

Cliff's Bio

Cliff Howard is a winemaker in Suisun Valley, California, who founded Tolenas Winery with his wife, Lisa Howard, in 2015. Though the winery is now one of his life's passions, the wine industry wasn't initially on Cliff's career path. After serving as an Arizona police officer for over a decade, Cliff left his day job to move to California and learn how to manage the day-to-day operations of a winery. Never one to shy away from hard work, Cliff fell in love with the process of winemaking and the opportunity to learn a new craft alongside his family. Today, he is the glue that holds Tolenas Winery together, overseeing the company's land planning, finances, and marketing initiatives.

Cliff was born and raised in Michigan. After graduating from high school, Cliff moved to Arizona to attend Arizona State University (ASU), where he graduated with a degree in Justice Studies. He then attended the Arizona Law Enforcement Academy, graduating as a Police Officer for the City of Phoenix. A few years later, Cliff decided to return to ASU to pursue a Masters in Legal Studies with a focus on Criminal Law.

While living in Arizona, Cliff met Lisa on a blind date and fell in love. They later married and began a family together. In the early years of their marriage, Cliff recalls dabbling in the process of fermentation. Cliff and his friends brewed their own beer at home, while Lisa and Cliff brewed kombucha in their kitchen. This hobby would eventually become their new life's calling.

When a 55-acre property became available in Suisun Valley, California—Lisa's hometown—Cliff and Lisa jumped at the opportunity to move closer to Lisa's parents, Steve and Linda Tenbrink, and try their hand at farming. Though the couple set out to farm prunes, walnuts, and wine grapes, Steve and Linda—farmers, winemakers, and owners of Tenbrink Winery and Vineyards—encouraged Cliff and Lisa to pursue winemaking instead. Steve then taught both Cliff and Lisa everything he knew about the trade. The process of winemaking became Cliff and Lisa's new passion, and it was out of this shared passion that Tolenas Winery was born.

For the last five years, Cliff has found his niche wearing multiple hats and taking a hands-on approach in all areas of the Tolenas Winery business. At the winery, he is able to use all of the skills he has gathered throughout his career, from winemaking and sales to storytelling and event planning, but it is his people skills that shine brightest. Cliff loves building relationships with customers, sharing the Tolenas story and his own personal winemaking journey over a taste of their award-winning wines. He enjoys his time spent in the tasting room pouring wine and seeing the smiles on guests' faces, knowing that he has helped to enhance someone's joy and appreciation for wine.

Today, Cliff and Lisa continue to operate Tolenas Winery with the help of their family. They are dedicated to producing small-batch bottles of wine with a flavor and quality that speaks to the terrior of the Suisun Valley