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# Kurt Russell on Wine

The Hollywood star talks exclusively to Wine Enthusiast about his passion for winemaking and his new tasting room in California.

BY WENDY THIES SELL



The star of *Tombstone*, *Big Trouble In Little China*, *Miracle* and dozens more films, now strives to balance his acting career with his passion for making wine. The 63-year-old Russell shared his story while sipping a bottle of his GoGi Pinot Noir in his new wine tasting room, The Wine Saloon, in Los Alamos, California.

## **How did you wind up making wine in Santa Barbara County?**

I was doing a picture with Quentin Tarantino called *Death Proof* in the Sta. Rita Hills AVA and I had six weeks to discover the area and the Pinots there. I began to delineate this structure within the Pinots—there was a similarity, but they were all different.

## **Did your friend, Fess Parker, the actor-turned-Santa Ynez Valley vintner, influence your decision to make wine?**

I liked to go see Fess. I just thought he was a really cool man. There were a couple times where I started talking to Fess about wine. He said, 'Kurt, you're not just curious about this—I think you've got a passion about this, and you should follow it.' It kind of spurred me to do that.

## **You make your wines at Ampelos Cellars in Lompoc, how do like working with Peter and Rebecca Work?**

I knew what I wanted to do taste-wise, but I didn't have any idea of how to do it. They've been wonderful in teaching me. Over the last 12 years, Peter's developed into an expert winemaker. He has this sort of openness and a fearlessness. I

love the way they farm; the fact that they were the first triple-certified sustainable, organic and biodynamic vineyard in the United States.

**Do you come to Lompoc for harvest?**

Yeah, I love harvest. Let's face it; the baby's being born. I think everybody understands the romance and special quality of harvest. It's exciting and there's potential in the air.

**What's your goal with your wine?**

As long as the wine has a tremendous balance and structure to it, as long as the taste is as equal to and as good as the nose, as brilliant as the floral quality of it. As long as you reach for the highest in all aspects, but they must all match, then you have a wine that can chase its own tail.

**How do you think the Sta. Rita Hills compares to other Pinot Noir-producing regions?**

After traveling the world and having the opportunity to taste Pinots from everywhere, my personal belief is that the Santa Rita Hills area is, other than Burgundy, the best place to make Pinot. And the fact that it's two and a half hours from Los Angeles is just brilliantly fortunate for me.

**When you started making it, how clear was your vision for the wine?**

I had no question about what I wanted to do. I think that's one of the most important things in winemaking. It's like filmmaking; you gotta know what you want to do. If you know what you want to do—then you can go about doing it. If you don't know what you want to do—then you just sort of get what you get.

**Have you noticed other similarities between winemaking and film?**

All movie storytelling starts with the script, and that is what you're going to make. Then you cast it. Your ingredients are beginning to swirl together. The director is like your winemaker. I love that! The way you nurture it in the field is the way you nurture a story, and working with the actors, and then you cut, you take your best takes and put them in a can. Well, we take our best takes. We cut at exactly the precise moment that we feel the grapes have matured. Ultimately, the editing process is where the movie is made, and ultimately blending to me is what you're going to arrive at, and until that blend is just what you want, until that editing process takes place, you don't have anything.

**Do you want GoGi to grow and go mainstream?**

It's going to always be 'boutique' with me, because I want to keep my hands on it. It's the thrill I get out of it. I keep mine in the barrel for a long time; I like to let it take its time. Because I don't have a big operation, I'm afforded some other luxuries, which is a little more time.

**Ever consider putting your name on the label, and what is GoGi?**

I was not interested in slapping 'Kurt Russell' on the bottle—as if that meant anything to the quality of the wine. It's simply GoGi, which is just an old nickname I had as a kid.