

PATIANNA
Organic Vineyards



Mike Lee

Winemaker

“This is a bit of a rebirth for me, and I am thrilled to be working with Patianna,” says Mike Lee, co-founder and former co-owner of Kenwood Vineyards in Sonoma Valley. Vintage 2009 marks Mike’s 40th harvest. In 1970 he started making wine at Kenwood, and in 1996 he began purchasing Patianna Organic Vineyards’ grapes for his Kenwood Sauvignon Blanc. “The Patianna vineyard is great,” says Mike, “and everyone knows that.”

Back in 1970, Mike joined his father, brother Marty and brother-in-law John Sheela to purchase the old Pagani Winery in Sonoma Valley. “All of us had degrees in business, and we all thought farming and winemaking might be an interesting way to make a living; we had no idea how great it would be,” reflects Mike. “At the time, I didn’t know how to plug in a pump,” he confesses. Hands-on was Mike’s education. Numerous short courses at U. C. Davis broadened his knowledge. “In those days – 1971 to 1973 – my fellow students were the personalities who have since shaped the California wine industry.”

Mike’s current affiliation with Patti Fetzer and the Patianna brand weaves together threads from the past. After attending a Fetzer seminar in the mid-1980s, Mike committed himself to sustainable farming. Eventually, Kenwood cultivated 270 acres of certified organic grapes. He first learned of biodynamic grape growing from Casey Burke, a pioneering proponent. Reflecting on his 40 years in the wine business, Mike describes the enormous changes he has witnessed. “When I started in 1970, 80% of the tanks in Sonoma County were made of redwood,” he remembers. There have been important improvements in crushing, pressing, aging and cellaring, but Mike thinks that the changes in the vineyard have produced the most dramatic, positive changes in wine quality. “Today,” he says, “the focus is on the vineyard, not the celebrity winemaker.”

His style of wine is user-friendly. “I make sound wines with varietal character, nothing over the top.” His wines are compatible with food. Mike’s favorite wine is Sauvignon Blanc; he loves its affinity for so many flavors and dishes.

Mike predicts a bright future for Patianna and Mendocino County. “I like the feel of this beautiful, rustic region,” he says, “and it is emerging as a powerful force in the wine business, particularly in organics and biodynamics. We have Patti and her family to thank for that.”