



## Satori Cellars, Gilroy

Written By **BEV STENEHJEM**

Satori Cellars, the most laid back and fun winery in Santa Clara Valley, is owned by Sandy and Tom Moller. Taking the first two letters of their names (SA and TO) along with the first two letters (RI) of their son's name, Riley – they came up with their winery's name which they opened in 2006. Bright, colorful swirls define their logo and flowing décor – they are the only winery in our region where you can pull up a seat at their bar. Adirondack chairs, painted in primary colors, and umbrella picnic tables dot the patio where friendly dogs laze in the shade. Close your eyes and it's easy to imagine you are in a special kind of nirvana. Open every weekend, Satori lives up to their tagline, "There is always a party at Satori," with live music, art and jewelry exhibits, yoga and more.

### How did you get started in wine?

Started as a hobby, which got a bit out of control I guess. I received lots of help and advice from three friends who are experienced home wine-makers. I also read a bunch, asked lots of questions from real experts and have taken classes in viticulture on the premise that it's easier to make good wine if you have good grapes. (It is.)

### Do you miss "corporate world" or are you happy in your new career and why?

I worked in power semiconductors for a few companies, mostly Ericsson in Morgan Hill (now Infineon) where I started as an engineer and became the manager. Timing was good as the demand for these devices skyrocketed as cellular grew more popular in the '90s.

The decision to switch to winemaking came relatively easily as so many indicators were pointing me in the direction to do it. Somehow I found myself with this fairly good chunk of land, with a grapevine experiment that had gone really well. Winemaking was fun to me and seemed actually like an option. On the other hand, my day job, which required extensive travel and had been transitioning to new owners, was no longer enjoyable. I was also at the age where a lot of folks think about shaking things up and I thought, why not. So with Sandy's support we embarked on a new phase of our life.

I would say yes, I am happy I left the corporate silliness. The first few years were challenging but it gets easier mostly (the drought was a challenge). I miss many people who I used to see and interact with regularly and now only get to do it occasionally. And of course a regular paycheck was nice. Otherwise, I don't miss it hardly at all.

### What has surprised you about being a winemaker?

How much can change year over year. Seems there's always a new challenge.

### What goals in winemaking are you still working to achieve?

Trying to relax about it more and trust that Mother Nature knows what she's doing.

**What do you find to be the hardest part of harvest?** Early and long hours become exhausting. Making the decisions on what to pick and when.

**What wines do you drink when you are not drinking your own wine?** That's easy -- beer. There's an old expression that it takes a lot of beer to make wine and there's some truth to it. Making and growing wine is mostly fun but can also be quite repetitive (e.g., on the first day of pruning vines and after the first five minutes, you can't help but think one down; 9,299 to go...) and so sipping beer helps sometimes (and it's allowed!). Sipping wine sounds nice but it can catch up with you quickly and make for a short workday.

### What kind of vibe does your winery have?

Easygoing, fun. When I suggested the possibility of starting a winery to Sandy she supported the idea under one condition: that it be fun. So with that in mind we seldom use the "w" word (work) - - choosing to believe that we are at play, rather than at work. Our staff members are called "Players." When I am curious about who is going to be here on a certain day I ask "who's Playing?" At first it was a bit strange but now I don't even think about it.

### What is your all-time favorite food and wine pairing?

Good chocolate with a nice big red wine is hard to beat.

### What kinds of wine do you specialize in?

Mostly big reds like Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Merlot, Syrah and Cabernet Franc. Occasionally we do a late harvest or a Pinot Noir. The main reason I focus on big reds is because of the weather; hot days and cool nights are ideal for these varietals. It's good for certain whites too, but they generally desire cooler temperatures and with the cooler climates of Monterey and Santa Cruz County so close I felt it was maybe better to leave growing the whites to them. Not that there aren't great whites grown in Santa Clara Valley, there are, but that was my reasoning seventeen years ago when I started planting.

### Funniest customer story?

We described one of our first vintage wines as having "notes of tobacco." My Mom read it and said "maybe you should just throw that batch out."

### What is the biggest misconception about you?

That I "retired" to do this. Running a winery/vineyard is about as far from retirement as I can imagine.

### If you were a wine grape, which one would it be and why?

Probably Zinfandel grapes- they are wild and unpredictable.

### Does your winery have a pet mascot?

We've got a bunch of mascots: dogs, horses and a cat.



Bev Stenehjem is a local wine enthusiast, author and freelance writer focused on the wineries of Santa Clara Valley. Bev wrote "The Wineries of Santa Clara Valley," a historical photo book published by Arcadia Publishing in 2015. Bev conducts occasional wine and food pairing events at the local wineries and through Gavilan College Community Education. She is passionate about shining a light on the world-class wines of the Santa Clara Valley and the people behind them.