

itiCULTure

By: Jennifer Nicholson

The cultivation of grapes to make wine is recorded as far back as four thousand years ago when the Greeks considered it the nectar of the gods. Crete was considered the birthplace of viticulture in Greece where wine presses and grapes have been discovered dating back to 2000 BC.

Fast forward to the 21st Century where Napa Valley, California is considered the prime grape growing and wine producing region in the United States. While Napa is home to large, internationally renowned wineries such as Mondavi, Beringer and Mumm, it is now the hot bed of an emerging trend in the production of "cult" wines.

CULT (kult), *n*: attracting a small group of devotees. Only about 1% of all wines produced in the country are considered cult wines, but it is a booming business for both collectors and winemakers. To be labeled as "cult," a wine has to adhere to the following criteria.

- The grapes must come from a top, pedigreed vineyard with a history of good wines.
- The winemaker must have a good reputation with a history of creating good wines.
- Low volume production.
- Critically acclaimed.

One of the most sought after "cult" winemakers is California native, Bob Egelhoff. Since 1993, Egelhoff has worked as a "winemaker for hire" and his most noted achievement was the 99 score his 1997 David Arthur Cabernet Sauvignon received from James Laube of Wine Spectator magazine. Other labels he oversees are Axios, Phelan, Richard Partridge, Amizetta and, of course, Egelhoff.

Bob grew up in Orange County California but chose to attend UC Davis to study Agriculture ECON and Managerial Science because he wanted to get into farming. While in college, he took all of the wine courses that were offered at the time, became a teaching assistant and then entered the world of farming grapes.

Egelhoff's first job after graduation was managing vineyards in Napa Valley for Andy Beckstoffer while making his own "house wine" in his garage. After spending six years as a vineyard manager, Bob spent a year at Chappellet and then joined the newly started Merryvale vineyard in 1988 as its assistant winemaker.



Bob Egelhoff ...vintner in demand!

While at Merryvale, Egelhoff managed production for more than a dozen nationally acclaimed brands including Staglin, Pahlmayer, Livingston and Hartwell. Thus, the birth of making wine for wineries that do not own a vineyard or grow their own grapes occurred.

As a consulting winemaker, Egelhoff contracts with vineyards to oversee the entire operation of a block of grapes from planting, to nurturing to picking to bottling. He enjoys the process because his clients allow him to make the wine without interfering. His complete control over management practices and wine making allow him to differentiate the wines he makes through the varietals and location of the grapes.

While Bob receives great personal satisfaction from his role as "cult" winemaker extraordinaire, he doesn't mind the perks that come along with the job. In November 2004, he was invited to Augusta National Golf Club, site of the PGA Masters Tournament, to showcase his wines at several dinners and was invited to play the golf course (one of his other passions). "There's nothing wrong with playing the greatest golf course in the United States," he said with a smile when asked about the experience.

To learn more about Bob Egelhoff and his wines, log onto www.bobegelhoff.com.