



THE FABULOUS ADVENTURES OF GREG BROWN

Calistoga's unorthodox winemaker strikes it rich, doing it his way

"I was the kid who always had jam on his face," says Greg Brown, owner of the popular T-Vine Cellars in Calistoga. "When people taste my wines, I want them to have visions of jumping into a blackberry tangle on a sunny day. My goal is to get the incredible flavors of the vineyard—big, juicy, yummy—into the bottle."

Brown's winemaking career had an unlikely start. While in his mid-20s—already an avid wine collector—a heartfelt conversation with a friend prompted him to quit his high-paying corporate position and take an entry-level winery job. "I was making \$7 an hour doing 'cellar rat' work—and I loved it!" he laughs. Eventually, he struck out on his own and opened T-Vine Cellars, with only \$15,000 and some unorthodox ideas. The self-proclaimed "winemaker, flyfisherman, and yoga dude" was a one-man operation during his first 10 years in business. He made, sold, and even delivered the wine himself. Much of Brown's wine-making was influenced by lessons learned in the South of France. He discovered, for example, that he preferred wines that were aged in oak for one year or less.

"Napa Valley really wanted me to succeed," he says. "People wanted to believe that someone with just moxie and passion could actually play the game. I had incredible support—from buyers, restaurants, and especially the vineyards, who sold me fruit." It wasn't long before word got out about Brown's scrumptious innovations—from lush Petite Sirahs to rich Cabernets to fruity Zinfandels. In fact, the *San Francisco Chronicle* named him 2000 Winemaker of the Year. Now on his 14th vintage, Brown's passion is still encapsulated in every bottle. "Nothing else that we buy reflects the spirit of the maker more than wine, because you're so involved in every aspect of it," he says. "I'm incredibly blessed that I'm able to do something that brings me such pleasure. When I taste my own wine, I'm still blown away." — Kim Olson