

# Be Careful What You Wish For

You May Become One of Them . . .

BY G.M. "POOCH" PUCILOWSKI



**Roger C. Nicholas • Winemaker /**  
*Director of Winery Operations of*  
**Grands Amis Winery**

As the California State Fair HOME Winemaking Competition gears up for its annual Wine Judging at the Wine & Roses Hotel, Restaurant and Spa in Lodi on June 16th, 2010, it is amazing to see the growth. I was fortunate enough to take over the helm of this prestigious competition nearly 5 years ago and watch in amazement every year as more and more home winemakers send us their precious wines and wine labels to be judged by our esteemed judging panels.

This year's competition is the biggest ever with nearly 1,200 entries, up over 150 over last year and about 400 over 2008. Why is this home hobby becoming so popular? What attracts consumers to this "bathtub sport?" What are the negative implications, if any, of such a gentlemanly hobby?

So I asked a few members of this special club — home winemakers turned professional:

Tim Holdener, hobbyist turned winemaker about 8 years ago, says, "You can make quilts or chairs, but once you get a

house full of them, what do you do next? Wine is a moving target, you make it, you drink it, you make some more. It's a hobby that lets you drink your own product."

Aaron Kidder, a Computer Consultant, agrees with Tim's assessment and sees his winemaking hobby "as something that takes brain power. It's a mental challenge, and as a by-product, I get to drink it!"

So obviously, one big advantage for home winemakers is the final product that you produce can be consumed and

you get to make more. Are there other advantages?

Dave Dart owns a printing company in West Sacramento, when in 2000 he decided to make his own wine. He knew instantly that he would go commercial, "As a printer, I loved the idea of designing labels and wine packages. I'm also a cook and I felt comfortable using recipes to make wine." It's easy to see the connection. By adding oak aging or grape selection to a batch of wine it would be similar to a cook who would add salt and lemon pepper to add complexity to his food dish.

There is also the challenge of starting a new business. "I liked the appeal of starting a new business on a shoestring," he said. But don't get too excited future winemakers — when I asked Mr. Dart to give me an idea of what a "shoestring" costs nowadays, he said, "I think a minimum shoestring amount for converting your home winemaking "hobby" to a full fledged winery might be \$150,000, not counting the grapes in the vineyards." He would know. Mr. Dart and his wife, Helen, are the proud winemakers of d'Art Wines in Lodi.



**Dave Dart • d'Art Wines**



**Tim Holdener • Macchia Winery**



**Aaron Kidder • owner Kidder Wines  
Opening 2011**

Mr. Kidder, who has been making home wines for over 11 years, has recently filed papers to go commercial. His new winery will be called Kidder Family Winery. "I always liked the wine industry. I liked being knowledgeable when I walk into a winery to talk with the winemaker or owner and know what I'm talking about," he said. His wife, Linda, has been taking cheese-making classes for the past year. I guess the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Lodi.

But is there any downside to being a home winemaker?

Mr. Holdener, who with his wife, Lani, own Macchia Winery in Lodi, sees home winemakers as "passionate — they only care about making good wines. They are not concerned with making more wine or selling more wine or having to worry about designing labels for consumer acceptance. Their agenda is 'pure'." And that might just be a hint of a possible negative implication. None of the winemakers I interviewed had any downside to home winemaking, but as Mr. Dart observed, "most home winemakers just want to make good wine; while a commercial winemaker has to

make good wine and then 'sell' it — and that is a big downside!"

And finally some sage advice from Mr. Kidder, "It's a good negative to not take this business too seriously. You want to take it serious enough to do a good job, but not so serious that it takes over your life."

### **Roger C. Nicholas, Winemaker / Director of Winery Operations of Grands Amis Winery**

First Homemade Wine was Cranky Cab 2003, this was the first Gold Medal he was awarded.

Grands Amis Winery 2007 Premiere Passion was the only Lodi Appellation wine to win a medal in the Bordeaux blend category, 2010 S.F. Chronicle competition.

Roger discovered his passion for wine in the 1980's. He assisted his brother who owned pizza parlors and began swapping pizzas for wine. This action brought about a desire to discover more about the complexities of wine, followed by an immersion in this activity.

Rodger is a purist that believes in a simple theory that making wine is

working with Mother Nature without unnecessary intrusion of her work. Simply put — keep it simple! People have been making wine for thousands of years. Technology provides us with an improved framework but certainly does not accommodate the substitution of the foundation of the art. Selection is determined by smell, taste and color that are provided by Mother Nature and guided to fruition by the hand of the wine maker.

*G.M. "Pooch" Pucilowski has been in the wine industry for over 30 years and is the Chief Judge for a number of wine competitions including both the Commercial and Home Winemaking for the California State Fair as well as the Consumer Wine Awards. He is available for teaching from beginning to advanced level wine classes or tours to California wine country for your company or your next birthday. Call 209-369-2020, email [gmpooch@pacbell.net](mailto:gmpooch@pacbell.net) or visit [www.UniversityofWine.com](http://www.UniversityofWine.com) for information.*