

## The Bachelor Star on his Sonoma Property

Ben Flajnik and his buddies talk to W.E. about their Envolve wine brand.

BY STEVE HEIMOFF



Next Monday, on January 2, Sonoma, California winemaker, Ben Flajnik, will hit the small screen again, this time as the main man in search of love on the 16th season of ABC's "The Bachelor."

Flajnik, who was selected for the show after Ashley Hebert chose competitor J.P. Rosenbaum to give her final rose to last spring during "The Bachelorette," used his time since being cast off to focus on his winemaking duties at the Sonoma-based wine company, Envolve. There, he works with founding partner, Mike Benziger, and their friend Danny Fay.

*W.E.* caught up with the trio in San Francisco to talk wine, company plans and "The Bachelor."

***Wine Enthusiast:*** During "The Bachelorette," you called your brand Evolve. Why the change to Envolve?

**Ben Flajnik:** We wanted to separate ourselves from "The Bachelorette," and make sure people take us seriously. We added an "n" because of our commitment to nature.

***W.E.:*** What does each person do?

**Mike Benziger:** My official title is director of production. Ben and I started this company in 2008, and we both make the wines.

**Danny Fay:** My official title is director of marketing. My MBA gives me a better understanding of branding and business development.

***W.E.:*** When did the three of you meet?

**MB:** Ben and I met in sixth grade.

**BF:** In Catholic school.

**MB:** We used to run around, make trouble together, and worked at my family's winery [Benziger] during the summer.

**DF:** I met Mike when his father, Bob [Benziger], clipped me on the chin during batting practice, in seventh grade. I went down pretty hard. Bob consoled me, and Mike and I have been best friends ever since.

**W.E.: What will Enville produce in 2012?**

**MB:** A Sauvignon Blanc from Sonoma Valley [\$20], Pinot Noir from Russian River [\$30] and a Cabernet from Dry Creek [\$40].

**DF:** We're launching a new brand, Epilogue, in January—a more everyday drinking style wine, based mainly from California appellations.

**W.E.: You expect this to be big enough to support all of you at some point?**

**BF:** It's our life.

**DF:** We're certainly here for the long run.

**W.E.: Ben, how long were you away filming the show?**

**BF:** Almost 3 months. I got home and went to work the first day back.

**W.E.: Obviously, you can't say anything about the outcome?**

**BF:** [Laughs] No! Except to say, it made me appreciate what I have at home here with my best friends and my business.

**W.E.: Is this it, Ben, for show biz?**

**BF:** As far as I know.

**W.E.: What if something happens? What if someone calls?**

**BF:** These are obviously discussions I have to have with my family, my friends, my business partners. I don't just do TV shows to be on TV. It's more about the journey and the ride.

**W.E.: Danny, what's the long-term business plan?**

**DF:** To establish a really strong direct to consumer trade. We're starting a wine club, and launching a new Web site, [envolvewinery.com](http://envolvewinery.com). And we're looking at investing in a tasting room, hopefully by summertime, around the Sonoma Plaza.

**W.E.: Ben, what do you want to say to people, now that you're about to be one of the most famous faces in the country?**

**BJ:** We're just Sonoma boys, homegrown boys with a homegrown brand!