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Donelan Family Wines—a Delicious Journey

(Santa Rosa, CA—Since its first vintage in 2009, Donelan Family Wines has produced the highest quality Rhône and Burgundian varietal wines from exceptional small-parcel vineyards in Sonoma County. Only the most attentive care goes into each and every wine that Donelan produces, from vineyard selection to small yields, gentle handling, attentive sorting and meticulous blending that captures the distinctive characteristics in each bottle. These highly sought-after wines are a definitive reflection of founder Joe Donelan's uncompromising pursuit of excellence, and his deep respect for his end consumer.

Donelan works specifically with cooler-climate vineyard sites located throughout Sonoma County, including the Knights Valley, Green Valley, and Russian River Valley. In 2015, the

Donelan family acquired their first estate vineyard, the Obsidian Vineyard located in Knights Valley, a vineyard from which they had previously sourced fruit for several years. “This is one of the most unique Syrah vineyards in California. It is in a bit of no-man’s land nearly straddling the Napa border, but it’s our most memorable Syrah, and we’re thrilled to have it as our bellwether vineyard,” says Joe Donelan.

The Donelan family is extremely selective in their choice of partners, and each vineyard owner must exhibit the commitment to high quality that is the hallmark of the Donelan family philosophy. Ever an optimist, Joe Donelan is the kind of guy who wears bright colors and who is sure that “maybe” means “yes.” Therefore, it comes as no surprise that he has been able to develop long-term and often exclusive lease agreements with some of the most unique vineyard sites in Sonoma County—Kobler, Richards, DeVoto and more. As a true wine lover who has traveled the world in search of memorable wines, Joe Donelan is not interested in working with popular and/or acclaimed vineyards from which every other wine producer sources. “It is like real-estate: if you have a great location, then you should be in good shape. We believe that the best wines are not made, they are discovered. Site really trumps all variables,” says Joe.

The winery and by-appointment tasting room is located in an unassuming building, nestled within an urban winemaking area of Santa Rosa. “What matters to our family most are our relationships with the vineyard owners and our clients. It is about what is in the bottle, and it has to be great. I’d opt to invest in another special vineyard site versus an ego winery any day,” Joe comments.

Stylistically, Donelan seeks great site expression and revels in vineyards that allow for great hang-time, while also preserving freshness and acid, which comes as a result of sites in the fringe areas. At the winery, winemaker Joe Nielsen engages in extensive blending trials, only selecting the best barrels—no matter the cost—for the single-vineyard bottlings.

Joe Donelan believes one builds a business based on trust. Donelan sells 80% of its wine to its mailing list. Whether a customer buys a bottle or several cases, he or she can count on receiving a handwritten note from him after each purchase. Tripp Donelan oversees all sales for the winery, and Cushing Donelan oversees marketing and is the host for a plethora of intimate wine dinners throughout the country.

Guests who visit the Donelan tasting room find that there is much more than meets the eye. More often than not, a family member or winemaker Joe Nielsen is present for part of the tasting, and guests are encouraged to engage and learn about the wines, the vineyard sources, and better than anything, absorb the collective passion that is woven in the fabric of Donelan Family Wines. “Our business lives and dies by word-of-mouth,” says Joe. “We ensure that if one of our guests tells a friend that they had a special experience with us, well, that friend will receive the same gratifying and engaging experience.”

The “Donelan Portfolio Tour & Tasting” lasts 60-minutes and includes a private tour of the production facility, as well as a flight of four current release wines that explore the breadth of Donelan’s portfolio of site-specific Burgundian and Rhône varietal wines. The 75-minute “Road Less Traveled Tour & Tasting” also includes an in-depth tour of the winery, as well as a comprehensive tasting of five of Donelan’s highly-allocated Rhône wines, including its limited-production, single-vineyard Syrah bottlings.

Tasting experiences are offered seven days a week between 10am and 4pm, by appointment only. The “Donelan Portfolio Tour & Tasting” is priced at \$35 per person, and the “Road Less Traveled Tour & Tasting” is priced at \$60 per person. Reservations may be made by e-mailing reservations@donelanwines.com or calling 707-591-0782, and advanced notice is requested.