



Knights Bridge



DEREK BALJEU, WINEMAKER

Derek Baljeu was born and raised in Huntington Beach, California, where he cultivated a lifelong passion for surfing, snowboarding, hiking, and other outdoor pursuits. A dedicated scholar-athlete, Derek earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in Viticulture and Enology from UC Davis, where he also excelled as a tight end and fullback for the university's football team. Serving as Team Captain and earning Scholar Athlete of the Year, Derek's drive and discipline extended seamlessly into his academic and professional endeavors.

Derek's winemaking journey began during his freshman year of college, working in the cellar at a small family winery while balancing the demands of football and rigorous coursework. He deepened his industry experience as an Assistant Viticulturist at Silverado Farming, collaborating with some of Napa and Sonoma's most prestigious vineyards. While completing his master's degree, Derek contributed to groundbreaking research on phenolic development, irrigation strategies, and canopy management at the renowned To Kalon Vineyard.

After graduating, Derek started at Trinchero Family Estates as an Enologist for their luxury wine portfolio, working alongside seven winemakers across multiple premium brands. In 2019, he joined Knights Bridge Winery, stepping into the role of Enologist and then Assistant Winemaker. His contributions were pivotal as he collaborated with ownership and the architectural and engineering teams on building the new state-of-the-art winery and new vineyard development on the estate. In 2021, his first vintage in the new winery, Derek was promoted to Winemaker.

For Derek, winemaking is about more than technique, it's a philosophy. "It's the idea of working for something greater than yourself and embracing the unpredictability of each vintage. Every year, the growing season and the vineyard write the story; we're just here to bring that story to life as honestly and authentically as we can."

Derek continues to elevate Knights Bridge Winery's reputation while pursuing personal and professional growth. He has broadened his global perspective by traveling through France and studying Enology and Terroir at the University of Bordeaux. At home, he completed the Wine Executive MBA at Sonoma State University and participates in Napa Valley Vintners' Leadership Program, reflecting his commitment to both the craft of winemaking and the community.

Outside the winery, Derek channels his passion for discovery and creativity into surfing the California coast, snowboarding and skiing on slopes worldwide, and restoring vintage SUVs and motorcycles. A musician at heart, he also enjoys playing guitar and exploring Northern California's culinary and wine scene, further enriching his appreciation for the region's vibrant culture.