



It was back in 1987 that Ray and Nancy Coursen crushed 4.5 tons of Zinfandel from the Morisoli Vineyard in Rutherford to craft 286 cases of their first wine. While the portfolio has grown over the last 25 years, the focus remains on creating vineyard driven wines that pair well with food.



Ray and Nancy had quite the varied life before starting their winery in the Napa Valley. Ray grew up on a dairy farm in northwest New Jersey and tended various crops before tiring of milk and leaving the roost. He attended Agricultural College at the University of Massachusetts. While at school, he worked at a fine wine shop in Boston, and it was here that he discovered fine French wine. With Coursen's background in farming and his new appreciation for wine, the idea of making wine took hold.

Nancy is a third generation Californian and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Following her graduation from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Occupational Therapy, she worked with special needs children in the educational systems of the Boston area. It was in Boston, in 1982, that Nancy met Ray and shortly thereafter his interest in the wine business brought them to the Napa Valley.

In 1983, Ray and Nancy arrived in California ready to turn their dream into reality. Ray's first industry job was working a harvest at Mt. Eden Winery in Saratoga. Looking back on this first winery position at Mt. Eden, Ray notes, "Thirty years later, I can still smell that vineyard when I drink their Chardonnay."



Upon moving to Napa Valley, Ray and Nancy became innkeepers for a bed & breakfast – perhaps only because they were allowed to plant a vineyard in the back. Ray then spent a formative amount of time at Tonella Vineyard Management, where he gained philosophical perspective and practical knowledge of working in the vineyards.

Next up for Ray was nine years at Whitehall Lane Winery in Rutherford. His dedication took him from tasting room to cellar to head winemaker. It was with owner, Art Finkelstein that he honed his skills in the art of blending. Ray calls

Finkelstein the inspiration for his winemaking style today and says "Art's theory was simple – fruit first, and then wine is a collection of nuances and balance."

In 1987, Ray and Nancy were ready to start their own wine label. Their daughter, Elyse had been born the year before and they decided to name the winery after her. They began with the Zinfandel from the Morisoli Vineyard, which is still a cornerstone vineyard source for the winery. After a decade of nomadic winemaking at various custom crush facilities, the Coursens purchased a small winery and vineyard on Hoffman Lane in 1997, the home of Elyse Winery and Tasting Room today.

The Elyse portfolio has expanded due to Ray's relationships with the area's growers and his love for all of the varietals that are available. Joining the Zinfandels are Cabernet Sauvignons, Rhone Style Reds, Petite Sirah and even a few white wines. Ray freely admits, "I just can't say no to wonderful fruit."

Ray makes wines that he wants to sit down with and enjoy – juicy, rich, voluptuous wines. "I like a little oak, but I don't want it to be overpowering – I want to taste the fruit. I love wines that pair well with food."



FINE WINE, LIKE CUISINE, IS A RARE GIFT
THAT IS MEANT TO BE SHARED.

