

BILL AND JOAN SMITH

Luck and timing led Bill and Joan Smith into the wine business: enthusiasm, perseverance, and good advice from a few talented friends facilitated their success as world-class producers. A wrong turn while trying to visit Chappellet Vineyard led Bill Smith to discover and purchase the historic ghost winery, La Jota Vineyard Co., including 40 acres on top of Howell Mountain in the Napa Valley. Two years later, in 1976, Bill and his new wife, Joan, spent their honeymoon planting the first 2 acres of vines, which would grow to 28 acres by 1978. After a few classes in home winemaking at UC Davis for Bill, a lot of experimenting, and some priceless mentoring from friend and Howell Mountain neighbor Randy Dunn, the Smiths produced La Jota Vineyard's first Cabernet Sauvignon vintage in 1982. When their release letter produced only 10 orders, Joan packed up a basket of wine, scheduled appointments, and went out to sell. Flush with the success of her first day, Joan continued



to personally sell La Jota for the next 20 years. The couple went

on to garner much attention and received many accolades—including being listed as #2 on Robert Parker's roster of "heroes" in the December 1994 issue of *The Wine Advocate*. The ultimate compliment—Markham Vineyards purchased the highly successful La Jota Vineyard Co. in 2001.



Curious by nature and eager to embrace new adventures, it didn't take much for friend and winemaker Helen Turley to inspire in Bill the desire to try his hand at Pinot Noir. In 1992, under a new W. H. Smith Wines label, the Smiths released their first vintage of Sonoma County Pinot Noir. Passionate for Pinot, in 1994 Bill and Joan purchased 360 acres along the Sonoma Coast on a ridge high above the town of Cazadero. The first vintage of Maritime Ridge Vineyards—the Smiths' rising star—was harvested in 2002 and was released in the spring of 2004.