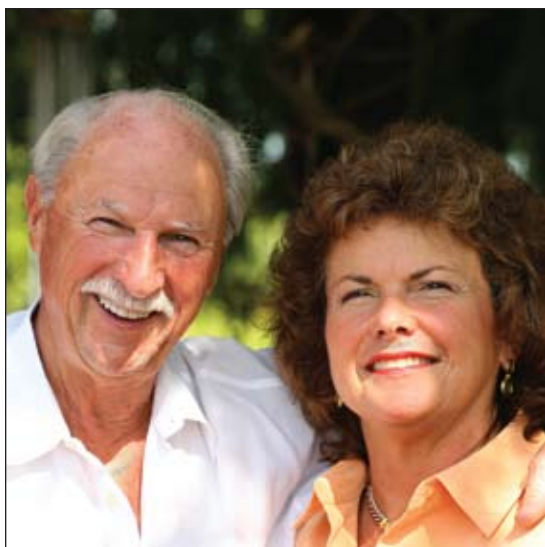


The World of Wine

Best of Both Worlds



An Interview with Charles and Shirley Roy, Roy Estate



Charles and Shirley Roy

EDITORS' NOTE Charles and Shirley Roy were both born and raised on the East Coast. Charles is a civil engineer and an architect, and Shirley is an accountant and a student of fine food and wine. Together, they owned and operated executive suite businesses in New Jersey and Norfolk, Virginia. During the '80s and '90s, they made many business trips to San Francisco and Northern California and fell in love with Napa Valley. They sold their business in 1998 and thought they were retired. In 1999, their retirement ended with the purchase of pro golfer Johnny Miller's estate and they began new lives as vintners.

COMPANY BRIEF Roy Estate (www.royestate.com) is on the eastern side of Napa Valley, in the foothills of the Vaca Mountains, south of Stag's Leap. The 42-acre property consists of the Roys' home, the winery site, olive groves, and a 17-acre vineyard. The vineyard was planted in 2001 by Piña Vineyard Management under the direction of Helen Turley, who vinified the first release in 2004. The vineyard is planted to cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and petit verdot. The tightly spaced vines are meticulously farmed including an elaborate irrigation system, which allows the vines to be farmed vine by vine. Winemaker & viticulturist, Philippe Melka replaced Helen Turley in April, 2005. A unique distinguishing aspect of the Estate property is that the Wappo Indians lived there along a rock ledge overlooking a spring.

What is the history of the Roy Estate's development?

Charles: We had become friendly with a real estate agent in Napa who had a listing for golfer Johnny Miller's house. After initially turning him down, I called him and made an appointment to see the house the next morning. That same afternoon, we were drawing up a contract.

Three months after we bought the property, we were attempting to get an erosion control plan approved so we could plant a vineyard, but this was stalled because the Sierra Club sued the county of Napa for allegedly approving erosion control plans that were environmentally insensitive. So we could only get permission to plant six acres. We were just going to plant vines and sell the fruit.

We hired John Piña and Piña Vineyard Management to plant the six acres. The following year, John Piña found out that famed winemaker Helen Turley was looking for another project. After two or three months of testing the soil and conditions, Helen told us she was very interested in doing a project on our property on one condition: that we rip out the six acres that we just planted the year before. So in 2001, we planted the vineyard for the most part, and our first release was in 2004. Helen vinified the 2004 vintage, and then left the project in March 2005.

Shirley: Helen designed it so we have cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and petit verdot grapes on our 17 acres. Following Helen's departure, we hired Bordeaux-born viticulturist and enologist Philippe Melka in April 2005. Philippe worked for Château Pétrus in Bordeaux, and then came to Napa and helped Christian Moueix at Dominus. Shortly thereafter, he was an integral part of Bryant Family, Quintessa, and many other leading projects throughout California.

Philippe was interested not only in the wine that was coming out of the Roy Estate property but also in the viticulture practices. We're fortunate in that we have our own mini valley in Soda Canyon, which acts as a trough directing air currents into our vineyard all the way from San Pablo Bay. So in the wintertime, we're a little bit warmer, and we have a bit earlier of a bud break, and more importantly, in the summertime, it's a moderating influence. Philippe spent a lot of time in 2005 working the vineyard with Piña Vineyard Management to make sure that everything was brought into balance with the vines. We put in a double poly system for irrigation, so literally, we farm vine by vine. In September

2005, after having worked with the wines and the vineyard, Philippe told us the best way to express our particular vineyard was by producing two styles of wine. So we have our Proprietary Red Wine, which is a cabernet based wine with a little bit of merlot, and we have our Cabernet Sauvignon, which is a cabernet/petit verdot blend. For 2004, our first Parker review, we received a 94 for the Cabernet Sauvignon. We had a very small quantity of the Proprietary Red that year, and it was atypical, so we didn't show it to Parker. But the following year, we showed him both the Cabernet Sauvignon and the Proprietary Red Wine, and we got a 95 for our Proprietary Red Wine. So Philippe was right, although we really weren't convinced initially. But as the wines evolved the next year – and the '05s are his from bud break to bottle – we came to understand.

Can you highlight the new releases you have coming out?

Shirley: We're up to the '06s, so this will be our third release. We're releasing the '06 Proprietary Red Wine in April 2009 – that's our cabernet/merlot with a little touch of petit verdot blend. And all of our wine is aged in Taransaud French oak barrels and we age the Proprietary Red Wine for 18 months, whereas we hold the Cabernet Sauvignon in a barrel for an additional six months, so it's in the barrel for 24 months. We won't release the Cabernet Sauvignon until the September timeframe. In December 2008, we just released our '05 Cabernet Sauvignon. Not that I'm biased, but they really are wonderful wines.

Robert Parker and Philippe feel that we have the best of both worlds: we have the beautiful fresh fruit of California and yet the elegance of Bordeaux. Parker rated the 2005 vintage at 95 points for the Proprietary Red and 94 points for the Cabernet. The ratings have been through the roof and well beyond our expectations.

Could you ever have dreamed that you would end up in the wine industry?

Charles: We are extraordinarily blessed to have tripped over what we're learning is a special piece of property. It is unique, particularly for growing wine. So we didn't seek out this special vineyard. We are just lucky.

Shirley: Serendipity has been the story of our lives to a large degree. To find out that you have this property that somebody is saying is going to make something that could be the next cult wine, is an amazing opportunity. ●

The mark that distinguishes a bottle of special Roy Estate wine