



**NIELS & BIMMER UDSEN
OWNERS/FOUNDERS**

The creation of Castoro Cellars has been an organic process for Niels and Bimmer Udsen. Both view wine as an integral part of the daily meal and hold strongly to the belief that quality wine should be available to all wine consumers. Both share a deep respect for the land and a desire to encourage stewardship of the environment. Thus, Niels and Bimmer have structured Castoro Cellars to reflect their values, and have developed an approachable and environmentally conscious brand.

Niels' father was a native of Denmark who immigrated to America in the late 1940s. A farmer turned successful businessman, he taught Niels about both the agricultural and business worlds. The two made many trips from their home in Ventura, California, to Denmark. During one of their first trips, Niels was introduced to Bimmer; he was 8 years old, she was 6. Upon returning to Denmark at the age of 14, Niels learned to make wine under the tutelage of his future father-in-law, setting the precedence for what was yet to come.

Throughout their childhoods, both Niels and Bimmer experienced wine as a casual, yet essential, part of the family meal. This feeling was perpetuated when Niels lived in Italy for a year after high school, immersing himself in a culture where wine was enjoyed without pretense.

Upon ending his year abroad, Niels returned to the United States to study Agricultural Business Management at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. A senior marketing project for a local winery studying the feasibility of growing grapes to earn a family income further sparked Niels' interest in the wine industry.

Niels and Bimmer were married in 1981 and, soon after, Niels began working in the wine cellar of Estrella River Winery. For the next five years, under the direction of Estrella's then winemaker, Tom Myers, he learned all aspects of winemaking from the ground up. The Paso Robles AVA was still in its infancy for winery development and Niels took advantage of working with a leading winery in the developing region.

In 1983, Niels and Bimmer decided to launch their own brand. The Castoro Cellars label was established with a laid-back, warm and welcoming style. Showcasing their sense of humor, the winery was named for the Italian translation of Niels' long-time nickname, "Beaver," thus prompting the motto "Dam Fine Wine."

At first Niels made the wine in his spare time, while still working at Estrella River Winery. Bimmer sold and delivered the wine and managed the bookkeeping, all the while attending the local junior college. By 1985, the brand had become so successful that Niels left Estrella River Winery to concentrate fully on the Castoro brand. Production grew over the next few years from 1,000 cases to 3,000 cases.

“Originally, we just wanted to make wine for our friends so that they could enjoy great wine more often without having to pay half a day’s wage for the experience,” says Niels. “Soon, however, our list of ‘friends’ grew and our backyard wine business became the real thing.”

Niels and Bimmer owned no vineyard or winery building at that time, so they purchased grapes from over 40 different vineyards and leased the facilities necessary to make the wine. The variety of vineyards offered great flexibility for producing a consistently high quality product every year. That consistency has held strong over the years, as Castoro Cellars has methodically carved a comfortable niche in the wine market.

Niels developed another niche during that period. His keen eye for business identified the Central Coast wineries’ need for “custom-crush” services. Many wineries were too small to own crushing equipment and many did not have on-premise machinery to bottle the finished wine. Accordingly, Niels purchased a large Europress for the small wineries to lease. He also developed a mobile bottling line that could be transported to winery sites. Now, instead of having to send grapes and/or finished wine to other parts of California, wineries had a local source.

“Our custom-crush operation serves dual purposes,” says Niels. “Not only has it been a good business investment, it has also enabled us to buy better equipment than our brand, by itself, could justify. Through this diversity in our business portfolio, we are able to take advantage of state-of-the-art equipment, and thus create a superior product.”

Over the years, the Castoro Cellars has added staff, equipment, facilities and vineyards. Explains Niels, “We took the backwards approach to owning a winery. We started with the product, slowly bought equipment, opened a tasting room, and eventually bought the winery site, planted grapes and purchased existing vineyards.”

Essential to the development of the brand, Niels and Bimmer have structured Castoro Cellars to reflect their own personalities and values. With two sons, Luke and Max, family is the top priority and Niels and Bimmer devote numerous hours to supporting school groups, educational endeavors, and sports teams. They offer a family-friendly tasting room, serving alcohol-free Zinfandel Grape Juice. Additionally, they offer their employees a business environment that understands the flexibility necessary for raising a family.

Avid outdoors people, Niels and Bimmer believe in being good stewards of the land. “Our entire staff consists of nature enthusiasts. From hiking to rock climbing to rafting, we enjoy all that our surrounding environment offers and want to protect it,” explains Bimmer.

The Udsens have translated this respect for the environment into sustainable practices for their winery and vineyards, including the implementation of various responsible farming practices and the cultivation of three organic vineyards. Other efforts include the placement of recycle bins throughout the winery and the replacement of paper towels with air dryers.

Castoro Cellars is now one of the oldest wineries in the region. Demonstrating his long-standing devotion to the local winegrowing community, Niels has mentored and offered support to a number of emerging growers and winemakers. He is the current Chair of the Paso Robles Zinfandel Festival, the Vice Chair and Director of the Paso Robles Vintners & Growers’ Association (PRVGA), a Board Member for Family Winemakers and an active member of the AVA, the Wine Institute and the Central Coast Wine Growers’ Association (CCWGA).