

DUCKHORN WINE COMPANY

ZACH RASMUSON

*Duckhorn Wine Company Vice President
Goldeneye Winemaker and General Manager*

In the story of great winegrowing appellations, there are always a few individuals who help to raise the bar and chart the course for a region. As the winemaker for Goldeneye since 2003, Zach Rasmuson has spent a decade helping the Anderson Valley achieve its full promise. While doing so, he has contributed to the valley's reputation as one of the world's preeminent locations for growing cool-climate Pinot Noir and established Goldeneye as one of North America's great Pinot Noir wineries.

In many ways, the path that led Zach to make Pinot Noir in the Anderson Valley paralleled the evolution of Goldeneye. Just as Dan and Margaret Duckhorn sought out the Anderson Valley in their search to make a Pinot Noir of equal stature to their Duckhorn Napa Valley Merlots, Zach also came to Mendocino County searching for Pinot greatness. After beginning his career at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars and Robert Sinskey Vineyards, Zach found himself fascinated by the challenge of producing Pinot Noir. During a trip the Anderson Valley in the late 1990s, Zach tasted through many of the area's Pinot Noirs. While he found the execution of the wines to be hit or miss, he was deeply impressed by their phenomenal potential. He also fell in the love with the valley.

Though he knew he was taking a big career risk leaving the center of California's winemaking universe for the then little-known Anderson Valley, he moved his family to Mendocino and became the winemaker for Husch Vineyards in 2000. There, he further refined his Pinot Noir philosophy before joining Goldeneye three years later. At Goldeneye, he dedicated himself to creating what has become the valley's most diverse and expansive estate Pinot Noir program which today includes over 200 vine acres and more than 20 distinctive clones. This estate program also helped to establish new standards of excellence in the appellation through the introduction of cutting-edge viticultural practices. Zach also began a thoughtful evolution of the Goldeneye style, moving away from the big, ripe wines that marked the winery's early offerings to a more terroir-inspired expression of Pinot Noir that balances depth and power with Pinot's natural elegance.

"I wanted the essential Anderson Valley-ness of our wines to shine through," says Zach. "I didn't want it lost behind too much oak and ripeness. So we started picking at lower Brix and dialing back the amount of new wood." This measured fine-tuning took place over a decade—a decade in which Zach earned a reputation as a master Pinot Noir winemaker. He also established himself as a respected member of the Anderson Valley community and an advocate for ethical and sustainable practices. Under his stewardship, Goldeneye was one of the first wineries to earn the Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing distinction from the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance. Zach also spearheaded the building of Goldeneye's state-of-the-art Pinot Noir winemaking facility, which was only the second winery in California to achieve LEED Gold certification. Beyond Goldeneye, Zach has played a key role in developing a pioneering program to build farm worker housing on winery land, and he is the vice president of the Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association.

