



**Eric Johnson**  
**Director of Viticulture and Winemaking**

As Director of Viticulture and Winemaking at Talley Vineyards, Eric Johnson oversees the grape-growing and winemaking process in pursuit of energetic wines which epitomize the distinct essence of Talley's seven estate vineyards in the San Luis Obispo Coast's Arroyo Grande and Edna Valley AVAs.

Born and raised in Los Banos, California, Eric's formative years on his family's apricot and walnut farm ingrained in him an enduring respect for the land and a strong work ethic, having been involved in various aspects of farm management, from the physical labor of tending to the fields to strategic crop cultivation planning. Though he worked the farm throughout his childhood, "scooting around on tractors and forklifts, enduring the misery of rotting apricots smashed all over him in 110 degree summer heat," his family encouraged him to pursue his own dreams, leading him to the scenic Central Coast.

In 2002, Eric enrolled at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where he studied Agricultural Business. Serendipitously, he was introduced to the finer nuances of wine through a college roommate, whose family owns vineyards in Sonoma County. Inspired by this newfound passion, Eric pursued Cal Poly's new Wine and Viticulture program. His education was not just confined to the classroom; it extended to practical experiences at various vineyards and wineries, where he honed his skills and deepened his knowledge through the university's trademark "learn by doing" approach to education. "My time at Cal Poly wasn't just about learning the science of winemaking but about understanding the individual characteristics of each grape and each soil type from hands-on experience," he reminisces. "We worked in the vineyards ourselves, made wines, and got to intimately understand every aspect of the process beyond just the theory."

During his senior year in 2007, Eric eagerly accepted a role as harvest intern at Talley Vineyards before becoming lab assistant that same year. In an effort to expand his wine knowledge from a global perspective, he traveled abroad to work as a harvest intern at Whitehaven Winery in Marlborough, New Zealand for the 2008 harvest. Upon returning stateside, he continued his tenure at Talley Vineyards as tasting room associate before quickly working his way up to assistant winemaker. When longtime winemaker Leslie Mead Renaud retired in 2010, President Brian Talley took a chance on the ambitious 26-year-old, naming Eric head winemaker. "I

was excited but also intimidated to take the helm of such a historic winery," he recalls. He promptly buried himself in UC Davis textbooks for the next year, studying up on the technical details to support Talley's transition and continue the legacy of the brand.

As winemaker, Eric maintains a minimalist approach in both the vineyards and the winery, taking advice given to him by Frederic Meunier, legendary proprietor of Domaine Jacques-Frédéric Mugnier in Burgundy. During a memorable visit, he asked the master vigneron for any advice for a young winemaker. Mugnier thought for a moment then offered, "I always achieve more when I do less." This struck a chord with Eric and is a philosophy that he practices daily. "We're fairly hands-off when it comes to winemaking, and rely on our long-term vineyard team to grow exceptional grapes. Delicious wines begin with precise farming and a trusted team," he notes. "I don't want to mask the unique qualities of each site. My goal is to honestly express what the vineyard gives us, rather than force a particular style."

In 2024, Eric was appointed to the role of Director of Viticulture and Winemaking, providing him the opportunity to integrate tailored winegrowing strategies through his intimate understanding of each of the 90-plus vineyard blocks, allowing for the refining of the unique expressions of each site. This direct control over farming will enable Eric to further enhance Talley's terroir-driven wines by precisely managing canopy, yield, irrigation, and picking decisions for each individual vineyard.

Eric resides in San Luis Obispo, with his wife and young daughter. Though his free time is limited, the same farming roots that first sparked his curiosity remain at his core. His 86-year-old grandfather still puts in long days tending the family orchards in Los Banos, exemplifying the dedication that helps explain Eric's enduring intensity of purpose—much like the acclaimed Talley wines he meticulously crafts each vintage as a passionate student of both vine and cellar.