



Erich Russell is the founder and winemaker of Rabbit Ridge. While teaching track and field at San Diego High in San Diego California, Erich began making homemade wine. In 1979 he was offered a cellar job at Chateau St. Jean after the winemaker there tasted his wine in an amateur winemaking contest. Erich soon retired from teaching and began working for Chateau St. Jean, then Simi, then eventually Belvedere before starting his own winery.

In 1981, Erich opened Rabbit Ridge Winery and Vineyards in Healdsburg, named after his college track nickname, “The Rabbit”. Rabbit Ridge continued growing and producing wine in Sonoma County until 2007 when the facility was sold and all operations were consolidated in Paso Robles on the Central Coast.

Erich began purchasing vineyard acreage in 1996 after becoming enamored by the ideal grape growing climate and soils west of highway 101 in the Templeton Gap. This steep hilly region with limestone soils and a maritime cooling influence keeps it 10 to 15 degrees cooler than in the town of Paso Robles to the east. Moving to Paso Robles in 1996, Erich began planting over 450 acres of land he has in production today. The new winery crushed its first grapes in 2002, with only the crush pad and upper tank room complete. Now the 55,000 square foot winery produces up to 100,000 cases per year.

In 1998, Erich met his wife, Joanne James, a lifelong resident of St. Petersburg, FL while promoting Rabbit Ridge wines at one of Disney’s top restaurants. Joanne was interviewing with Rabbit Ridge’s wine distributor at the same time and the two met. Having graduated from Northeast High School and Eckerd College, Joanne was running her own catering business and had a fledgling interest in good wine. Erich and Joanne were married in 1999 and maintained a residence in Florida until early in 2011. With Joanne’s daughter’s graduation from Canterbury School and her move to college, the Russell’s now live in Paso Robles year round. With many friends and family here in the St. Petersburg area, Erich and Joanne continue to be frequent visitors.

Joanne has joined Erich in the business putting her marketing degree to work in an assortment of duties including: direct sales, wine club coordinator, government compliance, marketing and designing all of the wine labels and occasionally pouring wine in the tasting room. In her spare time she published her own cookbook in 2004, “A Cooks Tour of Rabbit Ridge Winery”. True in the Italian use of vineyard land; it was a natural step for Joanne and Erich to begin planting both olive trees and lavender. Principally planted on the Live Oak Road Vineyard, where they live, Joanne now produces some of the only extra virgin olive oil from California that is Italian varietals and not Spanish. Over the years, Joanne’s oil has won two gold medals and silver at the California Mid State Fair.

We hope you will become a fan of Rabbit Ridge. Three of our wines have been named to the ‘Top 100 Wines of the World’ by Wine Spectator; Food and Wine Magazine named Rabbit Ridge Zinfandel as the ‘Best Red Wine Value of the Year’ in 1999, and Rabbit Ridge wines have been poured at the White House. Rabbit Ridge wines are fully developed, balanced and rich, but approachable and food friendly. Enjoy the some of the very best wines from California by Rabbit Ridge.