

ARTISAN WINERY OF THE YEAR

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In the eighties and early nineties, Girard Winery had a solid reputation for bottling estate fruit from Napa's valley floor. But its original estate was sold to Dean & DeLuca magnate Leslie Rudd in 1995, and Girard, the brand, existed in name only until 2000, when industry veteran Pat Roney decided to revive it.

To that end, Roney and his talented winemaker Marco DiGiulio have put thousands of miles on their vehicles these past few years, scouring North Coast valleys to find pristine vineyard sites in Napa and Sonoma (specifically the Russian River — Roney prefers the feel of RRV chardonnay). While Girard owns no vineyards and leases winery space

right now, Roney does have a 70-year lease on a property outside St. Helena, and hopes to build a winery there.


DiGiulio worked at Lokoya, and knows his way around a vat of red grapes. At Girard, Roney gives him the freedom to do as little as possible. "I came out of Davis with the idea 'I make the wine, I decide this. I decide that.'" DiGiulio told me. "Well, that's just bullshit. I don't decide anything. Nature does. The vineyard does. And the more that that's sunk in, the more I've learned to roll with what nature gives me every year, and I'm making better and better wine because of it."

Girard's two high-flyers this year were both reds. Girard's

2000 Zinfandel comes from what is unofficially the Napa Valley's highest vineyard, the Harris Blue Ridge Vineyard. It's a sturdy, red-fruited wonder, at once rich and restrained, with the stuffing to hold up to a steak and a finesse to uncoil over hours.

It's matched in character by Girard's 2000 Petite Sirah. From a small Calistoga vineyard and a clone that yields exceptionally small berries, this wine is pure and blue, with more than its share of earth, clove spice and peppery tannin, a reminder of how glorious Petite can be.

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★ GIRARD WINERY	Founded: 2000	
	Winemaker: Marco DiGiulio	
	Owners: Pat Roney, Todd Zapolski, Chuck Sweeney, Michael Stewart	
	Known for: New wine with an old brand, with Napa (mostly) at its heart	
	Location: Napa, California	
	Annual Production: 10,580	