Profile: Jed Steele

A New Yorker by birth, Jed moved with his family to San Francisco in 1950. In 1961, he received a basketball scholarship to Gonzaga University in Washington State. He continues to be a rabid fan and can’t be contacted during the annual NCAA playoffs.

Jed worked as a cellar rat for Stony Hill Winery in Napa Valley in 1968, and then went on to earn his MS in enology from U.C. Davis in 1974. From 1974 through 1982 he was the winemaker and vineyard manager at Edmeades Winery in Mendocino County’s Anderson Valley. He went on to become head winemaker at Kendall-Jackson Winery taking them from 35,000 cases to 1 million cases in 9 vintages. He then decided to start his own brand in 1991.

Steele Wines was born in Lower Lake in California’s Lake County. Jed expanded the business, bought Mt. Konocti Winery in Kelseyville, and moved production to that facility in 1996.

Jed’s vision had always been to make a number of different varietal wines in small lots, using minimally invasive winemaking techniques and allowing the vineyard and grape variety to dictate style. He launched the Steele and Shooting Star brands in 1992, created Stymie in 1999 and Writer’s Block (with his son Quincy) in 2002.

Today Jed continues his vision by crushing 22 different varietals and producing 40 different wines, most in lots of under 1,000 cases. Steele Wines owns five vineyards and leases three additional vineyards from the Dorn family, original settlers of Lake County. Jed also buys grapes from families he’s worked with for many years, from Santa Barbara County to Washington State.
**Steele Brands**

**Steele**

Jed’s flagship label started with his passion for Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel. Steele focuses on vineyard-specific wines from estate vineyards and from other vineyards Jed has worked with since the 1970s. Steele varietals now include Pinot Blanc, Viognier, Cabernet Franc Rosé, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

**Shooting Star**

Jed created Shooting Star because he had relationships with growers produced exceptional grapes that didn’t fit in the Steele program. The goal was a quality line of predominantly Lake County wines to offer restaurants at a wine-by-the-glass price. Shooting Star also provides an outlet for esoteric bottlings like Aligote, Blue Franc and sparkling Syrah.

The Shooting Star name comes from Jed’s middle name, Tecumseh, a revered chief of the Shawnee tribe. Chief Tecumseh was born during a great meteor shower and was known to his tribe as “Chief Tecumseh, born under the sign of a shooting star.” Shooting Star now includes Aligote, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Zinfandel, Barbera, and Blue Franc.

**Stymie**

Jed makes two varietals under this label, Merlot and Syrah. The grapes come from the Silva and Jacobsen properties. These wines represent Jed’s personal quality statement and are the best of the best, grown and vinified in Lake County. These wines are a tribute to Jed’s father, who made a great bet on a horse.

**Writer’s Block**

Writer’s Block stems from collaboration between Jed and his son, Quincy. Quincy inherited his father’s passion for winemaking, and after working with D’Arenburg in Australia and Catena in Argentina, Quincy created Writer’s Block from the ground up, combining Old and New World winemaking techniques. He selected the varietals and defined the wine making protocols. Of late he has worked several harvests for Biodynamic producers in Beaune, France and surrounding villages. The varietals under the Writer’s Block label are Roussanne, Syrah, Grenache, Counoise, Petite Sirah, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel.
Steele Winemaking Philosophy

It’s all about minimalism. At Steele we use standard, non-GMO yeasts, natural fermentations, and no extra additives or enzymes. During fermentation we gently pumppover, use inert gas to move the finished wines, and use gravity flow as much as possible. All of this ensures that we don’t bruise the wine during its time in the cellar, which helps retain fresh aromas and flavors in the finished wines. From handpicking grapes to gentle processing and bottling in our own facility, we make sure our grapes are cared for from vineyard to bottle. It’s all about a light hand in the winemaking to better highlight the aromas and flavors of the quality fruit we crush.

After harvest all of the single vineyard grapes are kept separate until blending just prior to bottling. That small lot management allows the integrity and individual terroir of each vineyard to show through in the wines.

Jed’s experience and longevity as a winemaker set his brand apart. Over Jed’s years in the wine business he has gotten to know vineyards and growers from Santa Barbara County to Washington State.

The grapes we source for the Steele label also supply the Shooting Star label. The Shooting Star wines are more reminiscent of specific appellations and uncommon varietals. They are fermented in stainless steel or aged in oak for a shorter period of time and should be enjoyed while young. The Steele label wines are single vineyard designates or specific vineyard blends that age in oak for a longer period of time and are meant to drink soon, but will age up to eight to ten years with proper cellaring.