



DIETER CRONJE, WINEMAKER

A cool-climate Pinot Noir specialist, and one of the Central Coast's rising star winemakers, Dieter Cronje brings a unique perspective, gained in two hemispheres, to Presqu'ile. As the winery's founding winemaker, Dieter had the rare opportunity to contribute his insights to the original planting of Presqu'ile's 73-acre estate vineyard, an experience that gave him an intimate knowledge of the vineyard's rich diversity. He also collaborated with Presqu'ile's founders, the Murphy family, during the design of Presqu'ile's purpose-built winery. In this gravity-flow winery, Dieter preserves the vineyard's diversity by working in small lots, and applying a gentle, minimalist approach that accentuates the character of the vineyards. The resulting wines offer the purity, elegance and signature spice that have made Santa Maria Valley famous among connoisseurs of great cool-climate Pinot Noir.

Dieter, who was raised just outside of Cape Town, in the wine country of Durbanville, South Africa, inherited his love of wine from his father. Together, the two would share and talk about wine. Recognizing Dieter's aptitude for biology and chemistry, his father encouraged Dieter to study winemaking. Dieter enrolled in the globally renowned Elsenburg Agricultural College, which has been training winemakers since 1894. As part of his curriculum, Dieter spent a practical year at South Africa's acclaimed Kanu Winery, where he worked alongside renowned winemaker Richard Kershaw. While Dieter learned a great deal from Richard, it was a bottle of 1997 Domaine Dujac Clos de la Roche that Richard shared with him that might have been the most significant lesson. "I tasted the Domaine Dujac and I knew that I wanted to spend my life making Pinot Noir."

Eager to gain a global perspective, Dieter did an exchange program with the University of Bordeaux, and traveled extensively throughout Burgundy and Champagne to learn more about Pinot Noir. He also spent a Northern Hemisphere harvest working at a custom crush facility in the Santa Maria Valley. Inspired by the unique character of the region's Pinot Noirs, Dieter jumped at the chance to return to Santa Maria Valley as the assistant winemaker for Ambullneo, after earning his degree in enology and cellar technology. At Ambullneo, Dieter became good friends with coworker Matt Murphy. In three years of working together, they learned that they made a great team, and had a common vision about what makes a great Pinot Noir. Over crush pad conversations and late nights sharing great Burgundies, Matt realized that Dieter would be the ideal winemaker for Presqu'ile.

Today, Dieter considers Santa Maria Valley home. "There is a sense of community and camaraderie here that I love. For winemakers, the focus isn't ego or money; it's about making wine for the right reasons." In the winery, Dieter does as many as 25 Pinot Noir fermentations each vintage to make just five Pinot Noirs. Employing a gentle approach that uses native yeasts, whole clusters and modest new oak, while eschewing winemaking "enhancements," Dieter makes authentic, elegant wines that show the unique terroir of Santa Maria Valley. "I think of our region's transverse valley as a very special feature that the world created to make fascinating Pinot Noirs. It's not my job to speak for our region; it's my job to let the Santa Maria Valley speak for itself."