

Skinner Vineyards, Destiny and Determination Part 1

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Skinner Vineyards & Winery, resurrected by a chance encounter, is a family run winery, dedicated to crafting **Rhône-inspired wines**, with a nod to the vein of Gold Rush history that runs through it. Located in the **Sierra Foothills** of Northern California, Skinner has staked their claim, establishing themselves as a leader in the region. Committed to sustainable and organic winemaking, Skinner is mining their legacy, resurrecting grape varietals from the past, and giving back to the local community.

Skinner Vineyards is the amazing story of a family's journey back in time, to California's Gold Rush 150 years ago, with the discovery that the Skinner family tree held a pioneer of California winemaking. Los Angeles couple **Mike and Carey Skinner** loved wine, but with busy careers in insurance and real estate, never dreamt they would ever produce it themselves. Their son, Kevin, and his wife Kathy, unearthed this ancestral link to the past on a fateful road trip through Placerville in 2006. Seeing the Skinner name on a local map, the Skinners determined that they were related to James Skinner, a Scottish miner, lured by the promise of gold, but whose life turned to liquid assets. James, Mike's great-great-great grandfather, established one of the first bonded wineries in the area, J. Skinner Native Wine and Brandy, and pursued winemaking in the region from 1861 through the early 1900's. Compelled to recreate the family's legacy, Mike and Carey purchased 67 acres of land nearby in 2007, and sought professional help with winemaker Chris Pittenger. Together, they worked closely to design the new Skinner Vineyards and Winery, with the goal of creating "exceptional wine". Upon analysis of the vineyard soils, they chose to focus on Rhône varietals, since it was close to those of France's



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Rhône Valley, and today are producing a full lineup of red, white, and rosé **wines**.

Almost a decade old, Skinner is a work in progress. Minimalist in approach, they use native yeasts and no chemicals. While the **winery** is large, at 12,000 square feet, it's state-of-the-art, 100% solar powered, and water-wise, with recycled water for landscaping and a herd of goats to keep the native California plants and shrubs trimmed. El Dorado County has hundreds of microclimates, diverse soils, and almost 50 different varietals planted, from France, Italy, and Spain. Grenache and Mourvedre seem ideally suited to Skinner's terroir, but they are also resurrecting **Trousseau**, an obscure grape from France's Jura which was once planted in the Sierra Foothills. It makes a unique wine, a pale red that is light-bodied yet intense, floral, with a tannic grip.



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Skinner today has two **estate vineyards**, Stoney Creek and White Oak. Stoney Creek Vineyard, the original purchase, is steep (2,700 feet), with warm days and cool nights, the decomposed granite soils produce brighter, fresher wines with minerality and complexity. Eleven red and four white grape varietals are planted on the mountain at varying elevations, in fact, the **Fair Play AVA** holds the distinction of being the highest AVA in the country. The Skinners harvest every 10 feet in elevation, and keep the lots separate until it's time to blend, bringing different nuances to the finished wines. White Oak Vineyard, adjacent to the historic Skinner property, is in the **El Dorado AVA**, lower in elevation, and a former river bed, with a mix of soils from volcanic, clay, granite and quartz. The wines reflect this very different vineyard, more full and round in the mouth, five red and five white varietals are planted at this site. Skinner also purchases fruit from several vineyards in the **El Dorado AVA**, experimenting with different styles of wines. It's an exciting time for the Skinners, who hope to grow their brand nationwide, while continuing to sell direct to the consumer.

Continued in **Part 2**



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