



Meet a Farmer: Kirby Anderson of Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards



Meet Kirby Anderson, Consulting Winemaker for [Dolin Malibu Estate Vineyards](#) in Malibu, CA. Although he's the man behind the scenes, Kirby's responsibilities include everything from the first step of production to harvesting to bottling the final product. Find out how his love of food and wine led him to his dream career and why his pride comes from making his customers happy!

CA GROWN: What are you working on today?

Kirby: I am in Paso Robles today because that's where Dolin makes their wine. Most small wineries don't have the capital to invest in owning their own winery, so there are wineries out there who invite other brands into their building and make the wine for a group of clients. These companies are known as custom crush facilities and that is all they do – they host clients and make wine for them. I'm in a facility that is its own brand and it has a functioning business plan to turn grapes into wine for their own company. But to add a little extra income to their bottom line, the place I'm at now has a small handful of clients and they make wine for those clients. So, I'm not allowed to do much of the physical work. I write the instructions on what I want done and then the winery's responsibility is to execute what I want done, when I want it done and how I want it done. And because I'm working with a winemaker I trust, things are going really well so far. Today, I'm working on blends for the next vintage of the Malibu Red Wine that Dolin makes. We're working on putting that blend together because we're going to be bottling it in a few weeks.

CA GROWN: What is your favorite part about your job?

Kirby: That's a tough question, it's like asking who's your favorite child because there's a lot of favorite parts. Let me tell you about one of my least favorite things to do and that's to bottle the product. Leading up to that, the preparation for bottling, there are fun moments where after all these months of barrel, the final blend is created because the way I make wine is in pieces. Then, leading up to bottling I start assembling pieces in certain proportions to create the final product. So, it is fun and exciting to create the final product. It comes with some anxiety and second-guessing because this is, in fact, the last opportunity I have to make that wine perfect. Once that wine is in the bottle, I can no

longer do anything to it. It is a finished piece and that's where the anxiety comes in. But certainly, there is a lot of enjoyment in creating the final blend. Another fun thing I like is that even though harvest puts a lot of miles on my car and hours are long and many tempers get stretched, that's the birth of a new wine. To experience all of those fabulous aromas and flavors and to be out in the vineyard on a daily basis assessing the ripeness and quality, those are exciting weeks for me. To distill all of that, it's that period in the cycle where the most amount of creativity comes into effect. I don't feel the pride in making it until others provide the feedback on it. It's very easy to make a wine that I like, but that's not my job. My job is to make a wine that our audience likes and that will appeal to wine critics. When I get the feedback from the consumers and the press and reports from Mr. Dolin that cases are leaving the warehouse to be placed in restaurants and wine shops, that is when the pride arrives.

CA GROWN: What drew you into this profession?

Kirby: When I was a very young man who had just graduated high school, I enjoyed wine at home with the family. Of course I was too young to buy it on my own, but I really enjoyed cooking and I was a self-taught cook. So wine was a natural conduit to all that fine food and my family enjoyed drinking wine, so I started creating wine pairings in my late teens and early 20s on my own. I can't put my finger on how I did, it was just very organic because I was around wine so much. But I never thought that I'd pursue a career in wine or food, it was just something enjoyable to do. So I studied science and transferred to UC Davis not for the wine program, but to pursue a career in Zoology and very quickly learned that that was a poor career choice for me. So I took a quarter off from all Zoology

coursework and took exploratory courses and one of them was Introduction to Viticulture and Enology and the light bulb went on. I knew this was it, this is a career that can use all of my interests and all of my scientific education thus far. So I got a degree from UC Davis and immediately got a job for a short term. Then I got another job and then, as a young man having been raised in a rural farm community now returning to a rural farm community, I had a yearning to see the world and do something bigger than just make wine in the country. So I left that business and went off to pursue much larger dreams for about a decade. I learned that that pursuit was not making me happy and by then, I was married and thinking of starting a family and I did not want to have a family in Los Angeles. So, I called all my resources and went through my rolodex to call all the people I knew in the wine business and I returned.

CA GROWN: What are your hobbies or pastimes when you're not making wine?

Kirby: Spending as much time as I can with my twin teenagers who are getting ready to go off to college this year because I know once they're gone, they're gone. I know because that's how I was. When it was time to go to college, I could not wait to get out of my hometown and start my life and see the world. So they're the priority right now and I'm very fortunate that they're wonderful young people that I enjoy spending time with. I also live next to the beach, so I try to go out there as much as I can to enjoy the great, wonderful air. I also still have a gigantic interest in food, so I like to cook from scratch whenever I can. I live in a busy world with a busy life running my own company, so I can't cook from scratch every day, but when I can I definitely do.

CA GROWN: What advice would you give to someone who wants to become a farmer?

Kirby: Unless you are one of a rare few, if you're thinking about entering this business to make money, then stop right now. For most of us in this business, we do it because we enjoy it and it gives us something back. It's a fulfilling piece in our lives. Sure, I live a fine life and I have a lot of comforts, but I'm not rich. Also, be prepared to work very hard and dedicate many hours to the job. Don't even think about a 40-hour work week if you want to be a winemaker. It's almost non-existent. But if you have the passion and you know up front that you're going to do it because you love it, not because you're going to get rich, then come join us.

CA GROWN: What has contributed to your past success and what are you doing to ensure continued success going forward?

Kirby: I really think that my education from UC Davis created this foundation of thinking about things and helped form the way I approach problems. My drive to do the best I can do, which I think is genetic, taught me to do the best that I can and never give up. If there's a solution, then I will find it. Then, of course, being blessed with the companies that I've been fortunate enough to work with that have had the means to provide the assets that are necessary to make good wine, have good facilities, good equipment, etc. Most importantly, the facilities that I've worked with have had either the property to grow grapes or the willingness to pay for premium, high-quality grapes to provide for me to make the wine for them. Now that I have so many years of experience, when I'm confronted with a problem, it's usually a problem I've dealt with before so I probably have a solution or method to

approach the problem that's been successful in the past. If I have the chance to keep working for people like Mr. Dolin, who is generous and grateful and a true gentleman, then I have everything on my side to continue being successful.

CA GROWN: What's the most rewarding part of your job?

Kirby: The most rewarding part of my job is meeting people and having firsthand conversations with consumers who enjoy my wine and tell me how much was added to their life because of a product that I was creating, that's a fantastic feeling. I'm doing something that is really impacting many, many people in a very positive way. There's so many jobs that could never come close to saying that, but I have one. There's nothing more fulfilling than that.

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