



MARTINELLI VINEYARDS & WINERY

RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY

Winemaker: **Helen Turley**
Assistant Winemaker: **Bryan Kvamme**

The Martinelli family has been growing grapes in the Russian River Valley since 1887. At the ages of 19 and 16, Giuseppe Martinelli and Luisa Vellutini eloped from their small village in the Tuscany region of Italy, making their way to California looking for land to farm and start a winery. Giuseppe had been a winemaker in Italy and with his viticultural knowledge he was hired to plant a vineyard for a farmer in Forestville. Within two years he earned enough money, and borrowed some from a local wood cutter, to purchase some land. Working side by side on a 60 degree slope, Giuseppe and Luisa planted a small area of Zinfandel and Muscat Alexandria vines, which later became known as the Jackass Hill vineyard. Over 100 years later, this south easterly exposure remains the steepest non-terraced vineyard in Sonoma County.

In 1918 Giuseppe died, leaving Luisa with four children and the farm to care for. Their youngest son, Leno was twelve years old at the time and had wanted no other career in life than to be a farmer. Leno's two older brothers wanted nothing to do with the impossibly steep hillside so after completing the eighth grade, Leno finished school and took on the sole responsibility of farming the Zinfandel vineyard. His family told him that only a jackass would farm a hill that steep. Hence, he and his vineyard earned the name Jackass. Leno received all of his farming knowledge from his parents and through his own lifelong experience of tending the vines the way his father had. He even continued using a horse and plow until 1949. At the age of 89, Leno decided to hang up the keys to his John Deere, and handed the

vineyard over to his son, Lee Sr. Following the family tradition, Lee introduced to vineyard work at the age of seven, performing all seasonal tasks necessary and learning the old viticultural practices handed down through the generations.

In 1973 Lee Sr. took over management of his Uncle Tony Bondi's estate, which was comprised mainly of apple orchards, and began planting vineyards in the rich soil of the Russian River Valley. Soon considered a premium grape grower, Lee's fruit was in great demand from many wineries. Realizing the exceptional potential to create superb wines from these grapes, Lee and his wife, Carolyn, decided to start their own winery. Two old historic hop barns that grace the property have been converted into the wine making facility and tasting room, keeping with the original feel and structure of the centurion buildings.

Twenty years later in 1993, Lee and Carolyn met and befriended Helen Turley on a dusty road in the middle of nowhere. They discovered that they were vineyard neighbors; Helen's Marcassin vineyard rests on the same ridge as the Martinelli's Charles Ranch vineyard along the Sonoma Coast. Soon they began working with Helen professionally, and she introduced new viticultural and cellar practices to the Martinelli family. The winery's new vineyards are all planted with the professional consultation and specifications of John Wetlaufer and Helen Turley. Lee Sr. and his two sons, Lee Jr. and George, do all of the farming, keeping the business traditionally family owned and operated. Helen Turley is the winemaker and Bryan Kvamme is assistant winemaker.