

**DAN COYRO/SENTINEL**  
David Bruce looks out over the vineyards where he's been for more than 50 years.

# Inspiration and coincidence: David Bruce Winery guided by early vision 10-10-12

**D**avid Bruce was an intern at San Francisco County Hospital in 1956 when he drank a bottle of wine that changed his life.

"I had a vision to make the very greatest pinot in the world," says Bruce, who would finish his Stanford education first, then practice dermatology for 25 years before setting after that goal.

As Bruce tells it, his life has been a series of visions, coincidences and inspirations that would eventually lead him to this 15 acres of prime vineyard land in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

"Coincidence has been a part of my life," he says, describing how, even with an alcohol-



**STACEY  
VREEKEN**

*Wine Press*

disapproving father, he learned to love wine through the flavors and aromas of cooking.

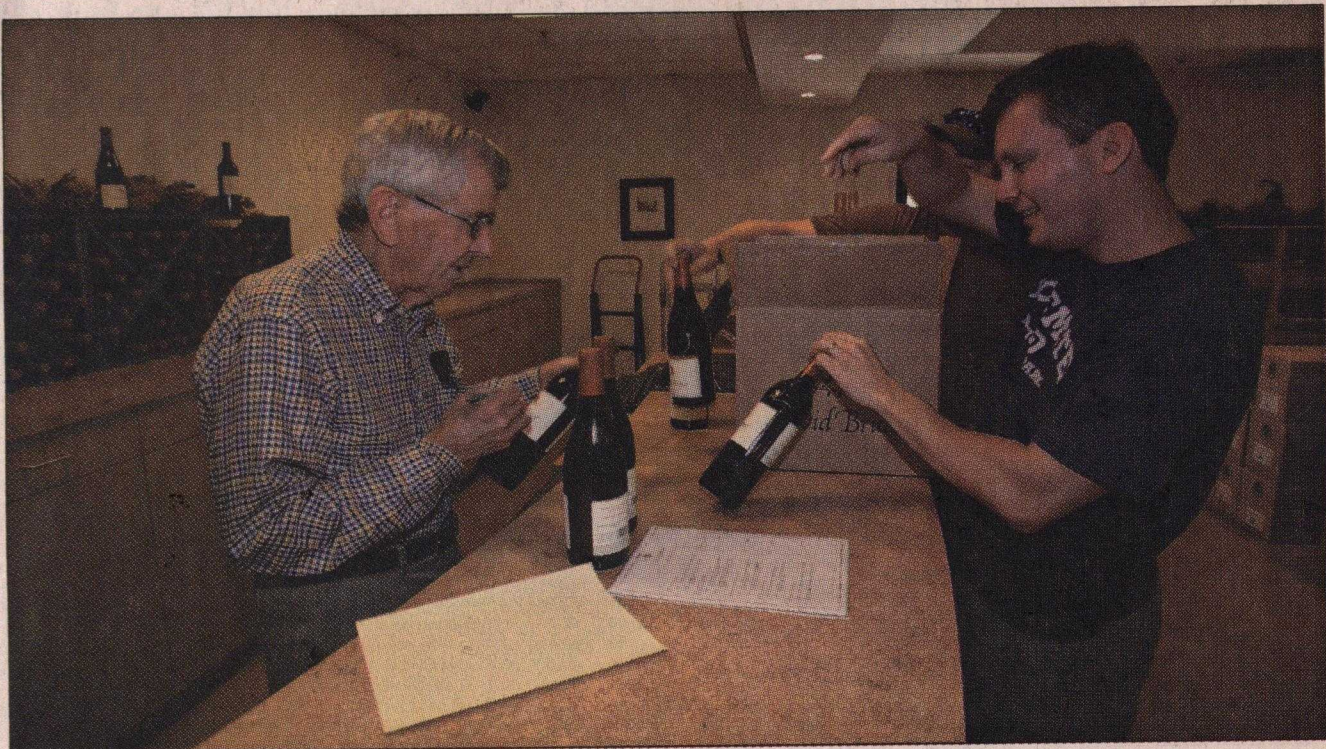
Bruce and his first wife, Carol, would follow recipes that every now and then would include wine.

"After a bit I thought, 'You know this wine isn't so bad after all,'" he says.

He read about a special wine, a pinot noir from Richebourg, France, made by Domaine de la Romanee-Conte, and found it in a wine shop. The clerk carried it cradled in his arms, says Bruce, and charged him the relative fortune of \$7.50. An expensive wine at the time cost around \$2.

SEE BRUCE ON C10





DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

David Bruce autographs bottles of his wine for patron fans in his tasting room on Bear Creek Road.

## BRUCE

Continued from C1

"I brought it home and cooked dinner around the wine. Wild duck," Bruce remembers. When he opened the bottle, "a floral spicy aroma" filled the room. "As I was drinking this wine, I imagined this mountain with vineyards and me walking through it," Bruce says, gesturing out the window at the sun-glistening hillsides of slowly ripening vines at David Bruce Winery.

"I spent the next year looking for it," he says.

He considered Oregon but it "hadn't put down roots yet," and he tasted pinots from all over, deciding the best came from Martin Ray, who

specialized in single-estate varietals from vineyards in the mountains above Saratoga.

Bruce bought a piece of the "chain of gold" and set about demonstrating that "the chunk of dirt out there makes great pinot noir. I proved that," he says. The descendant "db," or David Bruce clones, from Martin Ray vines are still used in vineyards throughout Northern California.

The ideal vine stock went with the best soils and climate. Bruce notes his eastern exposure has the perfect climate for cabernet sauvignon and his cooler western slopes for chardonnay and pinot noir.

So perfect, that Ridge Winery's cabernet sauvignon and David Bruce's chardonnay were included in the Judgment

of Paris, when California wines were pitted against the French. Another coincidence. While Bruce's wine didn't show well, California wines came out on top and later years established the chardonnay's quality. For Bruce, he longed for his pinots to be part of the competition.

"(The French) were stunned rather badly, and it put California on the map," he says.

The addition of winemaker to dermatologist didn't go over so well with his first wife, but his second wife, Jeannette, shared his vision, and they were married in the early 1980s.

The wedding invitation was a bottle of estate pinot noir that said, "Suck this down fast and get the

message."

An invite bottle still rests with others Bruce is proud of: a 1961 bottle of Monte Bello Ridge cabernet sauvignon, which he helped produce; the 1973 late-harvest Chardonnay; and a 1992 estate pinot noir.

Every few years the wines are tasted again, and Bruce finds "the chardonnay lives on for decades. ... There's something special about the plot of dirt out here, especially for chardonnay."

And "the greatest of them all," the favorite yet difficult pinot noir, took 20 years to finally satisfy Bruce.

He's looking for dense color, the "cornucopia of spices" characteristic of the Santa Cruz Mountains and the velvety texture of a great Burgundy wine.

He found it in his feet.

"True labor is foot-crushing a batch of wine," says Bruce of his inspiration for the 1981 estate pinot noir.

"The human body is soft. There's no bruising of stem, seeds, skin," the dermatologist says of the experience shared with his wife, "the human body is a wonderful mixing machine."

While not practical as an ongoing way to make wine, Bruce still is in pursuit of the perfect pinot noir, with his winemaker Mitri Faravashi, exploring other cool-climate growing regions such as the Russian River and applying what he's learned over the decades.

Bruce sums up his journey, "I can do a lot in 50 years."

Especially with luck, inspiration and vision on your side.

Wine Press appears monthly. Contact Stacey Vreeken, the Sentinel's former Food & Wine editor, at [staceyvreeken@gmail.com](mailto:staceyvreeken@gmail.com).



# AT A GLANCE

DAVID BRUCE  
WINERY

**WHAT:** Estate winery specializing in pinot noir and chardonnay

**TASTING ROOM:** 21439 Bear Creek Road, Los Gatos

**HOURS:** Noon to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

**I MAKE WINES THAT ARE:** 'rich and with a longevity that improves with age and are food wines,' says David Bruce.

**WINES:** In addition to chardonnay and pinot noir, the winery offers cabernet sauvignon, zinfandel, syrah, grenache and petit syrah.

**FAMILY:** Wife Jeannette is vice president and general manager at the winery; four children.

**OUTSIDE THE WINERY:** Bruce practiced dermatology for 25 years. He enjoys fine foods and dining out, especially at the Village Pub in Woodside.

**INSPIRED BY:** A series of eureka moments and 'coincidences' that pointed to winemaking in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

**WINEMAKER SELECTION:** 2008 estate pinot noir.

Tasting notes: Nose of red cherry, dried raspberry, cardamom, mineral, nutmeg, violet and pine. Palate of cardamom, white cherry, raspberry, pine spice, black pepper, walnut and nutty tones. \$55.

**RECOMMENDS:** Fogerty Winery

**CONTACT:** www.davidbrucewinery.com, 408-354-4214