

Mi Sueño

W I N E R Y

MI SUEÑO WINERY: A TASTE OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

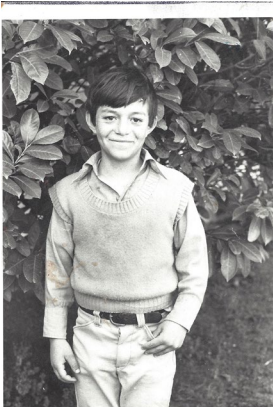
The Spanish phrase, *si se puede*—yes, you can—signifies one’s ability to accomplish anything with passion, persistence and determination. Rolando and Lorena Herrera, owners of Napa Valley’s Mi Sueño Winery (Spanish for ‘My Dream’) live this motto.

The inspirational tale of Mi Sueño is both a love story and the story of the American dream realized, one that came to fruition for Mexican immigrant Rolando Herrera as a result of hard work, raw talent, and the support of a strong community of mentors who led him along a path to success. Along with his wife, Lorena, whose family has deep roots in Napa and Sonoma counties as grape growers, the two founded Mi Sueño Winery in 1997, the year of their marriage.

Rolando started his career in the Napa Valley in 1982 as a modest dishwasher at the exclusive Auberge du Soleil restaurant. Over the span of 15 years, his resume of employers began to read like the who’s who of the Napa Valley—from the legendary Warren Winiarski, founder of Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars, to winemaking great Paul Hobbs. Each experience was an opportunity to learn more, and with every move Rolando harnessed his work ethic with his love of farming and wine.

Together, Rolando and Lorena have built their dream winery with love, passion, and a deep understanding of the art of growing exceptional grapes and crafting award-winning wines that are rich in character and elegance. As Rolando says, “farming and making wine is not science, it’s experience.” And experience he has. This year, as Mi Sueño Winery celebrates its 20th anniversary, the winery stands not only as a “dream come true” for the Herreras, but also as one of the great independently owned and operated wine producers in California.

The road from El Llano to the Napa Valley



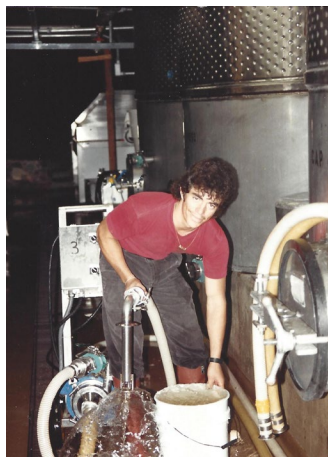
Growing up in a rural area of Mexico, Rolando learned to work the land and respect farming. His grandparents had a six-acre farm where they grew corn, wheat, pumpkins, squash, and many other vegetables, which they sold for their family’s living. He remembers complaining about the hour long walk up a rocky mountain to the family’s ejido (a communal farm). This is where Rolando’s abuela (grandmother) told him she grew her best crops for the family’s consumption. Rolando tasted the crops from the various sites and knew his grandmother was right. This lesson he would remember later in life, as it was his first lesson about terroir.

Rolando was just eight years old when his family moved from El Llano in the Michoacán state to Northern California in 1975. His father saw an opportunity, like so many immigrants before and after him, to better his future through hard work and a willingness to sacrifice his greatest values—his home, his extended family, and his culture.

After five years, in 1980, his family returned to Mexico, but Rolando dreamed of living in Northern California. He recalls riding bikes through grape pomace and learning how to plant and nurture seedlings and small plants. He also knew that his chances for a great education were better in California, and he begged his father to let him go back.

When Rolando turned 15, he fearlessly returned to Napa Valley with his brother, determined to make something of himself in the United States, against all odds and adversity. Without the financial support of their family or a clear plan, they lived in a plant nursery in the beginning and Rolando picked up multiple jobs to support himself while he finished high school. He worked nights as a dishwasher at Auberge du Soleil and at Cindy Pawlcyn's seminal Napa Valley restaurant, Mustards Grill, where he graduated to line cook. Although he enjoyed restaurant work, he longed to return to his rural roots and work outdoors.

From humble worker to sought-after winemaker



The summer of 1985 was a turning point in Rolando's career path. Warren Winiarski of Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, a meticulous owner-wine grower, hired him to break up rocks so that he could build a stone wall around his property. Later that summer, as Rolando completed his work and was getting ready to return to his senior year in high school, he approached Winiarski to thank him for the job. Winiarski was surprised—usually the workers he hired did not approach him and make a personal connection. Inspired by his work ethic and gumption, he immediately offered Rolando an opportunity to work crush and help in the cellar. Still needing to support himself and preferring the work in the vineyard and cellar, Rolando accepted the position, going to school during the day, and working for Stag's Leap at night. After only three years, Rolando became cellar master at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, where he held the position for seven years. During that time, he took courses on viticulture and enology at Napa Valley College.

Rolando has been in the wine business since—with positions as assistant winemaker at Chateau Potelle, winemaker at Vine Cliff, and director of winemaking of Paul Hobbs Wines. He feels that while he's dedicated most of his waking hours to wine, that he's never worked a day in his life. Each position he has taken was another step along the way to his own sueño.

In 1997, Rolando married Lorena, after more than a decade of friendship and courtship. Lorena is the oldest child of Reynaldo and Maria Robledo, who had also come to California as migrant workers in the late

1960s. Today, her family owns over 350 acres of vineyard land in Napa, Sonoma and Lake Counties. With a shared understanding of farming and wine, Rolando and Lorena produced 200 cases of Chardonnay later that year and launched Mi Sueño Winery as a side project. Originally intended as a “resume in a bottle” to entice investors, the wine garnered attention from friends and family who encouraged the couple to sell the bottles. The wine sold out three vintages in a row, and Rolando and Lorena realized they did not need outside investors to make their dream come true.

Farming and winemaking philosophy



Rolando and Lorena have never understood why winemakers typically outsource the most important job of all—farming the land and caring for the grapes. They decided to take matters into their own hands to control 100% of their winemaking, from farming to bottle, and founded Herrera Vineyard Management in 2003. They also launched an ultra-premium label that same year, Herrera Wines, with each micro-bottling dedicated to one of their six children.

“We are vintners that practice the good old traditional way. We work on our land, we are the farmers, the growers, and the winemakers. We have 100% control, which is something that is becoming increasingly difficult for wineries that are our size,” says Rolando.

With their full-time crew of highly trained and skilled workers, Rolando and Lorena farm 40 acres of estate vineyards in their favorite appellations including Oak Knoll, Coombsville, Los Carneros, Russian River Valley, and Sonoma Mountain. In 2016, they purchased a property on Mt. Veeder, which they will devote in the coming years to the varietals in the Herrera portfolio.

Stylistically, Rolando and Lorena say that they like to take what Mother Nature has given them in California, and strive to sustainably grow the best possible grapes—those that have achieved phenolic ripeness at the lowest brix possible, ideal for their goal of producing distinctly balanced wines. They are able to achieve this by adapting farming methods—be it row orientation, clonal selection, canopy management, or irrigation—dependent on each vineyard site and each growing season. Rolando says that growing grapes is not science and rather likens it to parenting. “You have to be consistently present with your children to know what is going on in their lives. Even when you think you know them, they change. The same is true with growing grapes. Each growing season is different, and to be a good farmer, you must nurture and cultivate the fruit and spend as much time as possible in the vineyard. You have to be there. No growing season is the same, just like no stage in a child’s life is the same.”

Mi Sueño produces between 8,000 and 10,000 cases of wine per year. All wines are bottled unfined and unfiltered. Bottlings include Los Carneros Chardonnay (\$42), Sonoma Mountain Chardonnay (\$55), Los

Carneros Pinot Noir (\$42), Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$55), Cabernet Sauvignon (\$75), Syrah (\$55), Tempranillo (\$55), and a red blend made of primarily Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, “El Llano” (\$49). Wines are available in select fine wine shops and restaurants across the country, and can be purchased directly from the tasting room or online at www.misuenowinery.com.

Under the Herrera label, Rolando and Lorena make a very limited production of ultra-premium wines named for their children. These wines, available only by joining the allocation list, include the Perla Chardonnay (\$70), Esmeralda Pinot Noir (\$70), Victoria Malbec (\$95), Valeria Petit Verdot (\$95), Rolando Jr. Cabernet Sauvignon (\$140), and Rebecca Cabernet Sauvignon (\$140).

It is immensely clear that the Herrera definition of success is not measured by retail prices or wine scores, but by the family’s ability to live and work according to their family’s values, heritage and traditions. And the dream continues—someday Rolando and Lorena hope to build a winery and tasting room on their newly purchased Mt. Veeder property up valley.

Visiting Mi Sueño



Latin culture and hospitality go hand in hand, and the Herreras enjoy entertaining as much as they enjoy making wine. These values emanate into each visitor experience at Mi Sueño Winery, providing an intimate tasting experience while giving a behind the scenes tour of the winery.

Located in the warehouse district of southern Napa at 910 Enterprise Way, tastings are available Monday-Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm by appointment. There are no gilded fences at the entrance to this winery—it is a working winery where guests will find memorable wines, great stories, and a chance run-in with the winemaker himself, who still comes to work each day with the same passion and dedication he brought with him into this country at the age of 15.

For more information about Mi Sueño, please visit www.misuenowinery.com