

TRACEY ADAMS

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COURTESY WINFIELD GALLERY

RANDALL GRAHM

The Alchemist's Apprentice Winemaking as Personal Transformation

I became a winemaker and winery owner some thirty years before seemingly everyone else on the planet decided that they wanted to become one too. I was too young to experience the mid-sixties and its quixotic, neuro-expansive aspirations with full force. But there was still enough residual patchouli (and God knows what else) in the atmosphere in the early seventies to cense my sensibility with a healthy skepticism about following prescribed career paths, as well as to engender a naive optimism that, even in the absence of a plan, things would somehow work out. (In our current age, this seems like a belief system from antiquity.) I had studied philosophy and literature (and pre-med among other things) at University of California at Santa Cruz, with no career game plan in mind, and took my very sweet time in ultimately securing a diploma; this just drove my parents absolutely nuts, which was, of course, a secondary gain.

It is hard, at least for me at this remove, to even imagine how I could have simply let myself get carried along on life's surface—I was not the only *puer aeternus* of UCSC who floated like a jellyfish on the surf—but float I did for several years. I worked for my dad for a year in his wholesale tool and merchandise business. The one certainty I had was that his business—the buying and selling of general merchandise—was not for me. How could one become passionate about selling widgets, or care about the business deal *qua* deal? That was what seemed to get my dad up in the morning.

Can the winemaking life become a sort of spiritual path or an avenue for personal development? That was not how I thought of it when I began. It is hard to reconstruct where I thought I was headed when I began, but as a child of the sixties and seventies, especially in Northern California, a sparkly geode's throw from the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, the awareness of the human potential movement (think Abraham Maslow and Fritz Perls) was inculcated in the minds of my cultural and generational milieu. We were all going to have to eventually find jobs, of course, but we had to find jobs with Meaning.

While working on my undergraduate senior thesis on the Heideggerian notion of *Dasein* (never, alas, to be completed), I wandered into a swanky wine shop a few blocks from my parents' home in Beverly Hills. "Would you like to open a charge account?" I was asked the first time I