



Al Zagofsky/Contributed photos

Four Gates Winery owner Benyamin Cantz walks through rows of chardonnay grapes that he has just pruned.

# Eco-kosher vineyard

## Four Gates keeps Passover, environment sacred

By **AL ZAGOFSKY**  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Santa Cruz has a secret.

It is home to what may be the only organically grown kosher wine for Passover made in America. And the wine is bottled from grapes grown without irrigation on a southern facing mountain slope.

From its 3½-acre vineyard, Four Gates has an annual production of just 3,600 bottles, making it the smallest producer of kosher wines in this country.

Its four varieties — chardonnay, merlot, pinot noir and cabernet franc — are grown, fermented and bottled by Four Gates' owner Benyamin Cantz.

Cantz grew up in a conservative Jewish neighborhood in the Los Angeles suburbs and was never exposed to Orthodox Judaism. In the late 1970s, while a student at UC Santa Cruz, Yankel Greenstein, a Chabad rabbi, came to Santa Cruz. Cantz was curious to learn about Orthodox Judaism and accepted an invitation from Rabbi Greenstein to his home for a Friday night Shabbat dinner.

"I wasn't on a spiritual path," said Cantz. "I started going because I didn't know much about Judaism, and I wanted to learn."

These studies became a spiritual path leading Cantz to become religiously observant.

"I wanted to make wine for the Sabbath kiddush," he said. "Then, and even now, there's not much dry kosher wine available."

While a student at UCSC, Cantz experimented with winemaking.

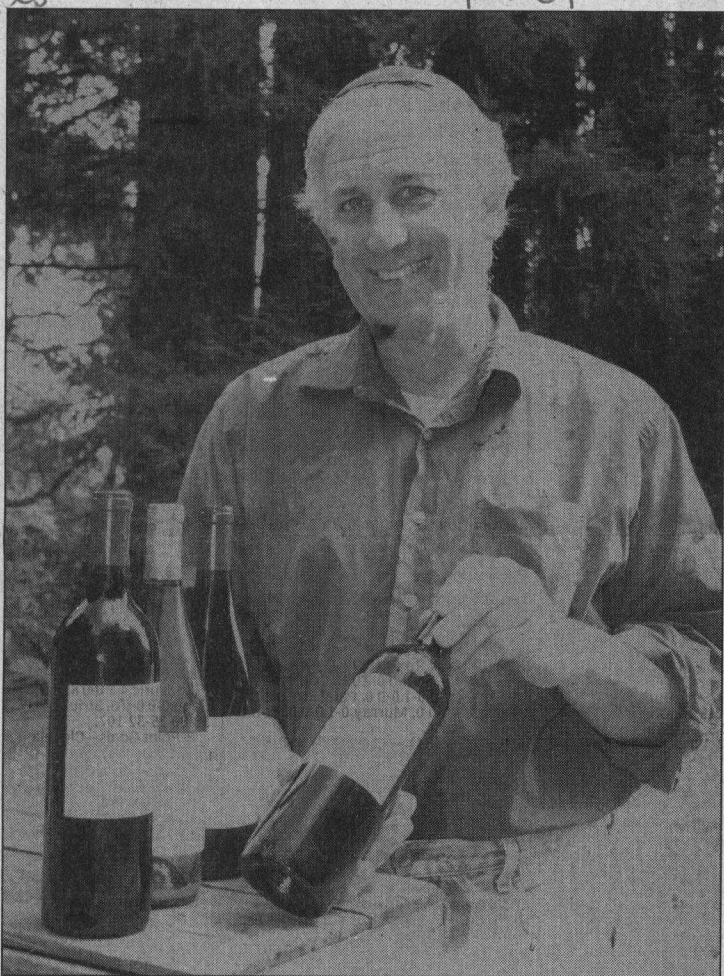
"Everybody was trying wine-making at the time I went to college," he said. "I made a bottle of raisin wine, and it wound up on the ceiling. I forgot to leave the bottle open while it was fermenting and producing carbon dioxide."

Between 1991 and 1992, Cantz planted 2,000 grape vines on a 3½-acre Happy Valley mountain slope rented from local painter and art historian Mary Holmes. Holmes died two years ago but Cantz retains a 50-year lease on the property.

Except for harvest, when he gets a little help from his friends, Cantz runs Four Gates as a one-man operation. He prunes the vines, crushes the grapes and controls the fermentation process.

Four Gates wine is certified kosher by Circle K. The agency makes random inspections of all ingredients and equipment and requires that all work in the wine processing be performed by an Orthodox Jew.

Four Gates grapes are certified as organically grown by the California Certified Organic Farmers Foundation. Although the grapes are organic, the wine is not certified organic because a small amount of sulfur dioxide is added as a preservative. Cantz believes that his wine has lower levels of sulfites than bottled juice.



Benyamin Cantz shows the fruits of his labors — a selection of 1999 and 2000 vintage wines for Passover.

### Four Gates Winery

**WHAT:** 3½-acre vineyard with an annual production of 3,600 bottles of kosher wine made with organic grapes.

**OWNER:** Benyamin Cantz.

**LOCAL OUTLET:** Shopper's Corner, Santa Cruz.

**INFORMATION:** 457-2673, [www.fourgateswine.com](http://www.fourgateswine.com)

Cantz has chosen not to irrigate his vineyard. He believes that grapevines that are not irrigated grow deeper into the soil making them heartier and possibly more complex in their mineral content and flavor.

Because he controls both the grape and the wine production,

Cantz claims Four Gates wines to be "estate bottled." Currently, all the grapes grown by Four Gates are used for their wine and all their wine comes from these grapes.

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