

FOODSERVICE EAST PRESENTS

SECRETS OF **SUCCESS**

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An ongoing series of interviews with chefs, restaurateurs and foodservice operators, Secrets of Success looks at the paths taken to professional recognition and acclaim.



Pat Henderson

Senior Winemaker, Kenwood Vineyards, Kenwood, CA
By Foodservice East

Pat Henderson has been immersed in wine and winemaking for much of his life, winning awards and creating memorable vintages. His acceptance of a hard-working career led him to a philosophy of creating a lifestyle in which great wine becomes paired with taking the time to relax and enjoy the best that life has to offer, such as hiking his beloved mountains with his dogs. That, it seems, is the "secret" of his success.

While completing his degree in Viticulture and Enology, he worked at five different wineries including a summer at Kenwood as an enologist in '83, before his first post as a head winemaker in Washington State.

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SECRETS OF SUCCESS

FSE: It looks like you've always wanted to be a winemaker. How did you come to the realization that that was the path you wanted to take?

HENDERSON: I got interested in wine at a young age, in high school I would help a friend of the family make his homemade wine. At first I did not seriously consider it as a career but when I was a freshman at the University of California at Davis I fell in with some of the winemaking students. One suggested I work a harvest before coming back to school in the fall. Within a few days of working at a winery I knew it was I wanted to do for a living.

FSE: Did you grow up in a family that was into wine?

HENDERSON: My parents enjoyed wine and it was often a part of our family dinner table although I don't think that anyone would have ever guessed it would become my life's work.

FSE: What gives you the greatest pleasure in what you do?

HENDERSON: Making something that people will enjoy. I like to think that all over America people will be having a glass of Kenwood tonight with some good food and good company. Whether it is on your first date, 25th anniversary or just a dinner Tuesday night at home with takeout pizza, hopefully it is making the experience more pleasurable.

FSE: What do you like the least?

HENDERSON: Paperwork! Not surprising because I think that would be first on the list of what most people would like to avoid at their job. For both ourselves and for government tax regulations, we put a lot of time and work into carefully recording and reporting all of the activity that takes place in our cellar.

FSE: What is the hardest part of creating a wine such as the Kenwood Jack London Zinfandel?

HENDERSON: With Zinfandel it is very important to pick the fruit at the absolute peak of flavor; a little early and it lacks fruit, a little late and the wine will be out of balance. Since the London Ranch is a hillside vineyard it slowly ripens over a few weeks and we spend a lot of time walking the rows of vines sampling the grapes for sugar and acid as well as tasting them for ripeness. Fortunately that is one of the reasons I like harvest, I get to spend a lot of time in the vineyards.

FSE: If you weren't a winemaker, what do you think you'd be doing professionally?

HENDERSON: I like making something that you could put your hands on (or your teeth into). I think that I could be happy being a brewer or a cheese maker. I have tried doing both at home for fun.

FSE: When you eat at home or in restaurants, what types of wines are you likely to order?

HENDERSON: I drink a lot of Kenwood of course but there are so many good wines out there I am just as likely to end up buying and old favorite as something new I have not tried. This is a pretty small industry when you get right down to it, so when I am scanning a wine list I always keep my eyes open for something a friend made.

FSE: What advice would you give to restaurants/sommeliers about promoting their wines by the bottle or by the glass?

HENDERSON: I would say to be familiar with what the wines on your wine list taste like and then know which best complement particular dishes. A great way to help out guests making a decision is to ask them what wines they like - then you will be able to help them to select something they would enjoy.

FSE: When you're traveling, what countries/regions are your favorites for sampling the wines?

HENDERSON: I like Chardonnays from Marlboro in New Zealand as well as wines from Burgundy and Rioja,

FSE: What other beverages do you like to drink?

HENDERSON: I love beer and I am fortunate because we have a lot of good microbreweries here in Sonoma. I also like a well-made Pisco Sour or Gin & Tonic

FSE: Are there tips you would give to diners about selecting a wine?

HENDERSON: Have your favorites, but don't be scared to be adventurous and try new wines. A good server will allow you to taste a small sample of wine on the by the glass list to see if you like it before you order. They know if you enjoy the wine, you will be happier with your meal.