

## Bonny Doon vintner's Santa Cruz roots

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Randall Grahm admits to being a product of Santa Cruz.

"I don't think I could have succeeded the way that I have if I had lived anywhere else," he says. "It was something about UC Santa Cruz, or living here, that made me think about things a certain way - contrarian, iconoclastic, rebellious."

Grahm, 59, is the mastermind behind Bonny Doon Vineyard. He's lived in Santa Cruz off and on since 1970, when he was a philosophy student. He bought some land in the Santa Cruz Mountains and, after giving up on his quest to create the perfect Pinot Noir, pioneered Syrah and Grenache in the United States.

Focused on spreading the genius of terroir wines - wines that reflect the soil and natural elements, not the winemaker's controlled style - Grahm sold off the bulk of his Bonny Doon empire in 2006. He says he's happier now with his work, and the honors keep coming: Most recently, he's been inducted into the Vintners Hall of Fame, and his book, "Been Doon So Long," won a James Beard Foundation Award.

### Randall Grahm cheat sheet

**On living in Santa Cruz:** Santa Cruz is great. It has its problems, but it's very cordial to my sensibilities. I like the bohemian aspect; the politics; the progressive nature; the exotic, spiritual aspect. There are a lot of unusual, interesting thinkers here from every arena. From a winemaking standpoint, the fact that we're geographically remote from a lot of the wine country in California is a double-edged sword. We're lacking that community and shared knowledge, but there's also a lot of independence and passion.

**On never moving to Napa:** They wouldn't have me in Napa. Napa is beautiful, but a little stuffy, a little conservative. There's a sort of "how you do things" in Napa, and I don't think I could fit that particular mold very well. Also, I'm not a Cabernet or Chardonnay kind of guy. I go to Napa fairly often, and I actually seem to do very well there, just because the wines we do are so divergent from everything else being done in Napa.

**On how the wine scene has changed:** Maybe I'm just old-fashioned, but the tragic part of the wine business is how it has become so much of a business. Some of that just has to do with the structure of the economy, but in the old days, people were in the business for different reasons. They loved it, they were passionate. They didn't have the expectation that they were going to make millions of dollars. Now, it's so expensive, only the very wealthy can do it, and the ones who are in the business feel that they have to play it much safer.

**On favorite things to do in Santa Cruz:** Hiking. I occasionally go roller skating with my daughter. There's a great ocean to walk by on West Cliff. We walk there sometimes - really lovely. We have a sensational bookstore, Bookshop Santa Cruz (1520 Pacific Ave.), kind of a world-class independent bookstore. The other thing that's great is the music - there's really sensational jazz, and street musicians of varying degrees of accomplishment.



Bonny Doon's Randall Grahm on his locale: "They wouldn't have me in Napa." Photo: Chad Ziemendorf, The Chronicle 2010 / SF

**On local eats:** Soif Wine Bar (105 Walnut Ave.), down the street, is very good. Ristorante Avante (1711 Mission St.), also down the street, very good. Then there are all the ubiquitous taco joints. Tacos Moreno (1053 Water St.) is utterly brilliant.

**On specialty shops:** There's a nearby butcher shop - El Salchichero (402 Ingalls St.) - with great sausages. It's really added tremendously to the neighborhood. Then there's a great bakery called Companion Bakeshop (2341 Mission St.).

**On grocery shopping:** There are superb farmers' markets in Santa Cruz. We have possibly the best concentration of great produce that I've ever seen. It's really exciting as a restaurateur and as a consumer to have access to that.

**On notable wineries in the area:** The great winery in the neighborhood is Ridge up in Cupertino, and Mount Eden in Saratoga and Calera in Hollister. They're up to an hour away, but still in our nexus. Windy Oaks is really good, and there are so many tiny wineries, many of which I don't know that well, but I suspect some are producing nice wines.

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