

MICHAEL CONVERSANO

ASSISTANT WINEMAKER

MICHAEL CONVERSANO began his career as a chef. While working in San Francisco, he decided to take time off to learn more about wine and secured a harvest position at Domaine Carneros. When he discovered he liked making wine more than cooking, Michael headed back to school to earn his master's in viticulture and enology from the University of California, Davis.

Before earning his degree, he worked harvests throughout California, gaining valuable experience at Dry Creek Vineyard and Chalone Vineyard and as the cellar supervisor at Cakebread Cellars. After graduation he worked as the enologist at V. Sattui Winery before eventually moving to Pine Ridge Winery as assistant winemaker.

At Pine Ridge Vineyards, Michael collaborates with Winemaker Michael Beaulac in making decisions in the cellar. The two confer about everything from which vineyard lots go into which tanks to the levels of toast in French oak barrels that bring out the best in each wine.

“One of my favorite things about working at Pine Ridge Vineyards is the way we’re always trying out new approaches,” says Michael. “We might use a different sprinkler system for pumpovers in the cellar or introduce a tool that measures evaporation in the vineyard. We’re always looking at what more can be done, how we can improve.”

Some of the biggest challenges have led to improved wine quality. One year, they fixed a stuck fermentation by changing the timing of yeast inoculation. When this led to better wine, they changed the timing of yeast additions for non-problematic fermentations as well.

Michael, his wife, and their two teenaged daughters live in Napa. When he’s not making wine, he enjoys cooking and home improvement—in fact, he’s currently building a picket fence out of an old redwood fermentation tank.

