



STAG'S LEAP WINE CELLARS

OUR PEOPLE

Kirk Grace Vineyard Manager

Kirk Grace knew from an early age that he wanted to be a farmer. But it wasn't until he graduated from Cal Poly with a B.S. degree in Crop Science that he decided to work in viticulture. "I figured out that grapes pay better than carrots," says Kirk with a laugh.

Of course working in wine country wasn't exactly foreign to Kirk. His family moved to Napa Valley in 1976, starting the winery that would ultimately become the highly-regarded Grace Family Vineyards.

"I definitely learned from the ground up, and I got to work with a lot of the old-timers," says Kirk, who counts legendary grape growers Laurie Wood, Charlie Wagner and Bob Craig among his greatest influences. "All my friends were from farming families, and back then, most vineyard owners farmed their own grapes. Vineyard management companies didn't really exist."

After college, Kirk worked at St. Supery Vineyards and then Bettinelli Vineyard Management, overseeing project planning, designing pest control programs and developing new vineyard acreage. In 1997, he joined Robert Sinskey Vineyards as vineyard manager. In his nine years there, Kirk designed and implemented a plan to manage all of Sinskey's vineyard operations in-house. He also successfully completed a transition of the winery's 160-acre estate to certified organic farming and worked with proprietor Robert Sinskey to bring biodynamic methods of farming to the estate.

"That was an exciting and challenging time for me," says Kirk, who was awarded the 2004 Integrated Pest Management Innovator from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation for progressive approaches to pest management. "It was when I realized that managing vineyards involves both the technology of agriculture and the craftsmanship of farming. It was also when it became clear to me that when the soils are balanced, the wines taste better."

That philosophy, and Kirk's leadership in sustainable winegrowing and agricultural conservation, caught the attention of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' Proprietor and Founding Winemaker Warren Winiarski. Kirk and Warren met in the spring of 2006, and Kirk was hired soon after as the winery's vineyard manager. In this position, Kirk oversees Stag's Leap Wine Cellars' 225 acres of estate vineyards.

"Warren and I have a lot in common when it comes to vineyards," says Kirk. "We both take a qualitative – or what Warren calls "horticultural" -- vs. a quantitative approach. Numbers are an indicator, but growing premium grapes and making fine wine is really about being in tune and in touch with the plant. You've got to be on the ground."

Kirk is an active member of the California Association Pest Control Advisors and the Napa Sustainable Wine Growing Group.