

## F. Teldeschi Winery

*The Teldeschi Family  
Healdsburg, California  
[www.teldeschi.com](http://www.teldeschi.com)*

F. Teldeschi Winery is a family affair. Originally a vineyard owned by Italian immigrants Frank and Caterina Teldeschi, the winery is now run by their oldest son, Dan. Caterina still owns the land and is active in the business, even picking the grapes! Frank's portrait, along with the family name, is on every bottle.

*Teldeschi*



Nestled in Sonoma County's wine country, the Teldeschis tend 70 acres of grapes in the Dry Creek Valley. They grow Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Carignane, some Cabernet, a little Gamay, some Malvasia, Cinsault and more. "We have some Palomino and French Colombard, too," says son John, the family grape grower. The vines range in age from one year to ninety years. "Three-quarters of them were planted by my dad," says John, "and most of them are Zinfandel. Zinfandel was his favorite. He always thought it would be what it is today."



Frank Teldeschi came to the United States with his mother in 1929 to join his father and grandfather in California's grape-growing region. He left school at 14 to work in the vineyards with his brother Mike; both of them served in the U.S. Navy during World War Two, after which they bought a ranch together in Dry Creek Valley.

1946 was a boom year: Winegrapes sold for \$135 per ton. The year after that, the price dropped to \$35. Wineries didn't need any grapes, so the Teldeschis responded with a practice that continued until just a few years ago. They loaded their fruit on a truck with a crusher and drove south across the Golden Gate Bridge, selling grape juice to Italian home winemakers in San Francisco.



Frank returned to his Italian homeland and returned with Caterina as his bride in 1950. In 1959 Caterina's mother came from Italy to help take care of the growing family. This enabled Caterina to work in the vineyards, helping with planting and picking and brush burning. By 1963, a daughter and two sons had been born and Frank had acquired a couple of ranches in Dry Creek Valley.

Until 1991, the Teldeschi family sold all of their grapes to other wineries in the area. The near-by Frei Brothers, who became Gallo of Sonoma, were frequent customers. This made it somewhat difficult for Frank when a young winemaker named Joel Peterson came to the house and asked if he could buy some grapes. Frank answered that he sold all his fruit to Gallo. But he opened a bottle of homemade Zinfandel, the two sat down under a tree, and several hours later, Frank said maybe he could sell Joel a few grapes. It was Teldeschi's Zinfandel grapes that helped establish Ravenswood as a winery to be reckoned with in the 1980s.

After Frank passed away in 1985, son Dan left the Valley to become a wine steward in Palm Springs. After a few years, he decided to return to the family vineyard and make red wine. He came home, put up a structure on the family property on Dry Creek Road near the corner of Lambert Bridge Road, and started making and selling Teldeschi wine in 1991. Dan learned the art of winemaking from his father when he was a teenager and had fine-tuned his skills while running Frei Brother's lab.

John is the vineyard manager and Caterina owns the vineyards. She pays for chemicals and fertilizers; John pays for equipment and labor. They continue to sell 95% of their grapes to nearby wineries. Dan owns the winery, is the Winemaker and sells the product of the family's years of toil. So continues the fourth generation of Teldeschi winemaking into the new millennium.



The tasting room, located three miles west of US 101 on Dry Creek Road is open noon – 5 pm daily. Wine is made in small batches and sold directly to the customer through the website and in the tasting room. The average cost is \$25.00 per bottle. Loyal customers can join the “Wine Club” which ships 2, 4 or 6 bottles four times per year, at a 25% - 45% discount. Cases can also be purchased at least a 25% discount. Teldeschi Winery produces approximately 1,000 cases of estate wine each year. The majority of their wine is sold direct retail, in

the tasting room or through e-mail orders. They have customers all over the world, many whom have visited the winery.

## **Tourism**

The Teldeschi Winery is located in the heart of Sonoma County's wine region. Thirty years ago, a few wineries in this area began to pool their tourism assets by forming the “Russian River Wine Road.”

[www.wineroad.com](http://www.wineroad.com)

Today, this active association of 140 wineries and 50 lodgings has created “a treasure map to the many jewels nestled among the hills and valleys of a region where fresh air, fine wine and exquisite cuisine await those who traverse it.” The non-profit association hosts and promotes a number of yearly activities. The “Barrel Tasting Event” held every March requires a \$20 ticket, and they expect to sell 10,000 – 15,000 tickets in 2008. Part of those proceeds go back to the winery owners, part to a

designated charitable organization. The organization also promotes seven different day trips in the Dry Creek Valley, each one offering “visitors a sensually gratifying journey of natural beauty, sublime tasting experiences and memorable personal encounters with California’s most devoted and individualistic winemakers.” Collective marketing tools such as posters and cookbooks that highlight the wine road are also available through the association.

Why belong to a marketing association? Assistant winemaker Bill Wertzberger, explains “ The wineries in Dry Creek Valley have a collaborative mentality. This comes from being farmers and neighbors for a long, long time. The guy down the road is not your competition. We all work together.” Bill has his own small vineyard and makes about 300 cases of wine per year, as well. “There is a lot of value that has been developed here – productive land, people with skills and a cooperative attitude” concludes Bill.

Bill has this advice for those starting up a winery. “Making wine is a work of art – you are selling the wine, true, but even more, the sensual experience of the wine. You want the wine to be evaluated subjectively, like a fine painting, not objectively like a commodity. With estate wine, it is not in the numbers, it is in the romance. Our best customers are people who are passionate about wine and food in the same manner as the patrons of the fine arts. At the opera and art museum, it’s all about sound and sight. Wine country “artists” focus on pleasing your senses of taste and smell.” Bill also says “The setting – the geography, the land, and the tasting room itself is important, but the “personality” that takes care of the “tasters” is even more important.”

Visitors come to the winery looking for a unique, memorable experience. Bill and Dan make sure they have one at Teldeschi Winery. Like many family businesses, there is always the hope that the next future generation will carry on. Dan reports that he has young nieces and nephews that enjoy helping out with events in the tasting room when they are not playing video games. “None of us know what the future will bring” concludes Dan. For now, I plan to keep producing high quality wines”.

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