



Written By **BEV STENEHJEM**

Kirigin Cellars, Gilroy

Owner Dhruv Khanna was on the look-out for property that would be suitable to hold his beloved cricket games, when in 2000, he came across a winery for sale. In need of maintenance and updating, Dhruv went to work transforming it into one of the most beautiful destination wineries in the Santa Clara Valley. Kirigin Cellars now boasts 33 acres of rolling vineyards, nine acres of cricket lawns, over 1000 rose bushes and 100 redwood sequoias. Their new Tuscan-style club house, complete with a commercial kitchen, is ideal for weddings, celebrations and corporate events. Throughout the year Kirigin Cellars hosts a classic car show, dog events, and a harvest festival. They are open daily from 10 am to 5 pm offering complimentary wine tasting and beautiful picnic areas for families and pets.

How did you get started in wine?

I purchased a very old winery, with an existing professional winemaker, in 2000 after falling in love with the property.

Do you have a degree in winemaking?

No. I'm not a winemaker but knew enough to realize that it is a sufficiently complicated job and that one must have a seasoned professional handling winemaking. Each harvest and each grape potentially throws up curve balls that only an experienced winemaker can handle properly. Consistently good wine-making is not for amateurs. Our winemaker, Allen Kreutzer, began working with Nikola Kirigin in 1984, and continues to lead all viticulture and winemaking processes at Kirigin Cellars. Allen's BS in Fermentation Science from UC Davis and Master's Degree in Agricultural Chemistry from Fresno State have provided him with a strong scientific background for viticulture and winemaking. Allen also successfully opened his own winery, Drytown Cellars, in November 2001 in the Sierra Foothills of Amador County. He is the proud recipient of many prestigious accolades, including "Best of Show" at California's largest wine competition, the Orange County Fair; and "Best of Class" in the San Francisco Chronicle's competition. Allen is one of California's best winemakers.

What goals in winemaking are you still working to achieve?

We consistently try to make soft, drinkable wines that reflect the best characteristics of each varietal.

What do you find to be the hardest part of harvest?

Obtaining slots on the pickers — calendars consistent with our own timing of picking needs for each varietal.

What kinds of wine do you specialize in? Any new releases or anything special on the horizon?

We are famous for our dessert wine, *Vino de Mocca*. We also have a very unusual white called *Malvasia Bianca* which offers up wonderful tropical fruit aromas — lychee specifically. As for special wines or new releases on the horizon, we definitely have some plans that we are not disclosing right now.

Worst disaster story at your winery? A burst water main.

What wines do you drink when you are not drinking your own wine? Good ultra-dry champagnes.

What kind of vibe does your winery have?

Unpretentious, old, charming, family-friendly, relaxed and beautiful.

Funniest customer story (something they said or did)?

An elderly lady asked if her 17 year old grandson could drive her to our tasting room because some wineries do not permit under-21 year old youth at their wineries.

Most coveted award or accolade that you've received?

Sauvignon Blanc, Best of Class, from the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition.

What recipe do you like to add wine to?

I like to add spices to our warmed up *Vino de Mocca* for mulled wine offered during Christmas time.

What kind of a job did you have before getting into the wine business?

I'm a lawyer by education and training and maintain my law license. I have plenty of business experience and believe that there are two types of wineries: commercial wineries (which the owner(s) run as a business) and recreational wineries (whose owner(s) is/are not 100% devoted to running the winery as a business). Kirigin Cellars is a commercial winery because it is my obligation to keep the winery in business as a sustained and sustainable winery to honor its legacy of being in operation for 100+ years. Kirigin Cellars is an iconic California winery, and we will keep it that way. No ifs or but's about that!



Bev Stenehjem is a local wine enthusiast, author and freelance writer focused on the wineries of Santa Clara Valley. Bev wrote "The Wineries of Santa Clara Valley," a historical photo book published by Arcadia Publishing in 2015. Bev conducts occasional wine and food pairing events at the local wineries and through Gavilan College Community Education. She is passionate about shining a light on the world-class wines of the Santa Clara Valley and the people behind them.