



# Knights Bridge



## DEREK BALJEU, WINEMAKER

Derek Baljeu was born and raised in Huntington Beach, CA, where he developed a love of surfing, snowboarding, and other outdoor activities. Wine was always in his house growing up, but food was the primary focus at the table and he started cooking for himself and his family from a very young age.

Derek attended U.C. Davis, where he earned both his BS and MS in Viticulture and Enology while also playing Aggie football as a tight end. It was during this time that a '96 Stags Leap Cabernet Sauvignon paired with a tomahawk ribeye ignited his love of wine. He began making regular weekend trips to Napa Valley to get a sense of the region and to develop his palate.

While in school, he interned at Jessie's Grove Winery in Lodi and followed up with roles in Napa researching phenolic development in the To Kalon Vineyard, and as Assistant Viticulturist at Silverado Farming. Next, he served as enologist for the luxury portfolio at Trinchero, working with seven different winemakers across ten brands.

In 2019, Derek joined Knights Bridge Winery as Assistant Winemaker. "Knights Valley is one of the most versatile growing regions. The strong coastal influence and direct sun preserve flavors and creating conditions ideal for wine growing. I thought the vineyard was absolutely stunning. I knew the topography and microclimate were things that could not be replicated and that they would support personality-driven wines with their own unique characteristics."

Derek was promoted to Winemaker in August 2021. While he has a variety of specific duties, he sees them all as pieces of one larger job: to maintain wine quality. "I think it's the idea of working for something that is greater than yourself and never truly having control that keeps me enthralled by winemaking. We navigate what the growing season and vineyard give us every vintage. I love the fact that we, as winemakers, are just here to bring out the truest expression of the vineyard."

Since that first Stag's Leap Cab, Derek has continued to find many wines that fuel his passion – from Old World Mosel Riesling, Vouvray, White Burgundy and Northern Rhone Syrah to New World Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. "Regardless of region or variety, I think balance and complexity are the most important factors for me in a great wine. It is the interplay of the acidity, weight, finish, aroma, and flavor that create harmony and complexity that always has you wanting more."

While not busy at the winery, Derek spends his time in Calistoga's downtown historic district exploring the diverse restaurants in town and on the beautiful hiking trails in the surrounding area. He also devotes time on the weekends to enjoy another passion – surfing at various spots from San Francisco to the Sonoma Coast. Other interests include cooking at home, sharing wine with friends, and playing the ukulele.