

The World of Wine

Working Toward Perfection

An Interview with Dan Kosta,
Director of Sales and Marketing, Kosta Browne Winery

EDITORS' NOTE Dan Kosta began his fine dining career working for John Ash & Co. restaurant in Santa Rosa, California, and eventually became the restaurant's Operations Manager and Wine Director. Kosta also has consulted for restaurants in California's Sonoma County and sits on the boards of directors for the Sonoma County Harvest Fair and the Sonoma County Tourism Bureau. He participates as a judge for the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, West Coast Wine Competition, and Grand Harvest Awards.



Dan Kosta

COMPANY BRIEF Based in Sebastopol, California, Kosta Browne Winery (www.kostabrowne.com) was founded in 1997 by Dan Kosta and Michael Browne. Kosta Browne's single vineyard wines are produced under three appellations – Sonoma Coast, Russian River, and Santa Lucia Highlands – and include pinot noir, syrah, and rosé of pinot varieties.

What can your clientele expect from Kosta Browne's new vintages, and how are the products evolving?

We have two releases a year, so we released '06 Sonoma Coast and Russian River appellation wines in the spring. As far as the '06 vintage, it's a rather elegant style of vintage; it's throttled back a little bit with more feminine nuances. People can expect elegant wines, but at the same time, they're going to have a nice ageability, because they're still structured.

Evolution is an interesting word because it implies that there are slow changes in a product, and if there is an evolution in what we do, it's that we are getting better at what we do. Always working towards perfection is our goal, but our palates really haven't changed our desires, and the style of wines we make hasn't changed.

Does technology have a heavy influence on the wine production process today, or is it still being produced as it has been over the years?

There is definitely an influence of technology, but you have to be responsible with the use of that technology. The advanced technology we use is for cleanliness in the winery. Other than that, if you come to our winery, there is not an extreme amount of technological advances.

Is it ever tempting to broaden distribution or will you remain consistent in the limited distribution of your wines?

When you're dealing with a demand that's much higher than your supply, it's always tempting to tap into that resource. However, we're dealing with a product that has a finite production value as far as it relates to quality. Our model is to take care of our mailing list customers first, and that will always be the case. So the distribution will remain limited out there. We have to resist that temptation to grow just because we can.

How challenging is it to find the consistency from vintage to vintage, and do you know early in the process whether that wine is going to be at the level you need?

We have to deal with what Mother Nature gives us. We can guide the fruit, the vineyard, and the winery, but creating consistency has always been relatively focused and simple because all we're trying to do is make a really delicious beverage, and that starts by tasting fruit in the vineyards.

In terms of knowing during the process if the wine is going to work, you do. Over the years, we've sought out vineyards that we know very well, with regard to what their performance level can and should be. Consistency is the name of the game, as far as the vineyard goes, because our customers want to know what they can expect. We have the ability to declassify wines, but we've never really needed to because we're working with vineyards that are so good.

When you first decided to get into this business, could you have imagined 10 years later there would be such a focus on pinot noir?

I think we did imagine that. When we were starting out and raising money, we talked of how pinot noir from California was going to hit it big, because we knew that pinot noir was at a turning point. We loved pinot noir and wanted to make it on a selfish level, but on a business level, we had a feeling at the time that it was an underrated and underutilized grape, and we felt it was going to have a renaissance.

With your level of quality and limited distribution, how have you been able to keep the price point reasonable and open to a much broader clientele?



We're still a small winery, and we rely on our direct-to-consumer business. It's a very personal business, and when you start raising prices that are either disproportionate or opportunistic, it doesn't look good. The winery business is a marathon, not a sprint, so you have to be fair. We're not the highest priced pinot out there, and I don't think we ever will be. But fair is key, and value is key. We always want to be at value or price our wines below what people expect.

Is it enjoyable to have such a close relationship with Cofounder Michael Browne, or does it sometimes make it more challenging?

We've been partners for 10 years, and there were definitely some bumps in the road, but in the past four or five years, things have been real smooth, and it's because there's a common vision. Where we're going, we see eye to eye on things, but just because we have the same perspective doesn't mean we're myopic. There is a division, because everyone has their specialties, but at the same time, we come together on common ground every day.

Do you take the time to celebrate how much of an impact you've had since you developed this brand 10 years ago, or are you always looking ahead to that next opportunity?

It's more looking forward. After 10 years, we're getting into this position where we have enough security to relax and enjoy our families. We've allowed ourselves to celebrate a little every day. We're not going out and popping champagne on the weekends, but every day we can look at each other, have a glass of wine, and say, this is a cool and great ride. It's still fast and furious, but we know that things are going to be OK, so that in itself is a celebration, and for that we're lucky. ●

A bottle of 2004 Kosta Browne Pinot Noir