

# Napa winemaker grew up in California vineyards

By JULIA HOLLISTER  
For the Capital Press

NAPA, Calif. — At an early age winemaker Mark Williams discovered a profound respect for those who work in the vineyards. “My father is a viticulture

professor at University of California-Davis and I can remember working in his research block of Thompson Seedless grapes as a high school student,” he said. “It was hot, dirty, and physically demanding, and I only saw the manual labor as-

pect of viticulture.”

It wasn't until he started studying enology in college that he learned to appreciate the adage, “Wine is made in the vineyard,” he said.

Before coming to William Hill Estate, Williams gained

experience as an enologist working in the Eden Valley in Australia and the Edna Valley in California's Central Coast.

On the 140-acre estate in the Napa Valley's Silverado Bench, Cabernet is most widely planted variety and comprises 82 percent of the planted acres. Chardonnay, which he crafts from fruit grown throughout the Napa Valley, is the most popular wine in the tasting room.

In addition to pests, the 4-year drought looms large as a challenge.

“The drought has had an impact on our entire state, from a lack of snowfall in the Sierra and devastating wildfires to water rationing in people's homes,” he said. “On the vineyard side, the warm, dry spring has made for a very early harvest.”

Williams said the most rewarding part of his job is experiencing the wines as they evolve over time — there are few products in the world that mature quite like wine.

It all begins in the vineyard, tasting the grapes as they transition through the growing season, later determining the amount of



Courtesy of William Hill Estate

Mark Williams, winemaker at William Hill Estate in Napa, Calif., thinks consumer wine tastes have changed for the better in the past five years.

extraction appropriate during fermentation, selecting the oak for aging, then tasting the wine with family and friends long after it has bottled.

“I especially like to make in-

tense, age-worthy reds that are complex and well-structured, as well as whites that are expressive and vibrant,” he said. “Generally, I enjoy wines from all over the world and over the years have spent a small fortune fine-tuning my palate trying new and different producers.

The public's tastes in wine continues to change, he said.

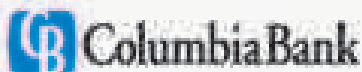
“Consumers' tastes have changed over the past five years; I know mine have evolved,” he said. “What we're seeing is that millennials (people born between 1978 and 1998) are willing to try new things and aren't as afraid of wines as other generations have been.”

“Mark is a tremendous winemaker and his passion for the wines he crafts is unparalleled,” Scott Kozel, vice president of coastal winemaking for E&J Gallo, said. “But I think it is Mark's intuition that sets him apart from so many of the other winemakers I have worked with. Mark is able to taste a wine, make an assessment of where it sits today and postulate which one of the possible next steps might best benefit a given wine.”

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