

Vintner Virtuoso

Longtime vino lover Russell
Bevan crafts world-class wines.

| BY BILL WARD





A few months ago, Russell Bevan's phone rang. Renowned wine critic Robert Parker was on the line, hoping to buy a couple cases of Bevan Cellars Pinot Noir. He was headed to Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, the most esteemed winery in Burgundy, France, for a three-day event. After evenings with 50 vintages of the winery's La Tâche and Romanée-Conti, the DRC folks wanted Parker to pour "eight Pinot Noirs from around the world that represent the best of each area."

"Now it's cool getting 100-pointers from Parker, and that's been a difference maker for us," Bevan explains. "But having Robert Parker say he wants to take your Pinot to represent California at Romanée-Conti, that he wants to pop your bottles at DRC — I got shivers."

Not bad for a guy who two decades ago was a Twin Cities dental-equipment salesman by day, an exuberant member of "the greatest wine posse ever" by night. He still explores the world's best wines with said posse (they gathered last spring in California), but now Bevan is making some of those coveted vinos.

He started crafting wines in 2004, five years after he and fiancée Victoria De Crescenzo moved from Minneapolis to his native California. Vintner Kal Showket thought their 10-acre Sonoma property had vineyard potential and gave them some Cabernet Sauvignon just for kicks (or rather, stomps).

After 15 friends spent 12 hours sorting the fruit by hand ("plump grapes in one bin, slightly bruised in another and desiccated ones in a third") and the grapes fermented for five days, "they were so completely different, I was hooked," recalls Bevan.

In short order he became winemaker at Dry Stack and Showket — a role he now fills with Chase Cellars, Château Boswell, Westerhold and his eponymous winery. Bevan Cellars Tin Box Vineyard Red was the only 2011 California wine to earn 100 points in Parker's *Wine Advocate*, and at the 2013 Premiere Napa Valley auction, a 10-case lot of Bevan Cellars and Château Boswell reds fetched the highest bid of \$75,000.

"Our wines are huge but seductive," Bevan says. "I want them to be big and massive, full of flavor and purity and passion. I want them to have verve and energy." Mission accomplished.

But as his cellar master, Iowa native Allison Nunnikhoven, notes, "They're also soft, inviting and cheerful." Just like the vintner himself. **AL**