



**NICKEL & NICKEL:  
A SINGLE-MINDED COMMITMENT TO VINEYARD-DESIGNATED WINES**

**Oakville, CA** -- The wineries dotted along the flat, tidy expanse of the Napa Valley appellation of Oakville are celebrated for producing world-class Cabernet Sauvignon and other varietal wines. In fact, the region's vineyards are some of the most coveted in the valley. The Nickel & Nickel winery, founded in 1997 but born from a tradition of exceptional winemaking, is devoted to creating wines that articulate the singular expressions of the vineyards in Oakville and beyond.

Established by the partners of Far Niente, Nickel & Nickel is based on a philosophy of producing 100 percent varietal, single-vineyard wines that best express the distinct personality of each vineyard. The winery's current releases include Napa Valley Chardonnay, Merlot, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as Russian River Valley Chardonnay, Syrah and Zinfandel from Sonoma.

Nickel & Nickel represents a distinct departure from the flagship Far Niente estate wines that are produced from a combination of vineyards and varietals. The partners also felt it necessary to have a winemaker devoted to each winery – Far Niente, Dolce and Nickel & Nickel -- in order to produce the quality wines that are their hallmark. These factors, along with a noticeable upsurge in the market's interest in vineyard-designated wines, led to the launch of Nickel & Nickel as a separate brand.

“We felt strongly that you need a winemaker to be completely involved to make a wine like Far Niente. Great wine has to have a point of view, which has to come from the winemaker – it's a natural extension. How can that happen without the focus of the winemaker?” says Dirk Hampson, president and director of winemaking, explaining the motivation behind launching Nickel & Nickel as its own entity, rather than combining the vineyard-designated wines under the Far Niente label.

“On the other hand, we have lots of other ideas that fascinate us. Nickel & Nickel allows us to grow intellectually. By being devoted solely to producing 100 percent varietal, single-vineyard wines, Nickel & Nickel will provide consumers with more of an understanding about wine, and the grapes and vineyards that it comes from,” says Hampson.

Eighteen Nickel & Nickel wines are currently in national distribution, including single-vineyard Chardonnay, Merlot, Zinfandel, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Although the winery is located on the Sullenger farmstead in Oakville, Nickel & Nickel works with vineyards from many different parts of the Napa Valley and Sonoma.

Winemaker Darice Spinelli, in addition to making each wine, is an integral member of the team that sources vineyards to meet the production plans. “We’re not just seeking out any vineyard. Every aspect of each vineyard must be top-notch, including the soil and the climate, but we also want to know the site is proven ground. We look at who the neighbors are, who is the vineyard manager, and will that grower be willing to do whatever it takes to make the best of the vineyard,” comments Spinelli. “Our goal is not to interfere with the vineyards to make the wines taste the way we want them to. Rather, we consider it our job to accentuate the vineyard and play up the special characteristics of each site, whether we’re dealing with ten rows or ten acres,” she says.

While it is tempting to use the term “terroir” when describing the winemaking focus for Nickel & Nickel, Hampson hesitates. “People in the United States tend to define ‘terroir’ as if it’s a physical address, which misses the point. True terroir only comes with a relationship over time with the land. We have to understand the subtleties of its personality, and take a journey over several vintages to learn how to get the best from the vineyard,” says Hampson.

Producing single-vineyard, single-varietal wines presents a real winemaking challenge, since, by definition, the winemaker cannot blend to enhance the final wine. But it is the challenge that keeps things interesting. “We’re in a stage of discovery. The vineyards will slowly reveal themselves, but one discovery always brings a whole new set of questions,” comments Hampson.

### **Winery Construction and Historic Restoration**

The opportunity for creative expression through Nickel & Nickel touches not just on the winemaking, but also the facility being built to produce the wines. The winery is located on the historic, 19th century John C. Sullenger farmstead, a 42-acre vineyard property situated directly north of Opus One and across Highway 29 from the Robert Mondavi Winery. The partners bought the property in 1998 specifically for Nickel & Nickel. The project broke ground in June 2001, and the first crush was held at the new winery in 2002. Construction of the project was completed in the summer of 2003, at which time Nickel & Nickel opened its doors to the public, by appointment.

The program involved extensive historic restoration and construction, including the preservation of the Queen Anne-style home and barns on the property that were built in the 1880s by John C. Sullenger, the original landholder. Although a state-of-the-art winery has been built, the original look and appeal of the 19th century American farmstead buildings was restored, such that the casual observer might not realize the property houses a cutting-edge winemaking operation.

The unique architectural design allows for the co-existence of the old buildings with the new winery. A 30,000 square-foot barrel cellar and press area has been dug underground and connects to an aboveground fermentation barn. Radiant cooling in the floor and ceiling envelops the entire cellar, providing constant temperature control.

“We had the opportunity to design the dream winery,” says Spinelli, “and the phenomenal commitment to quality on behalf of Far Niente was extended by the partners to Nickel & Nickel. With every technique we use, and every piece of equipment we incorporate into the winery design, what matters most is what ends up in the bottle.”

A circa 1770 barn from New England was moved to Nickel & Nickel to house production offices. Called the Gleason Barn, after the family who built it in the 18th century, the structure is composed of hand-hewn pine and hemlock beams; century-old pine siding, weathered to a rich, barn-red patina, covers the exterior.

The historic 19th century farmhouse located on the grounds has been restored for use as guest reception and hospitality. The pair of 1880s American farmstead-style barns existing on the site will be renovated and used for dry goods storage.