



Biography: Jim Clendenen



Jim Clendenen was born in Akron, Ohio to gastronomically impoverished parents during the culinary Dark Ages of the American 1950s. He graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara, with High Honors in Pre-Law in 1976. It was during his "junior year abroad" in 1974, while turning 21 in France, that he discovered life beyond tacos. After graduation, a one month stay in both Burgundy and Champagne convinced him to attempt a career in wine rather than continue on to law school.

Beginning with the 1978 harvest, Jim Clendenen was assistant winemaker at Zaca Mesa Winery for three vintages, a valued training experience. In 1981 his vision broadened with three harvests in one year as Jim worked crush and directed the harvest at wineries in Australia and France. Three harvests in one year confirmed his masochistic tendencies.

In 1982, Clendenen decided, along with Adam Tolmach, to start a winery dedicated to Burgundian varietals in leased quarters. Adam left in 1990 to pursue his own efforts leaving Jim solo at the helm. Through careful re-investment from its own production, Au Bon Climat (which means "a well exposed vineyard") has grown over its history to over 50,000 cases.

Au Bon Climat sources fruit from several of the most highly regarded vineyards in the Central Coast. These include Clendenen's own Le Bon Climat Vineyard and estate plantings at the legendary Bien Nacido Vineyard – both in Santa Maria Valley, Sanford & Benedict Vineyard in Sta. Rita Hills, Los Alamos Vineyard (Santa Barbara County), and San Luis Obispo County's Talley Vineyard.

The winery has cultivated an international reputation for its Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. Jim Clendenen, the "Mind Behind" Au Bon Climat, is recognized worldwide for his classically styled wines. In addition to his Burgundian-focused Au Bon Climat wines, Jim also established another brand, Clendenen Family Vineyards. This project of passion allows him to make artisan, small lots of distinctive wines from a wider spectrum of varieties in styles conducive to small lots. He has received high acclaim for Italian varietals particularly his Nebbiolo that has a five year aging regimen in barrel.

In 1989 and 1990 Au Bon Climat was on Robert Parker's short list of Best Wineries in the World, and in 1991 was selected by Oz Clark as one of fifty world-wide creators of Modern Classic Wines. Dan Berger of the *Los Angeles Times* named Clendenen the "Los Angeles Time Winemaker of the Year" in 1992; *Food & Wine* magazine named him "Winemaker of the Year" in 2001. Germany's leading wine

magazine, *Wein Gourmet*, in 2004 name Clendenen “Winemaker of the World;” and in 2007, Jim was inducted into the James Beard Foundation’s “Who’s Who of Food and Beverage in America.”