

## 2018 Danube Cruise ZAP Winery Host Bios

### Mark Vernon CEO Ridge Vineyards

Mark joined Ridge in 1998 as General Manager and was President & Chief Operating Officer for seven years. Working closely with the executive team, Mark is focused on insuring Ridge continues its fifty year tradition of producing exceptional single-vineyard wines while at the same time insuring its financial success. Mark is a Board Member and works closely with Ridge Chairman Paul Draper to chart Ridge's long term future direction. Mark is a graduate of U.C. Berkeley where he earned a B.A. in Economics. After graduating from Berkeley he continued on to MIT and earned an M.S. in Management from the school's Sloan School of Management.

Prior to joining Ridge, Mark was CEO of two successful Silicon Valley software companies. A native Californian, Mark grew up in Palo Alto and became passionate about fine wine as a young adult. He will always remember his first trip up Monte Bello road to taste wine at Ridge and enjoy a picnic lunch there with friends on a beautiful summer afternoon.



650 Lytton Springs Rd, Healdsburg, CA - 17100 Montebello Rd, Cupertino, CA - [ridgewine.com](http://ridgewine.com)

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### Diane Wilson Owner Wilson Artisan Wineries



Working out of a century-old tin barn since 1993, Diane Wilson has established herself as a standout winemaker in Sonoma County. She started her winemaking career by winning Best of Class for her wine, unusual for someone without formal winemaking training. The instant success she experienced with her first vintage has continued for over twenty years, recently taking home 38 gold and double gold medals for her wines at the Sonoma County Harvest Fair. As the creative force behind Wilson Winery and Matrix Winery, Diane continues to accrue a staggering amount of awards each year. She uses self-described unorthodox methods to craft standout wines. Although she learned the basic elements of wine chemistry as a Biochemistry major in college, she says her degree isn't what makes her a great winemaker. Instead, she credits her hands-on learning along with

relying on her senses during the production process to know when it's time to blend or bottle. Employing her senses has served her well as her hand-grown single vineyard Duetto Zinfandel won 94 points at the North Coast Wine Challenge. Her Sawyer Zinfandel and Molly's Petite Sirah earned two of her many Sonoma County Harvest Fair and San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition Sweepstakes wins, and at the 2011 International Women's Winemaking Competition, Diane won three Best of Class awards, as well as Best of Show.

Diane and her husband, Ken Wilson, made their entry in the Dry Creek Valley as grape growers, planting their first vineyards high in the mountains of the northern part of the Dry Creek Appellation. Their love of family is reflected in the naming of their vineyards. Their first holdings were named after their children: Sydney, Victoria and Sawyer Wilson, as well as their parents: Carl, Dorothy, and Ellie. Today, some 22 years later, each of the children has a role in growing the business as well.

1960 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg

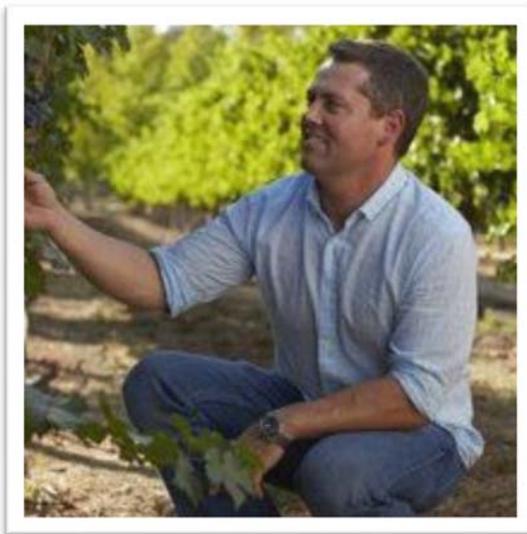
wilsonwinery.com

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## Gary Sitton

### Winemaker Ravenswood

Gary Sitton grew up in the farming community of Tulare County, CA, where his family farms pistachios, oranges and clementines. Far from Sonoma County, his first experiences in working the land did not lead him directly to winemaking. Instead, after studying biology and chemistry in college, he moved to Europe when he was signed by a regional soccer team in Munich, Germany. Sidelined by an injury after a year on the field, he came back to California, settling in Sonoma County, where he took a job at a family vineyard in the Alexander Valley. Finding himself skilled and deeply impassioned by his introduction to winemaking, Gary returned to school to complete a Master's degree in winemaking at The University of California, Davis, during which time he gained experience helping in the Ravenswood Winery cellar under the tutelage of legendary winemaker Joel Peterson.



The rest is history. 15 years before returning to Ravenswood as Director of Winemaking, Gary was promoted to Assistant Winemaker and soon advanced to become Associate Winemaker in 2003. After 8 years – *“the most exciting years of my career,”* according to Gary – he was offered the chance to become Director of Winemaking and General Manager of Blackstone Sonoma at Kenwood Vineyards. Most recently, Gary served in the same position for Clos du Bois.

Gary believes that the best winemaking begins with the vineyards, where he frequently spends hands-on time, and growers, with whom he is committed to forging strong relationships. By selecting grapes that truly express the unique character of specific appellations, employing minimal winemaking, such native yeasts, small open top fermenters and aging in small oak casks, Gary crafts wines which capture the unique expressions of Sonoma County's terroirs.

Gary credits his deep understanding of Sonoma winemaking with his early experience under Joel Peterson and beside Ravenswood's winemaking team, whose uncompromising standard for excellence inspire Gary's work to this day. *“I love and believe in Joel's vision for what wine should be: that it is about place, about history, and for Ravenswood, that it is deeply about Sonoma itself,”* he says. *“It is an honor to be back home, continuing Joel's 40-year legacy of expressive, high quality Sonoma wines. I look forward to contributing to Ravenswood and its standing among the icons of California winemaking.”*

Gary makes his home in Santa Rosa, enjoying the Sonoma region far beyond its richness as a winegrowing area, but also for its breadth of agriculture, cuisine and outdoor activities. He is father to two children, Nora and Gabriel.

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ravenswoodwinery.com