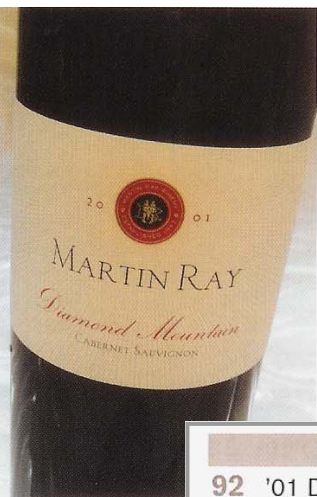


Wine & Spirits

MARTIN RAY WINERY VOTED *Top Winery of the Year*



Bryan Davison



MARTIN RAY

In 1990 Courtney Benham was casting about as to what he might do in the wine business, and the search took him to a warehouse in San Jose. It was there that he stumbled upon a trove of old Martin Ray wines dating back to the '50s, which he tasted and bought. He sold some and drank some, but kept coming back to Martin Ray himself, whom old-timers referred to as "cantankerous" and "a bastard."

"He was not a nice man," admits Benham. But he was a man who had such a fanatical devotion to mountain fruit that in the early '50s, Martin Ray became one of California's best-known wineries. Ray died in 1976, and the brand more or less died with him; Benham purchased the rights to the name in 1991. Then he spent ten years building the Blackstone brand into a value powerhouse; when he sold Blackstone to Pacific Wine Partners in 2001, it allowed him to turn his attention back to the cantankerous Martin Ray.

The new Martin Ray Winery is near Graton, in Sonoma County, and Benham set up the reinvented brand with a nod to Ray's legacy, a focus on mountain-grown fruit. Winemaker Bryan Davison crafts the Martin Ray wines to accentuate the structure, elegance and tannic fortitude of great mountain fruit. This year, the most impressive releases came from Fred Constant's 1,800-foot-elevation vineyard on Diamond Mountain; both the '01 Merlot and '01 Cabernet have the kind of depth and ferrous intensity that Ray himself might have appreciated. "Mountain soil is much better for producing wine grapes," wrote Ray. "Oh, the vines would like the perfect soil, but grapes have a stronger flavor when vines must work hard to get what they really need for growing." —P.J.C.



Martin Ray
WINERY

7 wines tasted, 4 recommended

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| 92 | '01 Diamond Mountain District Cabernet Sauvignon | \$70 (4/05) |
| 91 | '01 Diamond Mountain District Merlot | \$40 (4/05) |
| 90 | '01 Napa Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon | \$30 (2/05) |
| 89 | '01 Santa Cruz Mountains Cabernet Sauvignon | \$70 (4/05) |



Winter 2005

Founded: 1990 **Winemaker:** Bryan Davison
Acres owned: 10 **Annual production:** 27,000
Estate grown: 4% **Owner:** Courtney Benham
Known for: Resurrecting a historic California brand **Location:** Santa Rosa, CA
Website: martinraywinery.com