



BRAVIUM



FOUNDER AND WINEMAKER
DEREK ROHLFFS

Being in the right place at the right time can alter the course of anyone's life. For winemaker Derek Rohlffs, an unforgettable introduction to the world of wine—by way of a retrospective tasting with a Napa Valley legend—was that defining moment. A moment when Derek resolved to one day craft his own wine. Not just any wine, but a wine deeply connected to its terroir. In the decade that followed, he crossed paths with influential mentors and answered a profound pull to the land, ultimately creating his life's work: Bravium. "These wines are born of the idea that nature should do the talking," said Derek. "Each bottle is a reflection of a particular place and time, a portrait of the vineyards and the vintage."

Of Cherokee descent, Derek has felt a powerful connection to nature since childhood—Cherokee means "those who live in the mountains"—and he is most at ease outdoors, close to the land. Initially unsure of what kind of career to pursue, but certain of his passion for science and nature, Derek earned his undergraduate degree in the trailblazing Environmental Studies program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. But he didn't initially work in his field, instead entering the gaming industry—the family business—traversing the country building his marketing acumen, all the while developing a growing interest in wine.

In 1999, an encounter with Bob and Noni Travers of famed Napa Valley winery Mayacamas Vineyards sparked an epiphany in Derek. Tasting through Bob's 70's and 80's era Chardonnay and Cabernet, talking through soil and geology—favorite topics from his environmental studies days—and seeing for the first time the inextricable link between land and wine, Derek found his calling.

He began quietly taking courses in the renowned UC Davis winemaking program, and in 2005 made his first garage wine, a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. He connected a year later with Jeff Brinkman of Rhys Vineyards, who opened Derek's eyes to what California Pinot Noir and Chardonnay could be when grown in the right sites and crafted with minimal intervention in the winery. Jeff was instrumental in guiding Derek toward the ideal vineyards—hillside sites with shallow soils—to craft his own wines in a traditional style that would become the hallmark of Bravium.

"As a winemaker, I am a minimalist in every sense of the word, especially when it comes to Pinot Noir," said Derek. "When you think of art, a painter might layer color over and over on a canvas, but making Pinot is like sculpting; you're sort of taking away what you can until there's nothing left but pure varietal expression, with terroir as the ultimate framework."

Derek founded Bravium—a Latin word meaning "gift" or "prize"—in 2007. His widely acclaimed small-lot Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are characterized by excellent structure and aging potential, along with invigorating acidity, which allows for seamless pairing with a variety of foods.

Of all the influences that have shaped Derek's path, his family's Cherokee heritage has been the steady drumbeat that led him to the right places at the right times. His parents gifted him the name "Winter Hawk" as a child. To this day, the sight of a hawk feather in his vineyard reminds Derek that he is fulfilling his destiny. That rich heritage gently guides his hand in the cellar. For Derek, terroir is a gift.

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Bravium

Linguistic origin: Latin / Meaning: prize, reward, gift