



Keeling Schaefer
V I N E Y A R D S

We Got Started

in 1995 when we became interested in the fledgling wine industry in Arizona. Thinking about our future, our retirement, we began making wine from kits in our garage in Tempe. It didn't work out too well!

So we graduated to using real grapes purchased from Al Buhl's vineyard in Willcox, AZ. That wine was actually drinkable. Our future decided! We then made a plan to find property, plant a vineyard and begin producing our own estate bottled wine.

With the acquisition of a parcel of land along the north bank of Rock Creek in the foothills of the beautiful Chiricahua range, we created a blueprint for vineyards, living quarters and winemaking facilities. By 2003 we had ordered our first grapevines to be planted the following year.



At this time we were both still employed full time, Rod as President of the Downtown Tempe Community and Jan as Tempe's Economic Development Director. Weekends meant traveling to the vineyard after work on Fridays, doing fieldwork, then getting up at 3am Monday, donning our business suits and driving back to Tempe so we could be at work that morning. It was a lot!



Jan's retirement from the city in 2004, meant much of the administrative paperwork and permit filing could now be handled, moving us closer to getting the approvals we needed to do business in the liquor industry. We still traveled each weekend to the vineyard to train and prune the vines, battle the weeds, and oversee the irrigation system.

We finally had a real bed, a small kitchen and a shower in the small on-site apartment. A big improvement over the air mattress, hot plate, and having to shower with a hose in the crush room.

Our First Harvest

was in 2005 from vines planted the year prior. A small harvest, yet enough to produce and bottle wine. Eighteen months later our first vintage, Keeling Schaefer Two Reds Grenache, was offered. Thus beginning our sales operation in 2007.

How to market our wines? We started by pursuing space in the prestigious wine section of AJ's, an upscale subsidiary of the Bashas grocery chain. Their wine buyer in Tucson tasted our Syrah and Grenache and gave us our first retail opportunity! We also began attending house parties, festivals and other events to showcase and sell our wine.

While maintaining our focus on farming, wine production and marketing, we also needed to navigate the legal sales system for alcohol in the state of Arizona. In 2006, a contentious battle was waged in the State Legislature where Distributors challenged the rights of wine producers to sell directly to retailers and the public. As President of the Arizona Wine Growers Association, Rod was heavily involved in the legal process. The wine producers prevailed, paving the way for more robust growth in the Arizona wine industry.



With the addition of a new partner in 2007, friend and Tempe restaurateur Roger Egan, we added many more Rhone varietals onto his nearby 20 acres which eventually became our Rock Creek Vineyard. Roger's tireless contribution to KSV included preparing the property, planting, and harvesting. His business advice was invaluable and he helped us expand at a critical time.

In turn, we committed ourselves to acquire better equipment, upgrade our wine making facilities and set our sights on a retail space.



The Tasting Room

was the next big step for us while we were still working on construction of a full time residence at the vineyard. It was a tale of two buildings.



In 2008, we decided to purchase a historic property along Railroad Avenue in Willcox that would become our tasting room. The old Willcox Bank & Trust building dating from 1917 was in a state of disrepair and would require a lot of work to transform it into the retail space it is today. We restored the building ourselves, working diligently to maintain its National Register of Historic Places status. It opened in March of 2010.



Concurrently overseeing the construction of these two projects while adding acres of additional vines kept us plenty busy! In addition to the Syrah and Grenache grapes, we planted more Rhone varietals, including Viognier, PicPoul Blanc, Mourvedre, Shiraz, and Petit Sirah, enabling us to expand our offerings.

The house was finally completed during this time and we enjoyed our first night there on Christmas Eve of 2008.



2009 saw the start of our Wine Club where we hosted tasting events at the vineyard with food and tours of the property. This allowed us to grow our business further presenting new and returning customers with discounts and special offers. Soon we would be hosting events three times per year with up to 150 guests catered by the acclaimed Cafe Roka of Bisbee, Arizona. Preparing wine shipments for members is still a big part of our yearly business.

