
Eric Baugher Winemaker at Gali Vineyards

Eric Baugher has made wine atop mountains and along valley floors. He has followed the rhythms of nature and the undulations of a career. Now, after 30 years in the industry, he brings his wealth of winemaking, biochemistry and sensory skills to Gali Vineyards. The 2022 Rosé of Pinot Noir and 2022 Cuvée of Pinot Noir are his first vintages as their winemaker.

“Since I met the Gali family in 2018 while at Ridge, I had the chance to assess the quality of the grapes coming from this corner of the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation. The area of Corralitos, where I grew up, I knew one day would be a perfect place to grow wine grapes, in particular chardonnay and pinot noir,” he says.

As a child, Eric loved farming and being outdoors. He planted gardens and orchards, raised animals and rode horses. Attending UC Santa Cruz, he received his undergraduate degree in biochemistry and molecular biology. That scientific background qualified him for a position as a chemist at Ridge Vineyards, entering the wine industry immediately prior to the start of 1994 vintage.

Eric further honed his skills in winery operations after a production manager left to work at another winery and Eric volunteered to help Paul Draper manage the harvest and winery crew. In his 27 years at Ridge Vineyards Monte Bello Winery he served as Vice President of Winemaking (2001), Head Winemaker (2004), and then Chief Operating Officer (2016).

“Ridge was founded by engineers from Stanford Research Institute who established a well-equipped laboratory to pursue a deeper understanding of wine chemistry and its connection to quality. I joined Ridge and had the chance to work with three great scientists: one in microbiology and two others in the world of phenolics (the compounds that give wine texture and age-ability),” says Eric. Over time, the laboratory became my domain for expanding the research and capabilities of analysis to support the minimal-intervention winemaking at Ridge.”

His efforts resulted in twice earning placements on Wine Spectator’s Top 100 wine list, in the top 10 of the top 100. After leaving Ridge in 2021, he went north to Napa to help revitalize the vineyards at a high-end boutique estate that had been hurt by the 2020 Glass Mountain fire. For two years his solo, active winemaking efforts and infusion of precision red wine (Bordeaux-style) winemaking techniques helped steer the wine’s style, improve quality, and elevate its reputation in Napa Valley.

Differences in terroir, along with increasingly unpredictable weather patterns make conditions for grape-growing an annual gamble. Based on his experience, Eric feels that coast-hugging vineyards are most likely to be rewarded. “The freshness that is displayed in the Gali wines is directly related to achieving better acidity in the grapes as the vines experience cooler, foggy nights,” he says.

Eric’s appreciation for both high-powered laboratory wine analysis and human taste impression helps him to balance his actions in the cellar. While the analysis provides confidence that wines are safe and free of spoilage, he also leans into the voice of the wine itself; its individual character.

“One of the amazing qualities of any great vineyard is the level of intervention required by a winemaker to produce its wine. At Gali, you can make excellent wine without any winemaking additives besides a small amount of sulfite to preserve the finished wine while barrel aging. This allows the wines to maintain a focused and wholesome flavor characteristic of the grape variety and the vineyard’s soil. That is exactly the type of winemaking experience that I enjoy best: guiding the transformation of grape to wine without the need for a bag of tricks.”

When not making wine, he spends time with his family and enjoys the beach-life, swimming, gardening and cooking — experimenting with different food and wine pairings.