



## Anniversary proves golden at winery



Written by Steve Hicks

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Donna and I celebrated our 50th anniversary at a surprise party at the elegant Kelly Fleming Winery in Calistoga. Our daughters Julie Hicks and Jennifer Smith and Jennifer's husband, Steve, arranged the luncheon. Our grandchildren Meagan, Parker and Taylor were all there. Val and Dave Estes from Los Altos Hills, Sheila Hoar and Master Sommelier Fred Dame and his wife Carolyn rounded out our happy group.

For this family, there is no better way to celebrate than at a winery.

Fleming is the sole proprietor of the winery and until recently the only employee. Her adult children, Robert and Colleen, have joined the enterprise.

The 300-acre property is nestled between two canyons and only 12 acres are vineyards. I doubt much more will ever be planted, as the intent is to keep the land in its natural state. Fleming's production team includes winemaker Celia (Masyczek) Welch. She is a superstar – among her many successes are Scarecrow, Corra, Staglin and Hollywood and Vine. They have an organic consultant, as their land is self-sustaining and organically farmed.

The facility is gorgeous, and a highlight is the cave blasted and drilled into the volcanic Mount Saint Helena. The unique feature in this long cavern is that there was no need for reinforcement. The beauty of the stone is there for all to see.

Kelly and Colleen prepared and served the gourmet lunch, accompanied by the two wines they produce, Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. French Oak is used for 50 percent of the Sauvignon Blanc, and the result is a complexity of aromas and flavors with the grassiness of the varietal being somewhat muted. The 100 percent Napa Valley Cabernet has great, soft fruit and a long, elegant finish, which complemented the rack of lamb well. Both of these wines are excellent.

A magnum of 2004 Penfolds Grange provided by Sommelier Fred topped off the afternoon. Grange, produced in Australia, is 100 percent Shiraz, and the fruit jumps out of the bottle. This very collectible wine is a blend of many plots in South Australia, and the combination changes every year.

Fleming is well worth the trip for a tasting and a great venue for a catered meal or party. This is a small production winery, as currently only approximately 1,500 cases are made. Tastings as a result are by appointment only.

Most of the wine is sold in restaurants, though it can be found at K&L, and of course all Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bars feature it on their lists.

You can't fly on one wing, as they say, so that night we dined at Bistro Jeanty in Yountville. Their food is always great. I brought a 1961 Montrose, a second-growth Bordeaux. You never know when they are 50 years old, but 1961 was a legendary year for wine as well as for marriages! This bottle still had tannins to match its big fruit, and it was wonderful with a sparerib dish.

The next day we tasted at the venerable Raymond Vineyards, purchased in 2009 by the French négociant Jean-Charles Boisset. This has resulted in an infusion of talent and cash. Raymond has taken tasting to a new level.

There are several venues, but the most exciting is the Crystal Cellar. It is a combination of mirrors, steel tanks, Baccarat crystal decanters and chandeliers, mannequins hanging from trapezes and loud, hip music. Our guide, a well-traveled young man named Tyson Madden, made it even more fun with his nimble, knowledgeable banter.

A concert on the green at Robert Mondavi with k.d. lang and a stay at the comfortable and charming Harvest Inn made it quite a weekend.