

Rashell Rafanelli-Fehlman winemaker, A Rafanelli Winery, Healdsburg, CA



“*Wine Business Monthly* covers such a wide range of topics in both winemaking and viticultural practices. It has not only helped in product choices, but has also helped me stay current on the new technology, both in the winery and vineyard. From my experience, the better fruit that I can grow and harvest equates to better wines. Not only do I enjoy and benefit from reading *WBM*, but it truly is a family staple. My husband who manages all our vineyards enjoys the new information on viticulture practices and my sister stays up to date with trends in sales and hospitality.

With so many new products and all the recent studies pertaining to winemaking, the most helpful have been those reviews on barrels. There are so many choices and with all the new technology and information, we are continually learning more about the wood and its integration with wines. I have enjoyed reading up on all the current studies related to the new technology being used to make more consistent barrels and assessments of trials which allows me stay informed and customize my barrel program.”

NAME AND TITLE: Rashell Rafanelli-Fehlman, winemaker

WINERY NAME AND LOCATION: A Rafanelli Winery is located in the heart of Dry Creek Valley in Healdsburg, California. We are a fourth-generation family owned and operated winery specializing in red wines. My great-grandparents immigrated from Italy and established the winery in 1911.

ANNUAL CASE PRODUCTION: 11,000 cases

PLANTED ACRES: 85 acres all managed in the Dry Creek Valley

CAREER BACKGROUND: I was fortunate to grow up in the family business which generated my passion for the wine industry. At an early age, I was able to work with my grandfather and father and study each facet of winemaking. Watching the hard work in the vineyards and intense cellar work manifest into a beautiful glass of wine created my desire to work in this industry. I attended Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where I studied agriculture business with a concentration in marketing and was able to play a little with making my own wine. When I graduated, I knew I wanted to be in the wine industry and I loved San Luis Obispo, but my heart was in Dry Creek Valley. I moved back to the valley and though our winery did not have a marketing program, I was able to start at the bottom and work behind my

father in the wine production. The winemaking side of the industry is the most fascinating and rewarding to me, but in a small family business you have your hands in every aspect of the business—everything from walking the vineyards to making the final blend for the new vintages, or as we say “from grape to glass.”

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE? The biggest challenge in this evolving industry is to keep up and make decisions that not only benefit the winery presently to maintain success, but to carefully make decisions that will benefit the future generation and give them the ability to continue to thrive and build on the legacy. I want to be able to maintain our traditions while making progressive steps, such as diving into the social media world, creating relationships and connecting with the younger generation, and becoming 100 percent sustainable. Every day brings with it a new challenge with a different focus, but the important thing to me is to keep perspective and know that we are creating an amazing product that brings people together.

VARIETALS THAT YOUR WINERY IS KNOWN FOR: Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot