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## JOURNAL REPORTS: RETIREMENT

# At Last, Becoming a Winemaker

Roger Beery, 59, indulges a lifelong passion by starting J. Cage Cellars



Winemaking has become a passion not just for Roger Beery, second from left, but for his daughter, Whitney, son, Conch, and wife, Donna. PHOTO: JAMES REDDICK

By *Julie Halpert*

Updated Nov. 27, 2016 10:38 p.m. ET

Roger Beery's lifelong fascination with wine began as a teenager, watching "The Galloping Gourmet." The show's host, Graham Kerr, he says, would sometimes invite an attractive woman from the audience to share a glass of wine with him at a bistro table.

"I thought if it works for Graham Kerr, maybe it would work for me," jokes Mr. Beery, now 59.

It would be well into his adulthood, however, before the budding oenologist was fully able to indulge his passion. Indeed, Mr. Beery had a long and successful career in insurance consulting before taking the first steps to turn his interest in winemaking into something more than just a hobby.

Back in 1980, while in the Graduate School of Business at University of Texas at Austin, Mr. Beery started a business providing risk-management and insurance consulting. He later moved the company, Austin Consulting Group, to Breckenridge, Colo., where he had a second home. Fine wines and their making, however, were seldom far from his thoughts.

He first visited a vineyard in California's Sonoma Valley in 1983. Though it was a rainy day, the owner took him on a personal tour of the entire operation. Four hours later, Mr. Beery says, "I had a whole new appreciation of wine and what went into it, the agricultural piece, the art piece."

Afterward, he began collecting wine. Wine cellars, ranging from 400 to 1,000 bottles, became a fixture in each home where he lived. In 2009 started a blog about wine, Bacchus and Beery. ("Don't be confused," the blog tells readers. "Our last name just happens to be Beery and the wine blog is about our family's love affair with wine.")

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It wasn't until 2014, however, that Mr. Beery finally put a toe into making wine commercially.

Insurance consulting no longer inspired him, he says. "I knew I had to do something in retirement to lift and fill my soul." So, in June of that year, he launched J. Cage Cellars, based in Healdsburg, Calif., in northern Sonoma County.

"It was scary and exciting simultaneously," he says of his decision to leave one business for another. "When you build a company from scratch, even if you're ready to let it go, it's a big part of your identity."

A career coach helped him navigate the transition, he says. For the first year, he kept the insurance business and used his personal savings to begin assembling the pieces he would need to start his own wine business. His plan was not to actually own a vineyard, but to source top-quality grapes from the region, and make his wine at an existing winery where he could use their equipment and personnel at harvest time.

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 ROGER BEERY
 

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**Age:** 59**Hometown:** Austin, Texas**Primary career:** Risk management and insurance consulting**Current path:** Winemaker

**Why this path:** “How many millions of people visit the wine country and say, ‘If I had it to do all over again, I would love to be a winemaker’? I figured out how to do it, and it’s as good as you think it’s going to be.”

He produced 240 cases that first year—enough to show him his plan would work. He sold the insurance business the following year, and he hasn’t looked back.

Today, J. Cage’s wines are served in a few farm-to-table restaurants, but the majority are sold online and through private tastings. Typically, he sells as much as he makes. He and his wife, Donna, reside most of the year in Austin but spend the harvest and winemaking period, August through October, in Healdsburg.

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There have been challenges. “I have this business partner named Mother Nature who is unpredictable and threw us a bunch of curveballs,” he says, referring to some bad weather in 2015. But, Mr. Beery says, the

perks of the job more than outweigh the setbacks. “Winemaking brings together art and soul and science in an amazing way,” he says.

Mr. Beery’s enthusiasm has rubbed off on his children. His son, Conch, 27, works full time at a nearby winery and directs the production at J. Cage Cellars. Mr. Beery’s daughter, Whitney, 25, works in hospitality at another nearby winery but helps with marketing for J. Cage.

“It makes me happy that they share my passion,” Mr. Beery says. “It’s great to create something that your family can be involved in and everybody brings a different piece to the puzzle.”

*Second Acts looks at the varied paths people are taking in their 50s and beyond. Ms. Halpert is a writer in Michigan. You can reach her, and let us know how you’re starting over, at [reports@wsj.com](mailto:reports@wsj.com).*

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