



## ELIAS FERNANDEZ, WINEMAKER

Elias Fernandez has been making wine at Shafer Vineyards for 40 years, forging the winery's style of opulence, balance, and elegance.

Few winemakers are as deeply connected to Napa Valley as Elias. One of his grandfathers helped build the landmark Vintage 1870 in Yountville. Elias's parents were both farmworkers in Napa Valley orchards and vineyards. He grew up here in the 1960s and 1970s, attending St. Helena High School, where he excelled academically while playing trumpet in the band and running track. His early achievements in music earned him a Fulbright scholarship.

A year into college, in 1981, he changed his major to winemaking at U.C. Davis.

"I went from studying music to science," he says, recalling the difficulty of the switch. His first chemistry class was held in an auditorium with 1,000 other students. "It was overwhelming," he says. "You have to remember where I came from, my graduating class at St. Helena High was just over 100 kids."

During his college years, Fernandez grew more knowledgeable through internships at local wineries including Schramsberg Vineyards, Louis Martini Winery, and Cuvaison.

Three weeks before graduation, in 1984, he was hired as assistant winemaker at Shafer Vineyards working with Doug Shafer.



The winery was then just five years old. The following ten years at Shafer were some of the most challenging of his life.

"We were still learning how a winery works — how to crush, how to get the juice into the tank, how to get it out," he recalls. "Thank God we were young because we worked ourselves to death."

For several years Elias shared co-winemaker duties with Doug Shafer. In 1994 when Doug became winery president Elias took on the winemaker title with all of its duties.

Numerous accolades followed recognizing Elias's talent and constant focus on achieving the absolute best in the vineyard and cellar. In 2002 both *Quarterly Review of Wines* and *Food & Wine* magazine named Elias "Winemaker of the Year." Shafer Vineyards was selected as one of the "25 Great Vineyards in the World" by *Wine & Spirits* magazine.

On October 2, 2002 Elias was recognized at the White House as a leader in the Latino community at a reception hosted by President George W. Bush.

In 2012, Shafer's 2008 Relentless — a wine we named to honor Elias — was named Wine of the Year by *Wine Spectator* magazine.

Elias has always been, and remains, relentless in his pursuit of the absolute best in the vineyard and cellar. His unyielding commitment to always aim higher inspires all of us at Shafer.