

## Winemaker Profile

### Mario Pulido, Third-Generation Farmer

My roots are in the Central Valley. My father's family has farmed in the Modesto area since the 1920's. With money tight, I helped with the family harvest, primarily walnuts, almonds, chili peppers and table grapes. I also helped raise chickens and goats; I always had dogs.

In 1975, the summer after my junior year at the University of California at Santa Barbara, I traveled for three months in Europe. The timing was extraordinary — my energy level was extremely high and my intellectual capacity was in sponge mode. Wine was everywhere to be enjoyed. I felt like a child — everyday a new culture, new language, new food, and new currency.

My winemaking career at Gallo began with training under Julio Gallo and Marcello Monticelli. At the time of my entry into the winemaking department at Gallo, the estate program was just being developed. We were learning the attributes of different barrel producers from the various regions in the world.



In the Central Valley, I worked under the guidance of Julio Gallo, where the varietal wines, as well as the Carlo Rossi and Peter Vella product lines, were setting the standards in the industry as “affordable quality wines”. Working with these product lines for several years gave me an understanding of large-scale winemaking, but also recognizing that cost savings here can result in less cost per bottle for the consumer. The challenge of delivering an affordable quality wine to the customer has been a driving force in the value wines sector and a personal passion of mine.

Now at The Wine Group with the responsibility for Oak Leaf Vineyards, I can apply all of my experience — from the vineyard to the winery and including recognition of the cost factors — to produce extreme value wines that I can be proud of and the consumer can afford and enjoy.

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**Why did I become a winemaker?**

I love the challenge of creating expressive wines from fruit that comes from various regions and deliver a wine styled for our customers. While working as a winemaker assistant, I was fascinated with the various flavors, aromas and palate weight of the each wine. I found that the unique flavors from the various regions throughout the state are invaluable in understanding the potential of the California wine industry. The gratifying role is the influence a winemaker can have in the finished blend.

**What inspires me to make great wine?**

In my travels throughout Europe, I tasted wines from all of the regions. I learned about the luxury of a wide spectrum of flavors and textures available to me which allow me to craft any style of wine. The inspiration comes with the idea of creating a wine that expresses the natural flavors of the grape. I am inspired by the opportunity to create new-style wines in hopes of bringing new customers to the business. I am also inspired by representing a team that includes our community of growers, our field department, production and the support staff that it takes to deliver from the grape to the bottle.

**What makes me passionate about wine?**

Wine to me is an enhancer. Wine enhances a meal, a mood or a celebration. And now, with the advances in grapegrowing and winemaking, we're always going to make very good wines.

**What gives me the most satisfaction in my job?**

Working with my colleagues. It really is an extended family. The founders of this company started as a family business. As complex as the business has become, many of the family values still determine what we do. I work directly with our field staff and sensory department to determine harvest decisions. I work with our planners, production, bottling, management and marketing with each new vintage.

**What is my favorite time in the vineyard?**

Harvest is my favorite time of the year. I love the pace. We are in the vineyards early in the day, tasting grapes and making harvest decisions, scheduling deliveries. And cost decisions are also made -- if we can use tractors for another year and invest that money in better vineyard operations, the choice is easy.

**What makes California an ideal location for winemaking?**

The varied soils and the climate make grapegrowing conditions ideal throughout the state. Our climate allows us to create varied styled wines. We produce some wines from early harvest grapes that lend a leaner palate with a very bright, crisp citrus flavor. With regions like the Delta we can allow more mature fruit to develop deeper riper flavors.

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**What are other winemaking regions that I admire?**

In California, I admire the Central Coast. The area is producing some very interesting wines. I like the Italian wines; many of the wines produced are fruit-forward and complement the food.

**How do I spend my time outside of the vineyard?**

I spend most of my time with my family. My wife Laura has worked in the wine industry for 30 years; we have a daughter Andrea and a son Antonio. Both my children played on traveling soccer teams and we are very supportive. We also love to travel. Last year we took the family to Paris and London; the highlights were the Louvre and a musical in London.

**What is my favorite place in California?**

My favorite place in California is Santa Barbara. I love the weather, the architecture and I love that the city is proud of the Hispanic heritage that created the city.

For more information or to interview Mario, please contact a media representative at [Info@OakLeafVineyards.com](mailto:Info@OakLeafVineyards.com).

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