More luscious, elegant fruit-driven wines are being crafted as we speak," Bland says.

"We're embracing the future," adds Silva. "Our winemakers, Katie Madigan and Chris Louton, are committed to continuing our tradition of wines that best interpret the richness and distinct varietal characteristics of Sonoma's unique, diverse terroir. We wouldn't trade this place or time for any other." ♦

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