

WINETOLOGY {Official Blog of The Noble Rot}

2011 Harvest Recap: Part Three of Three – Ram’s Gate Winery



It is befitting that my 2011 Harvest Recap ends where it began: at [Ram's Gate Winery](#), the *new* gateway to wine country.

Facts first: Ram's Gate resides where Roche once was. The facility is entirely brand-new, from the concrete cellar up. At the helm of Ram's Gate is Managing Partner, **Jeff O'Neill** (of O'Neill Vintners). Next in line is General Manager, **David Oliver**. The winemaker is **Jeff Gafner** (Saxon Brown) and assistant winemaker is **Jesse Fox**. I conducted [an interview with Jesse](#) just before leaving town, this past October.

The rest of the supporting cast of impresarios includes appearances by: **Cary Gott** (father of Joel Gott, of Gott's Roadside fame – or Taylor's Refresher – whichever side of the tracks you're on) as consulting Winery-101-Guru, **Ned Hill** the Vineyard Manager, **Shannon Rosenberg** the Wine Club Director, **Marc Hartenfels** the Hospitality Manager (formerly of Benu), **Jason Rose** the Chef de Cuisine (formerly of Wayfare Tavern and Locanda SF), **Tanya Melillo** as Marketing Coordinator, **Michelle Lehmann** (of the newly formed Michelle Lehmann Communications) as Public Relations Coordinator, **Brooke Hester** the money lady, **Barbara** a project-managing all-star, **Katie** and **Eva** the best interns a winery could have, **Dan** the Construction-Master-of-Ceremonies and surely there are others. But these people I knew and knew well for the first few months of my stay in the Napa Valley.

The winery was slated to open its doors on September 18th (and it did!). I arrived to the scene on June 10th. Between June 11th and August 11th I would endure “an education” in the start-up of a multimillion dollar operation that gave new meaning to the word *momentum*, which is Latin for “You’re dead in the water the moment you say, ‘um.’”

At any old rate, here goes –

My task was such: I was brought out to help build the Ram’s Gate “brand” up into the Digital World. Give it life, let it breathe, give it direction, get it going – into the cloud. Because that little old traveling wine saloon thing I do has garnered the likes of a good amount of press, they asked that I also lend a helping hand to events. At first I was tasked to suggest an array of opening events Ram’s Gate ought to partake in. Soon, that responsibility grew into event management and direction. The Social Media umbrella of activity was put on temporary hold while I spent every waking minute of the weeks to come doing as much as I was humanly capable event-wise, event prep, event proposals, event event event(s).

A visit to the [Facebook page](#) will reveal some of the early content I helped to shape and create. Same goes for their [Twitter account](#). Videos I created of Ram’s Gate’s vineyards and outings with Ned Hill dot the postings on Facebook. A video of Jeff O’Neill, in “Apple” fashion serves as an introduction to a man full of passion – the passion of wine, the passion on the vine. Jeff is an amicable character who loves fast cars. How appropriate to have the Infineon Raceway right across the street from his winery. I even suggested he consider sponsoring a “Ram’s Gate Gate” at the Raceway. We’ll see if that pans out.

The attention to detail cannot be dismissed. Every single tiny atom of the winery was thought and brooded over. What more can be said? Go visit and see for yourself. The wine too speaks for itself. Try the red or white label Pinot Noir. It was my favorite. Tell ‘em Jonny Cigar sent you (and they’ll charge you double).

And with that, let’s say that *momentum* caught up with me and before I knew it, I had lost sight of the green light at the end of the dock. I left the operation in August because it was time to engage in the activity I came to California to partake in: HARVEST.

I've lived in New York City for the last 10 years. I found myself really "getting into wine" about six years ago and getting serious about it three years ago. At the end of October, just before leaving Napa, Time Out New York named me one of ten Wine Prophets of New York City. I am... enamored by it all.

And I'm ready now to put into words what I was unsure of from [this earlier](#) post, and those words look like this: Let me begin with an analogy — once you make it on Broadway, you go home to star in your local community theater production of "Into The Woods" and you charge ungodly prices that make the locals talk dirty, but shell out dough regardless because you've got a bio with accomplishments that give new meaning(s) to big fish in little ponds. Wine Country is a place to go when you've already made "it," and by *it* I mean "\$." Remember the time you made millions of green in real estate? Or as a banker? Huh, bankers? Ya know? Right? Own it. Occupy it, killer. Or that inheritance you worked so hard to inherit? Or perhaps you were a politician or a lawyer or a doctor or maybe you were The Great Gatsby and you made your money you rags-to-riches SOB! Well... you did it and then they ask you what you're going to do now and instead of talking bullshit about Disney Land you buy up some property, you plant grapes, you come up with a brand and kapow! You're in the wine business. Just ask Dan Aykroyd or [Maynard James Keenan](#).

Wine is a luxury. Sure, it's an agricultural product, but it's a damn luxurious one. It's an Organic Pre-Certified Home-Grown No-Pesticides Hand-Picked Hand-Washed Hand-Massaged Loved Cared and Tended-For Piece of Ripe Juicy Elegant Mouthwatering God's-Country *produce*. And it'll cost you and tax is not included and neither is shipping.

I came back to New York to realize all this? Not really. But if one is thinking of making a career out of the *Vin-[Extra]Ordinaire*, one must stop and smell the *vinifera*.

Now look Old Sports: this ain't apply to ever'body. In fact, I met many, many a goodnbrilliant wino, hospitable, caring, nurturing, endearing, humorous, cantankerous, ornery, healthy, good-eatin, good-living group dare I say throng of folks. And made some perfectly brilliant friends, some of whom I would trade for various New York friends in a New York Minute.

The business of wine has to be a business of passion — because if it's not something you like to do, *love* to do, with all your heart and soul, it is a vanity project for you or a death project for your piggy bank.

You know where this leaves me, mentally, for January 2012? Nowhere to go but up. Just like a budding vine. Nowhere to dream but down the mountain. And I was at the top of Mount St. Helena, looking over it all... *I was looking over it all.*

I know that I love the wine industry. I know that I love the people of the industry. I'm lucky to have been apart of the start of Ram's Gate, and to see a winery built up from the ground not just in the physical sense but in the building of a business as well. I love wine like the way Gatsby loves Daisy. The difference is, it hasn't eluded me yet. And tomorrow I will stretch out my arms farther...and indeed, one fine day-----

