

# Beyond the Boardroom

## Christopher Sawyer *By Alexandra Russell*

**S**onoma County-based sommelier/wine educator Chris Sawyer is on a mission to make wine fun. "I highly encourage all to be adventurous and open up their palates whenever possible," he says.

He accomplishes this by being "a multi-tasking wine educator on many different levels, including working as a sommelier for more than 20 years, writing for national wine magazines, judging professional wine competitions, building my new social media presence, moderating panels and speaking at many public events, usually on behalf of the wine associations in the industry."

He's known for his deep knowledge, unbridled enthusiasm and easy-to-understand delivery. In person, he's equal parts comedian, storyteller and cheerleader—and zero parts wine snob.

### *Did you go to college?*

After high school, I spent my first few years at Santa Rosa Junior College, where I was editor-in-chief of the *Oak Leaf* newspaper on campus. I transferred to UC Davis, where I majored in sociology with minors in history and religious studies. I also wrote for the UC Davis *Aggie* newspaper, through which I was introduced to the viticulture and enology department. From there, I never looked back.

### *What do you love to do outside of work?*

I love family time with my wife and son, cooking, camping and exploring regional parks. I'm a big sports fan and try to keep up with football, baseball and basketball. Then, of course, sharing wine with friends!

### *Describe one of your craziest professional moments.*

While working as the sommelier at a special dinner event at Moon Mountain Vineyards, I got 20 minutes of one-on-one time with Mikhail Gorbachev, sipping wine and explaining the beauties of Cabernet Franc to him under a full moon.

### *Share a funny life moment.*

Once I showed up late to a New Year's Eve party. When I knocked on the door, I was greeted by my good friend Michael McNeill, the winemaker at Hanzell. After crashing the party for a while, I realized I was at the wrong house. So I rallied McNeill, his fellow winemakers, their families and friends to come with me to the original party I was invited to a few doors down. Needless to say, the party lasted until the wee hours of the morning.

### *What section of the newspaper do you turn to first?*

Sports section. When I was in high school, the first journalism award I won was a sports article. The award was given to me by the *Press Democrat*, a publication I delivered on my bike as a child. Ironic, because I was much better known for more cultural and political satire-based columns I did as the editor of the *Trojan* newspaper at Petaluma High.

### *What spells adventure for you?*

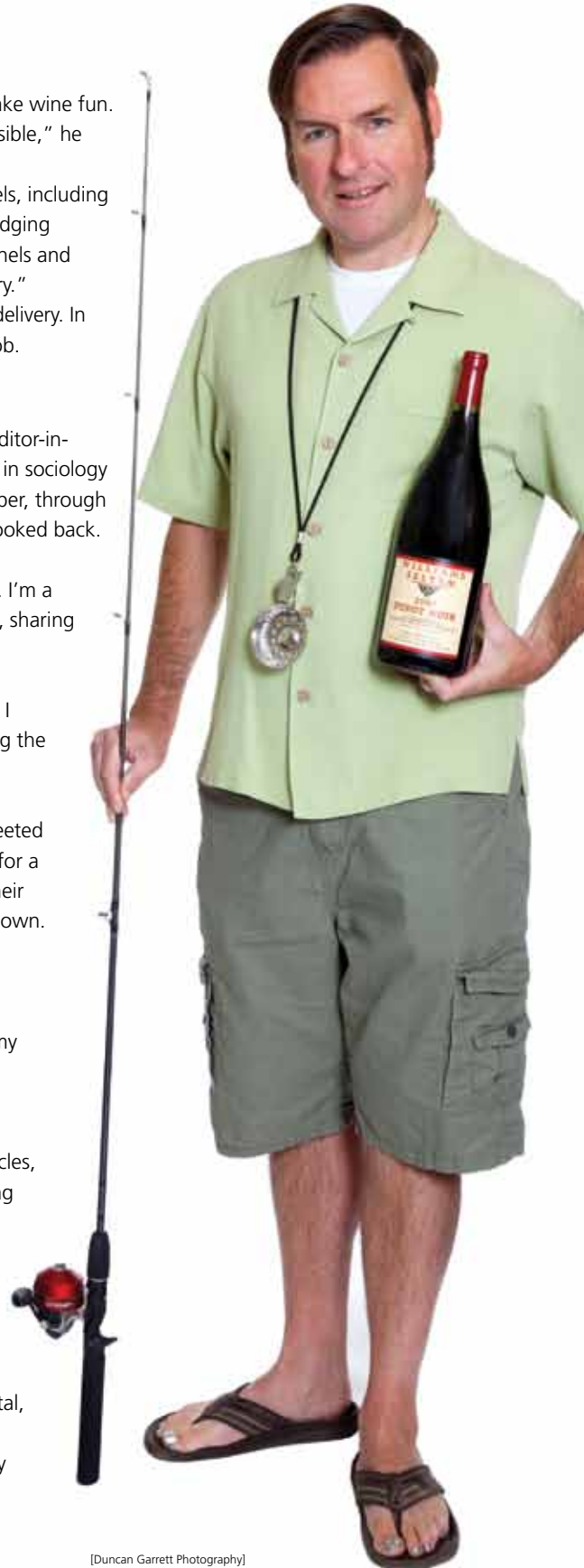
Whether I'm working as a guest sommelier, teaching classes, judging wines, writing articles, drafting some new wine and food pairings, traveling or going to memorable wine tasting events, every day of my week is filled with adventure. I've accepted these voyages and have considered changing my middle name to Adventure instead of William Nicholas on several drunken occasions.

### *What's the scariest thing that's ever happened to you?*

When I was 21 years old, I leaned against the door when I was trying to sleep in the backseat of a car and not wearing a seatbelt. The car was traveling 50 mph, and I fell out and split my head open. I don't even remember the first two weeks in the hospital, and I stuttered for the first six months while recovering. During this period, I went back to school and eventually became a public speaker. I appreciate life that much more every time I think about it.

### *What's your favorite jellybean flavor?*

Sizzling cinnamon



[Duncan Garrett Photography]