



Published January 24th, 2018

## Susan and Sal Captain, Moraga's Business Persons of the Year

By Sophie Braccini



Captain Vineyards receive the EPA CoolCal Award. Photo provided

Winemaking in Moraga is still a marginal activity, with Captain Vineyards being the only operational commercial winery in Moraga with a production under 300 cases a year, but the activity adds to the town's character and fits the semirural and sophisticated image it wants to project. The performance and passion of owners Sal and Susan Captain, who were chosen this year as Moraga's Business Persons of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce, have made their boutique winery a green leader in the county and state that is recognized with this distinction.

Captain Vineyards' wine is sold only at the property. Susan and Sal Captain planted their first vine 12 years ago and became state certified commercial winemakers in 2010. After a corporate career, they studied at UC Davis, Diablo Valley College, and in Napa to learn about soil management, plant management, green practices, and the art of winemaking. Their objective continues to

be creating an organic and dry farmed vineyard that produces the highest quality wine possible.

Moraga Chamber president Bob Fritzky notes that the Captains were selected not only for their long-term contribution to the business community, but for their impact as educators - Susan Captain conducts several winemaking classes each year - and for how well they represent Moraga at the county and state level with the numerous and recurrent distinctions they have received for their green and water saving practices.

The California Environmental Protection Agency recently invited Captain Vineyards to compete for a CoolCal award and it was selected in the small business category. The site published their story stating, "Captain Vineyards embodies sustainability through its initiatives and inspires viticulturists and visitors alike to conserve natural resources in their business operations and lifestyles."

The Captains were involved in the creation of the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association and in the multiyear research and documentation process that led the state to recognize Lamorinda as a distinctive American Viticultural Area.

Their home and winery are located in Moraga's Bluffs area, on 2.5-acres of open space overlooking a large expanse of rolling hills. They have planted 3,500 vines and the wine production varies every year. In 2017 they bottled about 250 cases of wine from the previous years' production that had patiently been waiting in barrels stored in the wine cellar excavated in the rock underneath their home. Depending on the variety, the wine has to vinify in barrels from two to five years.

Captain explains that the volume of grapes they produce varies with the years and tends to decrease due to weather changes and their practice of dry farming. The 2013 production was 27,000 pounds of grapes, and in 2015 only 7,000 pounds. Sal explains that the changes create a wine that is gaining in intensity, color, flavor and alcohol content. The couple confirms that they limit their production by not buying grapes outside of Lamorinda, and working almost exclusively with producers that use the same pesticide-free and dry farming methods.

The comments left by people who have visited the winery are extremely positive, including a 100 percent five star on Yelp.com regarding the quality of the wine as well as the Captains' hospitality and desire to educate their visitors.

For more information about the Captains, visit [www.captainvineyards.com](http://www.captainvineyards.com). For information about the Feb. 21 Business Person of the Year award dinner at the Moraga Country Club, visit [moragachamber.org](http://moragachamber.org).

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