



David Milner
Head Winemaker
Donelan Family Wines

David was born and raised in Northern California in a suburban town known as Fairfield. While David was attending Sonoma State University, his roommate worked for a local winery and would bring home wine to taste almost daily. This exposure to wine allowed David to discover its qualities and “ignite the spark.” He was surprised at how much there was to learn, and from then on, he was hooked.

The fermentation bug bit David while he was taking an undergraduate brewing class. He continued to hone his skills over batches of home brewed beer with a few friends, and it left David looking for a new challenge. He had a stint in cheesemaking, but wine would eventually become his real passion.

In 2009, while David was working in a tasting room and completing his Bachelor's Degree in Wine Business Strategies, he produced his first batch of wine in his carport after convincing a local grower to give him a half-ton of grapes. After graduation, he took a full-time job working in the cellar for a small winery.

“It was a fun time,” says David. “I was working for a small Pinot producer who rented out custom crush space to a handful of other clients. It afforded me the chance to see each winemaker’s approach in the vineyard and the winery. The experience helped me develop a solid base of knowledge of cellar operations and to learn some basic lab work.”

After some time, David made his way over to Napa County and worked with two of the Valley's most respected estate wineries; the Eisele Vineyard and Groth. But David knew Sonoma County was home, and he returned to take a production supervisor role at a family-owned biodynamic winery and then at Benovia, a small estate winery in the heart of the Russian River Valley.

In 2017, David joined Donelan Family Wines as our Cellar Master. Not long after his arrival—and under the tutelage of Joe Nielsen, Former Head Winemaker and now Advisor at Donelan Family Wines—David was promoted to Assistant Winemaker.

“Working for the Donelan family has been such a pleasure. Joe Donelan is committed to making the best possible wines from hidden gems in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. He stands by his work of only making wines that are ‘As with five pluses.’”

In 2019, as the newly named Winemaker of Donelan Family Wines, David will be working side-by-side with Advisor Joe Nielsen to ensure a seamless transition. And David’s winemaking philosophy of “...trusting your gut in making wines that clearly show where they come from,” will portray just that.



“Our portfolio of wines is so special,” said David “It’s important not only as an employee of Donelan Family Wines, but as a fan, too, to respect the heritage and style of the wines and to be able to take pride in the wines I produce. The goal is not to change what or how things have been done, but to understand and embrace the process through the lens of a given vintage. Typicity is important, we make Sonoma County wines because it has unique attributes and qualities that simply make people happy and bring people together, and I count myself lucky to have the tools at my disposal to do so.”