



THE PEJU TASTING ROOM TOWER
An Entertaining Approach to Wine

Upon entering through the hand-crafted wooden doors of the new copper roofed, stone-faced tasting room tower at Peju Province Winery, visitors are greeted by one of the most well-appointed and architecturally appealing facilities in all of Napa Valley. With a soaring ceiling and a mezzanine, the large, open room houses a thorough selection of books on food, wine and Napa Valley history; crystal decanters and wineglasses, wine openers and accessories, local olive oils, custom made mustards, and other delectables, all lit by a massive, 1906 antique stained glass window.

Under a custom-crafted, 22 feet high by 10 feet wide chandelier, at the Brazilian cherry wood tasting bar, a group of visitors raise their glasses to sniff and swirl. But this is hardly the serious, quiet group usually found in such settings, these people are laughing, clapping and even singing with one of the most engaging personalities in the business, Alan Arnopole.

Alan is first and foremost an entertainer. He is part storyteller, singer/songwriter/guitar player and comedian who performs while pouring wine. Its part education, part entertainment and a lot of fun for everyone involved. "It didn't start out to be this way," Alan says. "I was tired of being on the road with my band, California Zephyr. I thought that by working in a tasting room, I could still interact with the public, but be home with my family at night, too."

When he first accepted the job with Peju in 1995, Alan took the typical approach, explaining the wines, making friendly comments, the occasional joke. But within the first month or two, he thought it would just be a lot more fun to bring his 30 years of professional musical life to the job.

Alan began playing music in the early '60s, influenced by folk groups such as Peter, Paul and Mary, the Kingston Trio and the Limelighters. After the "Summer of Love" his tastes became more diverse and he explored Cajun, rock blues and jug band music. "The great thing that America has given to the world," he says, "is the freedom to create new music. Country, bluegrass, jazz, soul and good old rock 'n roll all developed as people from different parts of society mixed together fusing cultures and ideas."

By his junior year in college, Alan knew that he wanted to dedicate his life to music and performing. A variety of gigs led to the formation of "Fine and Funky" a Sierra Mountains band that first recorded in 1975. He was

married that same year and after a series of solo gigs, a multi-media production of Woody Guthrie's life, and playing guitar in the movie "Bound for Glory" he founded California Zephyr, the band he plays with almost thirty years later.

"We were traveling minstrels," he says, "touring in a converted Greyhound, playing rodeos, county fairs, weddings, bars, anywhere they'd have us. It taught me a lot about this country and its people."

In 1989, he helped develop and produce the Napa Valley Music Festival which continued for ten years, and to this day heads an on-going, non-profit organization, which raises money to put music back into the schools in Napa County. With his years of experience and broad exposure to various styles, Alan says, "I like all kinds of music, even rap."

One of Alan's most improbable compositions, in fact, is a rap monologue (complete with "scratchin' ") describing the ancient geological formation of Napa Valley and what makes it an ideal environment for growing grapes. His writings include poetry describing the harvest or solitary vineyard walks, his songs and stories evoke a side of Napa Valley most visitors never see.

"I feel that I'm still on stage in the tasting room," he says. "Part of me has always been involved in putting on a show. I believe that the experience in a tasting room should be fun. It shouldn't be cut and dried. I want people to come on in and have a good time, taste the wine, enjoy themselves. I want people to remember their visit to Peju when they go home and drink the wine."

And while Alan may be the ringleader, he's not the only performer. Other tasting room employees get involved too, joining guests in the "Peju National Anthem" (sung to the tune of "Hey Jude"), playing a part with comedic set-ups or adding vocal harmonies. "But we don't forget the star of the show," he says. "Peju Province wines. The Peju family has been so supportive of this approach. They've created a wonderful environment here and tremendous wines which people really enjoy. All this is about the wine. I'm just glad I can use my background to bring the experience to people in such a joyful way."

The Peju Province Winery tasting room is open daily from 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., except on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. A \$10 tasting fee is refundable with purchase of wine. Telephone 707-963-3600.

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