

# A Chorus of Music on the Palate

## BENTON FAMILY WINE

BY LAYNE RANDOLPH | PHOTOS BY RICK BOLEN OF RICK BOLEN PHOTOGRAPHY



If all goes well, Benton Family Wine will be hosting the annual West Coast Songwriter's Competition again soon. The monthly open mike contest hosted by and held at the Benton Family Wine winery has been on hold for most of the year due to the events of 2020. Owner and Winemaker Daniel Benton takes it in stride. "In the wine business, you're never in control. Mother Nature is always in control," he said. The monthly competition showcases musicians who are, in turn, scored by a panel of judges who pick a monthly winner. At the end of the year, those winners compete to become the West Coast Songwriter's representative at the national competition.

The postponement of the events is a disappointment for everyone, but especially for Daniel, who grew up as the oldest of four in a family of guitar players and considers himself a "backyard campfire picker." Music naturally pairs with wine, Daniel explained. "A chord is made up of many individual notes, but the ear picks up the harmony." He uses the music analogy as his winemaking philosophy. "I want a chorus of music on the palate," he said.

But he has taken his musical inspiration even further. He plays his guitar in the

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barrel room while sipping wine, and he has implemented strict playlists for each step in the winemaking process. While bottling, he prefers Reggae, and for tasting and blending, he turns on some Classic Jazz.

His musical and winemaking styles are based on elegance and finesse more than power. In the case of wine, the style tends to be less American and more French, which is fitting since Daniel trained under a thirteenth generation Bordeaux winemaker from Saint-Émilion, Louis de Coninck. Daniel began making wines in the French style with de Coninck, and he has stuck to that winning style for 20 years.

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Benton Family Wine takes the word "family" in their name seriously. Daniel and his wife Kara own and run the business, and they treat their small staff of nine like they are members of their own family. When the LNU fire encompassed much of the North Bay, and many people were evacuating their homes, Daniel and Cara opened their doors to house two of their displaced employees. "I tell people before I hire them, I'm not hiring you for this position, I'm hiring you to be part of the family."

Through training, winemaking, building a business, and running a family, music has remained a constant inspiration for Daniel. It is the thread that ties it all together. Daniel has found many extraordinary wine-music combinations in his years as a winemaker, and he likes to share them with friends and customers. As an example, Daniel offered, "I've found that the 2017 Croze Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon – 100 percent Cabernet Sauvignon and 100 percent Rutherford AVA – is a perfect complement to Van Morrison's "Sweet Thing." He added, "Good wine, good food, good music, and good friends – what else do you need in life?"

