

# A Brief History of Larry Brooks

Or

## *What Makes a Winemaker?*

While some in the new world subscribe to the idea that winemaking can be learned in school, there is ample evidence that this theory is wrong. What Flaubert called a sentimental education is far more important. Wine is made as much with the heart as with the head. So to understand a winemaker's style it is crucial to review aesthetic as well as intellectual development.

Charles Baudelaire, in attempting to explain his upbringing said that his pram was parked next to a bookcase and he spent his childhood living in the land of the imagination. Larry's family made a similar mistake when they first took him to a library. Most of his 1950's childhood was spent with his nose in a book and the balance in the daydreams they engendered. Given that Larry's parents were both technocrats, it seems only natural that he was attracted to Science as well as Literature. In a family of engineers, chemists, and physicists his interest in the live sciences was unusual but accepted. The tolerance for complexity and mystery that is inherent in the study of Biology made a good training ground for a winemaker. He got a BA in Botany from Rutgers University, but what was more important by far was the minor in Art History. At the time, Larry thought he was studying Art because the girls were prettier and the parties were wilder in the Art department than in the science departments. Little did he know, these early studies in aesthetic analysis unwittingly prepared him for the type of intuitive decisions that are at the heart of winemaking. The parties were good training as well for life in general.

An equally whimsical decision led him to UC Davis for his graduate work. The catalog for the graduate school had an illustration of a racing bicycle on the cover. Larry loved bikes and that was all it took for him to bid farewell forever to the eastern seaboard. While obtaining his MS in Plant Pathology at Davis, Larry was introduced to two things that would help shape the rest of his life: his future wife Alexis and California wine. Little of what followed would have been possible without her forbearance and help. Also at this time he was briefly housed in the same building as the Enology department, but had no inkling that his path would lead him back there five years later.

After working a variety of jobs post scholastic, Larry had a fateful meeting with Mike Richmond, Acacia's founder and Larry's first mentor in wine. This led to the many happy years at Acacia working as a cellar worker, lab rat, assistant winemaker, winemaker, and ultimately general manager. After 19 years at Acacia, Larry briefly experimented with corporate life at Chalone. During this three-year interlude as an executive, Larry founded Echelon and managed Chalone's many wineries and vineyards.

Over the last few years, Larry has run a consulting practice out of a cozy office in downtown Napa. In the Fall of 2005, a relationship was founded with Windy Ridge. Larry is now the consulting winemaker for this brand which specializes in wines that are carefully selected from the finest appellations that California has to offer – wines that reflect their unique terroir and distinctive flavors as well as being a truly remarkable value.