Madson
Santa Cruz
(California sales only)

Progress at Madson continues at a rapid clip. Winemaker Cole Thomas and viticulturalists Ken Swegles and Abbey Chrystal outdo themselves with each passing vintage, delivering a classy, precise lineup of wines that express a diverse range of terroirs across the Santa Cruz mountains, all farmed by Swegles.

-Matthew Luczy, The Wine Advocate, October 2026

These rugged coastal mountains have a new crop of winemakers who are inspired to translate these soils into art. -Ken Swegles, January 2025



Madson Wines is a collaboration between Cole Thomas, Ken Swegles and Abbey Chrystal out of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The trio is committed to celebrating the terroir of these mountains, highlighting the natural freshness and acidity grapes are able to retain here. They work mostly with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, showcasing single-vineyard bottlings as well as blends. Their focus is on energy and elegance.

Cole grew up in Ventura before heading north to UC Santa Cruz. He majored in Agroecology and worked gigs as an organic vegetable farmer, an edible landscaper and a manager at seed saving project, The Demeter Seed Library. His senior year internship was at local institution Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard under the tutelage of Jeff Emery. Emery's forty-year tenure, enthusiasm and deep devotion to farming inspired Cole greatly. It was also here that Cole would meet Ken and his wife Abbey, his eventual business partners.

Set on making wine and looking to gain knowledge and exposure, Cole embarked on a self-guided winemaking education which led him to Australia, back to Santa Cruz and finally to New Zealand. In Victoria, Cole gained an appreciation for Pinot and Chardonnay; at Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard he honed his winemaking chops and deepened his understanding of the AVA during a four-year stint as assistant winemaker; and finally, in Central Otago working at Prophet's Rock and Amisfield Winery, he picked up essential low-intervention winemaking techniques. When Cole returned to Santa Cruz in Spring 2018, he was ready to set off on his own.

Cole was determined to put impeccable farming above all else, which led him to Ken, who had gone on to specialize in viticulture after his stint at Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard. The two partnered up to launch Madson Wines with Abbey, Ken's wife, as their third collaborator. The winery was dubbed Madson after Cole's grandmother; it was her maiden name.

Ken and Abbey boast impressive resumes in the local wine world. He's since founded Rhizos Viticulture, specializing in organic vineyard management in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Rhizos has a hand in at least 90% of the fruit Madson brings in. Abbey has also worked at many wineries across Santa Cruz, with her most recent role being in the cellar and lab at Bonny Doon. She farms Ascona Vineyard with Ken and sells wine for us, Vintage 59 Imports.

The Madson team leases vineyards throughout Santa Cruz Mountains, enabling them to take full control over vineyard management. The team's farming practices are entirely organic, and they have helped transition many vineyards they lease away from conventional farming. They have also gone one step further with a pledge to operate at 100% carbon neutral. Winery production and shipping unavoidably emit greenhouse gases, so they have partnered with TerraPass to plant trees to offset these emissions.

Thanks to Ken's expertise in the vineyard, Cole is able to keep intervention to a minimum in the cellar. All fermentations occur naturally and spontaneously, oftentimes with the use of *pied de cuves*. Cole once even let fermentations kick off in plastic bins in the middle of the vineyard to prove the quality of their fruit and call attention to the unique native yeasts present. With each bottling, the focus remains on highlighting the purity of fruit and sense of place. The only manipulation taking place at Madson is a tiny addition of sulfur at bottling (kept under 25 ppm). Wines are generally bottled without fining or filtration.

https://www.madsonwines.com/