



MICHAEL MCNEILL BIOGRAPHY

When Michael McNeill left *Chalone Vineyard* in 1996 a colleague said to him, “You will spend the rest of your career getting back to this.” He was right. McNeill would spend many years honing his talents in the quest to produce Pinot Noir and Chardonnay of significance. His appointment as Director of Winemaking at *Hanzell Vineyards* has brought him full circle.

McNeill says, “Working with Michael Michaud, then winemaker at Chalone, imbued in me a strong sense of stewardship for the style and traditions at Chalone Vineyard. At the same time, we were striving to improve the vineyards, the fruit, and the resulting wines through carefully planned experiments to extract and enhance the truest expression of the estate. I have now found my way to Hanzell—to work in a way that allows a translation of this terroir into the wines I am most passionate about.”

During the past two decades, McNeill has travelled to Burgundy to gain appreciation of traditional winemaking and to Oregon’s *Silvan Ridge* to understand innovative winemaking in challenging conditions.

Yielding to the compelling call of the sun, McNeill returned to his native California to become the Winemaker at *Savannah-Chanelle* in the Santa Cruz Mountains. There, he managed the 12 acre estate vineyard (which included Mt. Eden clone Chardonnay and old-vine Zinfandel, planted in 1923) and created a multi-tiered portfolio of Pinot Noirs—single vineyard, appellation and region. These wines have proved to be stylistically consistent, balanced, and the truest expression of the vineyard or appellation.

After several years, the opportunity to build a state-of-the-art winery and the lure of working again with 100% estate grown fruit brought McNeill to Sonoma’s *Keller Estate*. At the time, the winemaking program was in its infancy, allowing him to craft the estate’s wine style in his own vision.

At *Hanzell*, from his office overlooking the new winery, McNeill reflects, “Listening and learning has always been my personal style. Spending as much time as possible walking the vineyards with Bob Sessions, Winemaker Emeritus, and Jose Ramos, Director of Vineyard Operations, allows me to gain valuable insight from their collected history of tending these estate vineyards for more than 30 years. Similarly, I am spending much of my time tasting through this rich storyline of vintages with Bob Sessions and Consulting Winemaker, Michael Terrien. Bob is more than a wealth of information; he has made what *Hanzell* is today and has championed the hallmark of ageability in the *Hanzell* wines.”

As the keystone of *Hanzell Vineyards* management team, Michael McNeill strives each and every day to reinforce a collaborative atmosphere where there is a free flow of ideas. His motto is to gather as many opinions and glean as much information as possible before making decisions—decisions based in honoring a house style of age-worthy wines that are the expression of this iconic estate.