



Kunin Wines

2007 SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SYRAH, CENTRAL COAST, CALIFORNIA

Committed to Elegant, Cool-climate Rhône Wines Sourced from Exceptional Central Coast Sites

For **Seth Kunin**, winemaker for his eponymous brand **Kunin Wines**, being chosen as one of *Wine Business Monthly's* Hot Brands was surprising, not because he didn't believe in his graceful, cool-climate wines, but because he has seen recent press reports decrying the state of Syrah sales and the marketplace malaise toward Rhône varieties.

As a 15-year-old Central Coast winery known for elegant Syrah and other Rhône varieties, it never occurred that he might be considered hot.

"We're small and we are still under the radar for a lot of people," said Kunin. "But I'm thrilled to be included and maybe get people to re-think small-production Rhône varieties in California."

Kunin, a New York native who moved to Los Angeles and then Santa Barbara to work in high-end restaurants, was drawn to the wine industry in the mid-1990s. After a few years in the cellar at **Gainey Winery** in the Santa Ynez Valley, he launched his own brand.

His wine choices, though, immediately set him apart. "Most of the people at that time in Santa Barbara were focusing on Pinot Noir or Chardonnay, what this area was known for originally. I felt like I'd just be one more of the masses if I jumped in on that bandwagon," said Kunin.

"I started searching for vineyard sites that I thought would allow me to make the kind of wines I wanted to make," he said. "At the time, it was very en vogue to make these ginormous, big, fruit-forward wines. [Critics] were focused on big Barossa Valley Shirazes and big extracted wines from the North Coast of California. In my mind, I had this benchmark of these Northern Rhône Syrahs and more elegant wines. So I was searching for cooler climate sites for Syrah, and Syrah in Santa Barbara County was just being developed."

While Kunin was finding high-quality Syrah sites from several vineyards in the region, he knew from his restaurant experience that he would have to be focused in his approach. "Nobody's going to put four different Syrahs from the same producer on a wine list, probably," he said. He opted for a Santa Barbara County Syrah blend and one vineyard-designated Syrah. "I realized at the level I was, it was okay if the mass market was still focused on these bigger wines. For me, as long as enough people got what I was doing and shared my appreciation for that elegant balance, Old World-style wine, there was a spot for them."

From the very first vintage, the Santa Barbara County Syrah has been crafted with fruit from three vineyard sites: **Alisos Vineyard** in Los Alamos Valley, **Larner Vineyards** in Ballard Canyon and **Paradise Road Vineyard** on an old Spanish land grant property in eastern Santa Ynez Valley. He believes the sites are an ideal match for his winemaking philosophy.

"People have this image of Santa Barbara as being part of Southern California, with palm trees and beaches and all that stuff. But we're

the coolest area of California, and we're over 1,000-degree days cooler than Napa Valley," he said. "Our growing season is phenomenally long. I frequently pick Rhône varieties into the first week of November. Our bud break is basically at the same time as the North Coast, so we have this very long, cool, moderated growing season that allows for a lot of good acid retention and a lot of flavor development and phenolic development in the grapes that I think you don't see in certain other places."

To maintain structure and acidity, as well as the "smoky, meatier, spicy flavors of cold-climate Syrah," Kunin picks the wines as early as possible. Then the wines spend 10 to 12 months on oak (with a program of around 20 to 30 percent new oak) before being bottled.

"We do capture that intensity of youth and that sense of terroir, I believe, but the downside is that the wines go in the bottle a bit unresolved and a bit backwards because they have a decent amount of tannin and acid," said Kunin. To give the wine time to age and "resolve themselves," the winery cellars them for several years before being released.

"One of the best compliments I've ever gotten was from someone at a tasting. They said they liked the wines because they found them to be honest," said Kunin. "I had not used that word to describe the wines before, but it resonated with me and I was really happy that someone said that. I think they are honest. For better or for worse, they represent what I think is great wine, what I think is a great site. You can taste the wines from the same vines every year; it's the same yeast, it's the same winemaker doing the work. But every vintage is really different. I am not trying to manipulate the wine into some style; I am trying to let them be themselves. I want them to be that vintage, that vineyard, that grape. I am just shepherding it along."



Price	\$30
Case Production	490 cases
Blend	100% Syrah
pH	3.74
TA	5.93 g/L
Brix	24.7°
Residual Sugar	N/A
Alcohol	14.60%