

VILLA^{MT.} EDEN[®]

ARMANDO DE SANTIAGO WINEMAKER

When Armando De Santiago first tasted wine in 1996, he could hardly imagine that sampling wines from 300 different barrels would one day be part of his job. Then again, this soft-spoken, modern-day Renaissance man's life had taken him down many winding paths before.

Armando grew up in Zacatecas, Mexico, where as a child he would help his aunt by saddling up a horse and taking lunch to his grandfather working 10 miles away. His family moved to Baja California when he was a teenager and it was there that Armando earned a degree in Chemistry. While in school, Armando also studied theology for a time before getting his certification in naturopathy, an alternative medicine that emphasizes the body's intrinsic ability to heal and maintain itself. It was at his graduation dinner that Armando sipped the glass of wine that would change the course of his career and his life.

Not long after, Armando moved to the Napa Valley, where he used his chemistry degree to land a job as a lab technician at Conn Creek Winery. His precision, work ethic, dedication and curiosity helped him to advance to enologist and then to the position of assistant winemaker. As he began taking on winemaking responsibilities at sister winery Villa Mt. Eden, more of his time was spent in the cellar, tasting – as opposed to testing – the wine. Working side-by-side with longtime Villa Mt. Eden winemaker Mike McGrath, his palate developed along with his career and Armando quickly learned the ropes both in the winery and in the vineyard.

Today, as Villa Mt. Eden's winemaker, Armando carries forward a 130-year tradition of winemaking that results in lush, elegant, award-winning wines. With his varied expertise in chemistry, naturopathy and theology, Armando is fascinated with how wine represents an intersection of disciplines. "What captivates me is that winemaking is part science, part art, part culture and even part nutrition," he says. In a way, perhaps he never changed careers at all, he just kept adding them.



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