

V.6

LOAM —Baby

A Wine
Culture
Journal

WOMAN'S ISSUE



HATERS

LOAM

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Journal

WOMAN'S ISSUE

Opening Letter

Dear Reader,

Those of you who have followed along on my little Loam Baby journey know that I almost lost my magazine a couple of years ago in a sale gone off the rails. Gladly, I got my baby back and I couldn't be happier. (Fuck you to anyone who tries that shit on me again.)

Since I don't have kids of my own (I hope that's my only regret when I'm an old woman, because it's a doozy), this is my little baby. I don't know what it's going to be when it grows up. I'd like it to tell me what it wants to be, rather than imposing my will upon it.

So, I'm kind of creatively just going with the flow. If you like what's enclosed here, please consider going to my website, at www.rhdrexel.com and signing up for my newsletter. Starting in 2019, I'll be issuing the Holy C.O.W. (Child of Wine) newsletter, which will include links to wine articles, poems and even a free PDF of a children's book of verses you can assemble at home!

I'm open to suggestions regarding the next issue of Loam Baby. I'd really like to venture outside of California...maybe Arizona, Washington, Texas, Finger Lakes, New Mexico, Oregon, Michigan. Let me know on my website what you'd like to see. My email is listed there.

Lastly, earlier this year, I quit Instagram. It was the last of my social media accounts. I wondered what it would feel like to all of a sudden be entirely off of social media. For about two days, I worried about becoming insignificant. Then, I realized I am insignificant and I've been breathing much easier ever since. I know some folks are built for social media; that is to say, they don't let it interfere too much with their perception of themselves or how they perceive others. I'm not built that way; it was kind of messing with my head.

Now, I feel like I used to before social media; just more relaxed. After a dinner party, I don't go home and check out the Instagram accounts of those I met. I don't get a download of their personal "brand" and then make an assumption about them. Instead, it's like when we were kids and we'd go to a party and afterwards we'd go home and think about it. I think about the folks I met. Some of them I hope to meet again. And, then I let the occasion go and, well, it's nice to live that way. On to the next moment...and then the next...

Love you all,



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The Woman's Issue of Loam Baby is dedicated in loving memory to Debby Zygielbaum.



*"I want to
grow old
without facelifts.*

*I want to
have the courage
to be loyal to the face
I have made."*

*Marilyn
Monroe*

8 Days A Week: Jasmine Hirsch

Native Californian, Jasmine Hirsch, is the General Manager at the eponymously named Hirsch Vineyards. Her father, David Hirsch, is largely regarded as one of the finest grape farmers in the United States. Jasmine does him proud on the daily.

Friday – 8/17/18

Attended our weekly farming meeting. We discussed thinning and irrigation decisions. Lots of variation between blocks in the ripening, but you can feel the approach of harvest – maybe 4 weeks to go!

Raided the garden and took the first ripe watermelon of the season. Felt slightly guilty taking the first one, as this is a shared garden, but I couldn't resist!



Saturday – 8/18/18

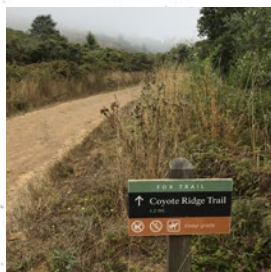
Woke up and hung out with our farm manager's puppy – Grizzly Bear. He's the son of Peanut, and they look exactly like.

Hosted our California distributor's team at the vineyard. Great day of sharing stories and wine.



Sunday – 8/19/18

Spent the day in SF; could be one of the last before harvest. Took a morning hike out to the Marin headlands and looked for wild flowers (an obsession of mine). Later in the day, walked through Dolores Park, had soft serve from Bi Rite, and enjoyed the city. Ended the day with dinner at one of my favorite restaurants, and had an incredibly inspiring bottle of wine – 1996 WS “Allen Vineyard”. Will be thinking about that bottle this harvest.



Monday – 8/20/ 18

This day was all desk work. One of my last full office days before harvest, so I had to put my head down and clear my inbox and get computer work done. The weekend was so great, that this was a classic downer of a Monday.

Sorry, I forgot to take photos this day!

Tuesday – 8/21/18

More of the same, but I got to end the day with ramen from The Ramen Shop and Crazy Rich Asians. I love this movie!!

Sorry, I forgot to take photos this day!

Weds – 8/22/18

Headed back up to the vineyard. Stopped for a breakfast meeting with my colleague Juliana at The Shed in Healdsburg; epic way to start the day!

Got to the vineyard around noon, and the fog was just lifting. Received a call from our neighbor Elisa Hellenthal that they may have some extra fruit available this harvest.

The Hellenthals have been our neighbors for 40 years, and their vineyard is the only one contiguous to Hirsch. We buy about 2 acres-worth of fruit from them every year, so this was an exciting opportunity.

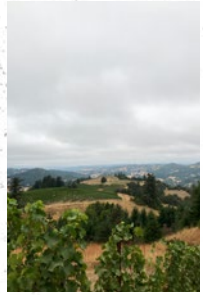
Went out with Elisa to check out their block 9B, from where you can look across the valley and see a great view of our East Ridge.



Thurs – 8/23/18

Hosted an amazing group of sommeliers from Japan. Great questions and curiosity about our vineyard and winemaking practices! Despite being August 23rd, it was so cold we had to hold the tasting in the office. (Normally we would have tasted at a picnic table overlooking the vineyard.)

The fog never burned off this day, nor the next. Very wet, drippy fog that brings the spectre of disease...



Fri – 8/24/18

More of the same heavy fog. Went out in the morning with our amazing vineyard manager, Everardo Robledo, who has been with us for 30 years. Discussed the biodynamic options to combat the disease pressure, as well as straightforward viticultural options like pulling leaves and declumping fruit.

Farming meeting. (It happens every Friday.)

In the afternoon, went out to look at the Hellenthal 9B with our winemaker Anthony Filiberti.

It looks good, so we made the decision to take the fruit.

Cold night, so we drank a bottle of Jamet to stay warm!



Proust Questionnaire: Maia Parish



There's no grass growing under Maia Parish's feet. Between raising a young daughter as a single mom and running multiple successful businesses, including The Wine Suite and Parish Media, Maia has become the wine world's whirling dervish of consumer and trade education. A connector long before that term existed, Parish is first and foremost an enthusiastic people-person, eager to bring her adoration for all things enological and viticultural to the everyman and woman. This Denver native, born into a football family, resides with her daughter and family in the Green Valley Ranch suburb of Denver. She is a former caterer, human resources manager and government trainer. Here Ms. Parish talks Wakanda, expensive cognac, and having no regrets.

*Photo Credit Kandid Moments Photography
Tiffany W. @KandidMomentsLLC*

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Sipping a glass of wine on my front porch as I watch the girls play.

What is your greatest fear?

My greatest fear is complacency. Being stuck in the same space for long periods of time with no progression.

What is your greatest extravagance?

Lheraud XO Cognac paired with oysters from the Puget Sound. I had this combination at a Cognac tasting and I would love to relive it. It was sublime.

What is the quality you most like in a man?

Swag, Confidence, Finesse, Charisma, Passion

What is the quality you most like in a woman?

Confidence.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Listen.....

Which talent would you most like to have?

I wish I could speak multiple languages.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I wish I could take a compliment. I have realized compliments matter and the ability to receive them when it comes to me personally is difficult for me to accept. You can complement me on my WORK but when the compliment becomes personal, I deflect and evade. I am beginning to understand my confidence is directly affected by the ability to receive a pure compliment. I am learning.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My daughter is my greatest achievement. Ms. Ross (After Diana Ross #theboss) was born at 28 weeks. She was a super preemie and our life was challenging. I was not prepared to be a mother despite my older age of 38 years. Ms. Ross was diagnosed with Chronic Lung Disease. She was in the hospital for weeks. At 6 she is my greatest achievement. Although my daughter still suffers from Chronic Lung Disease, she is thriving.

Where would you like to live?

I live in Denver, Colorado. I grew up here and moved back five years ago. Denver is in my soul and I would not want to live anywhere else. I love my city!!

What is your most treasured possession?

My father's just passed. I had not seen him in 38 years. Last year, I got a call stating that he was dying and had one week to live. I flew out to visit him and began to take over his care. He seemed to improve with the presence of his estranged family, especially my presence. After a long battle with CTE (Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy) from years playing football and for the NFL, my father passed. He left me his car and while cleaning it I found 2 rings. One was his wedding ring which I gave to my mother. I put the other on a chain and I wear it around my neck.

Who are your heroes in real life?

My daughter is my hero. She has had a hard life with her illness and she smiles through it all. It is remarkable.

Who are your heroes in fiction?

My heroes in fiction are the Women of Wakanda. Aneka and Ayo of the Dora Milaje, and Zenzi, a revolutionary leader in Wakanda. From Black Panther Comics Family.

What are your favorite names?

Hopefully, the term wife will be my favorite name.

What is it that you most dislike?

Elitist people.

If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?

I like to come back as a Redwood Tree. Redwoods are the tallest and can live for up to 2,000 years.

What is your greatest regret?

I don't really have any regrets. If I had not made the mistakes from my past, I may not be right where I am at the moment.....typing this questionnaire!

How would you like to die?

In my sleep, after a great meal and some great wine.

What is your motto?

People ask me why I do what I do and I tell them “cause Pouring make me happy!!”

Written in the Sky

*"Blessed Santa Barbara, your story is written in the sky, with paper and holy water."
-Lorca*

In 1891, Luigi Lepiane arrived on the shores of Ellis Island from Piane Crati, the smallest village in Calabria, Italy. Single, alone and carrying everything he owned in a few satchels, he made his way to San Jose, California. There, with little more than an immigrant's dream to his name, he met his future wife, Rosanna, and together they made their way to the nearby farming community of Hollister, near Gilroy, in 1917. Luigi went about chasing his vision of owning a grocery store and a little winery. As is the case with many immigrants, the Lepianes longed to connect with other Italian immigrants, and soon they were holding frequent celebrations, and became known throughout Hollister and San Jose for an always-abundant table, generous helpings of wine and the sharing of old-country customs. Their fellow countrymen came to anticipate the Lepiane's annual "Feast Day of Santa Barbara" celebration, held every December in their home in honor of Luigi's most beloved Catholic saint. Old newspaper articles from that time report that the local toastmaster once bestowed upon Rosanna and Luigi a symbolic gift from the local community: two high-backed chairs symbolizing a "seat of honor" for each of them among their townfolk. Luigi finally launched his wine brand, under which he made, among other wines, an off-dry Tokay. Yet, only four short years later, he was stricken with colon cancer and died shortly thereafter, and his wine dreams died with him.

For a time.

One-hundred and twenty-two years later, his great-granddaughter, winemaker and passionate California surfer Alison Thomson, launched her own wine brand in 2013 and named it L.A. Lepiane Wines, in honor of Luigi Antonio Lepiane.



Luigi's Tokay wine label (left) and Alison's Grenache wine label (right).

When I arrive at Thomson's small, modest seaside home for our interview, she is preparing a hearty, home-made Pasta e Fagioli for our lunch. I can smell it as I get out of my car. Just yards from the Pacific, along the Goleta shoreline of Santa Barbara County, there is a dirt pathway that leads from the front door of their rental down to the ocean. Along the pathway is a row of dilapidated greenhouses filled with mangoes, guavas and bananas.

While Thomson sets the table, I make my way around the small house she shares with her husband, George, and their children, Mick and Julia. Through the kitchen window, I see a couple of surfboards propped up against their backyard fence. Their walls are a veritable gallery of children's artwork. At five years old, Julia is going through a butterfly phase, and so one wall is nearly covered with colorful drawings and paintings of these little winged creatures. Their toys lay about on a collection of mismatched furniture that Alison has found mostly by visiting thrift shops; she enjoys collecting old furniture, maps and art that others have owned because these objects have character, and their own secret stories to tell.

In a few days, it will be December 4th, the Feast Day of Santa Barbara, and Thomson plans to celebrate the day with a few friends over a bowl of Burbara, a traditional dish made of boiled wheat grains, pomegranate seeds, raisins and anise usually served on this day. I mention how curious it is that there exists quite a bit of synchronicity between her and her great-grandfather. As a young girl, before ever learning that Luigi wanted to own a grocery store, she too nurtured the same dream. "My parents would take us to the Oakville Grocery Store [in the Napa Valley] when I was a kid. I'd beg them to buy me any piece of fruit I'd never tried before. I dreamed of having a grocery store like that someday. I still do." And, like her great-grandfather, Thomson loves to garden and loves to can her own vegetables and fruits. "My parents weren't really into canning or gardening." Though her parents taught her and her brother early on about the joys of the table, neither parent had any interest in making wine. I find all of these coincidences somewhat mystical, but Thomson is a pragmatist; a child of nature and science, so as I muse about these connections, she shrugs, says little, smiles and continues to work in her kitchen.

Thomson looks young for her 37 years. She and her husband will soon celebrate their 20th anniversary. Though they wed in 2008, they began dating in 1998 when they were 18 years old. The Thomsons share a deep, abiding love for the ocean. "I grew up in the water in Northern California. My mom always says that the only way she could get me to be quiet as a baby was to put me in the bath. But in Northern California there weren't as many opportunities to learn to surf. I really didn't start to surf in earnest until my sophomore year." By then, Thomson was studying Italian, and also Habitat Restoration, at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Her male friends at the time, including George, told her that they'd teach her how to surf. "I'd like to say that they taught me to surf. But when



guys tell you they'll take you out on the water and teach you to surf, they kind of just take off and leave you at the beach," she says laughing. "So I just taught myself. It took me a while to get proficient at it. I started in 1998, but in 2001, George and I went to Australia, New Zealand and Rorotonga," where the couple spent their time "surfing, reading, just hanging out for a few months." It was there that Thomson became a good surfer.



Thomson enjoys surfing alone to clear her head. "The thing about surfing is that it is different each and every time. On smaller days at Devereaux [a local spot where she surfs the most] when the water is clear, you can look down and see the bottom of the ocean. There are rocks and swaying algae and sea grass. Fish dart in and out of your sight. Sometimes a dolphin or seal will pop up right near you. You can look down the coast and see a relatively untouched coastline on one side and Isla Vista on the other. I'm usually looking towards the untouched coastline because that is the direction the waves are coming from. I scan the horizon looking for the signs of a set, paddling around to make sure I'm in the right position to catch a wave. If a wave is coming I turn my board around towards the beach and start paddling. As I'm paddling I look to my left to make sure no one else has the wave before me. Then I look to my right and gauge how this wave is going to break. Once I stand up, it is such a rad view from the board gliding along the face of a wave. Everything is in motion. I've had so many magical days out there when the sun is setting and the glassy water is reflecting the colors of the sky as I'm sliding along. On big days, when you get an especially good wave and you ride by other surfers who are smiling back at you, cheering you on...you feel your adrenalin pumping and that's one of the best feelings in the world." Thomson has a calm demeanor, and I ask her if this is due mostly to surfing. She replies that her daily commute to nearby Lompoc, just outside the Sta. Rita Hills appellation of Santa Barbara, occurs alongside the Pacific Ocean, centering her on a daily basis as much as surfing does.

Prior to launching Lepiane Wines in 2013, Thomson held successful stints at Sine Qua Non, as well as Samsara and Palmina, two popular Central Coast brands at which she held the positions of Assistant Winemaker. Because she only produces about 250 cases annually under her Lepiane label, she must supplement her income by taking on wine consulting jobs. It's something she enjoys for its variety, currently consulting for several small, emerging Santa Barbara County brands, perhaps most notably Jalama Canon Ranch & Vineyard, known for its cool-climate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays.

Thomson favors Italian grape varieties and makes astoundingly good Barbera and Nebbiolo under her own label. She employs Old-World methods in the cellar, including extended aging in 600-liter casks for her Nebbiolo. She first fell in love with Italian wines as a sophomore, when she spent three months living in Siena as an exchange student. She turned 21 years old while studying there, and her host family threw a grand birthday dinner for her in their “classic Italian kitchen,” she says now. “There was a big table in too small a space. They invited their cousins. The entire family was boisterous and lovely. I couldn’t get a word in edgewise. Everyone was talking over one another. The volume in that little kitchen was through the roof. That’s when I fell in love with Barolo and Barbera, and with Italy and my host family. Here I was, a stranger, and they threw this great party for me and even gave me gifts.”



Once a month her host father would visit the local wine merchant who would fill his empty 20-gallon carafe with whatever wine he had available. When her host father got home with his monthly allotment, he’d float a little oil on the surface of the wine to keep it from oxidizing. “The carafe was wrapped in wicker. It was very charming,” Thomson adds. While in Siena, she moved into a top-floor apartment in a converted palace. “My daily view was of churches, olive groves and narrow streets. When I had to return to the states I was devastated and decided then that someday I’d have to return.”

And return she did. Nurturing a nascent love for Italian wines as an undergraduate, she applied to graduate school at U.C. Davis and was accepted into their Viticulture program. She so enjoyed working with the university’s vineyards that she fully embraced what was now her destiny—to make Italian varietal wines in America. She joined a group

of fellow students traveling to Barolo in 2005. There she met Angelo Gaja, who poured the young students 1989 Barbaresco, among other rare, older wines. "It was such an inspiring tasting. I couldn't believe he took so much time out of his day to taste with us. He was very generous in sharing his family's history. He spoke about his wines with such passion and commitment. Then he poured us some incredible bottles going back to the 80s. After the tasting he actually gave us wines to take back home with us. I was in awe that someone of his stature in the wine world would welcome us to his winery with such warmth and generosity of spirit. The energy and excitement with which he spoke really energized me and made me fall in love with wine even more. He was so wonderful to us. From that day on, my heart was set on Barolo, on Nebbiolo."

Piedmont further sparked her imagination. "It seemed so real, so undiscovered. It was perfect for me. I found those wines amazing." Thomson set about trying to find an internship in Piedmont, and eventually landed a harvest job with esteemed winemaker, Sergio Germano.

After exchanging only two emails, she showed up at his doorstep. By now it was 2006, and Thomson moved into Germano's winery, Ettore Germano, where she worked a full harvest. "I worked alongside very hardworking Romanians." At first they thought she wouldn't last. They jokingly told her about two Americans who'd been working there just before she arrived. After just their first day of work, both Americans left Ettore Germano, claiming their grandmothers had fallen ill and that they'd have to return to the states. "They just couldn't cut the work, but I could, so I became one of the crew. A 17-hour day was not uncommon and we worked seven days a week, but I totally and completely fell in love with the process. I remember pressing late one night. The winery was on a ridge. It looked over a valley and there was another ridge beyond ours. The moon was rising behind a castle across from us. It was warm outside, humid. We were so exhausted, pressing chardonnay by the moonlight, and all I can recall thinking was, 'I sure like this a lot!'"



On rare occasions when they had a little downtime, Thomson would go on sales calls and wine deliveries with Germano. "He poured me his lineup of Barolos. Each was so distinctive, yet all of them had some of the same core elements. They all had incredibly complex and lively aromatics. There was so much energy in the wines. I sat there smelling the wines, taking them in for quite a long time before I tasted them. I marveled at how they shifted and changed in the glass, revealing layer upon layer of mystery as they opened. In the mouth they were equally lively, complex and energetic. Barolos are known for their structure, and these were definitely built to last, yet they were also completely approachable. I think what I loved most about them was their energy. This might sound cheesy, but they made me feel more alive because they seemed so alive." I tell Thomson I don't find that at all cheesy, as her wines make me feel the same way—enlivened by their specificity, focus, vibrancy and freshness.

Last year, when Thomson debuted her Barbera at a local wine tasting in downtown Santa

Barbara, she was joined by Germano himself, who made the trip to pour alongside her during her debut. He complimented her on her first Lepiane bottlings. She describes that moment as one of the most humbling of her career and life thus far.



Currently, Thomson sources her Nebbiolo from one of Santa Barbara County's more historic vineyards—Rancho Sisquoc, an isolated, beautiful site just on the edge of the Santa Maria Valley appellation. She is also sourcing some fruit from the Alisos Canyon Vineyard, not far from Sine Qua Non's Third Twin estate vineyard.

Her Barbera is sourced from the small, elite

Walker Vineyard, on the Alamo Pintado corridor of Santa Barbara's Santa Ynez appellation. Available for purchase now, her Barbera possesses such an innate, perfect balance that it's a revelation with food. Each sip invites another bite and so on, a perfect accompaniment to a hearty meal. Her Nebbiolo will be released for the first time this spring, and there already exists a waiting list for this exemplary expression of such a noble variety. I've had numerous winemakers share with me that it's the best American Nebbiolo they've tasted, and I have to agree with them. Grenache lovers will be interested in knowing that Thomson produced a limited amount of Grenache in 2013. At about \$38 a bottle, it stands out to me as one of the best Grenaches I've ever had from California, and certainly the finest I've had from Santa Barbara County. I tend to favor Rayas, and at the risk of sounding hyperbolic, this sublime little Grenache does that world-class estate proud. In the future, she plans to focus solely on Italian varieties, but for now, she has a small amount of Grenache in inventory.

The hours seem to pass quickly while I'm with Thomson. After spending the greater part of a day together, I get ready to head home. Thomson sends me along with a couple of bottles of her wine, including her breathtaking Nebbiolo. A few days later, I decant it early in the morning and serve it to my wife with dinner that evening. We turn off the television and have dinner at the dining room table. I tell her all about my day with Thomson and about Luigi Antonio Lepiane, and how, unbeknownst to him, a wine brand carrying his name flourishes today in the New Country, bringing strangers together at the table, the way he and Rosanna ached to do those many years ago.

**Black and white photography by Andrew Schoneberger. All other photos provided by Alison Thomson.*

The Evolution of Kelli White

It's a blustery day in a remote location in California's San Benito County when I meet up with Kelli White for our interview. I've been wanting to interview White since 2015 – the year she released her comprehensive book, *Napa Valley Then and Now*, a 1,255-page tribute to America's most esteemed winegrowing region. It's a book I reference often, and I've long admired White's work as a sommelier, author and educator. Over time, I've run into her at Press, a restaurant in the Napa Valley, where for years she presided over the nation's deepest collection of uncommon, old Napa Valley wines. I've watched her expertly decant aged, rare bottles with confidence and a steady hand. We often rub elbows with the same colleagues. So I want us both out of our element for our first, in-depth chat.

We've been together now for a few hours, journeying through the remote foothills of the Galiban Mountain range. At one point during our visit, we spot a bobcat meandering through a little-known vineyard, and White asks to get out of the truck so she can get a better look. Her thin, lithe frame makes its way lightly through a row of cover crop. She gets fairly close to the bobcat before it runs off into the nearby foothills. She snaps a few pictures of it sitting there in defiance before she runs back to the truck, looking like an adventurous 12-year-old girl away at summer camp.

It's getting chilly out, and we soon retire indoors where we stretch our legs, pour ourselves some plum wine, and put on some music. White chooses Karen Dalton, an artist I'd never heard of until now. Dalton, it turns out, was a contemporary of Bob Dylan's and one of his favorite singer-songwriters and guitarists. She never got the recognition she deserved and died in 1993 at the age of 55, in a mobile home, from an HIV-related illness. White wants me to hear her favorite Dalton song, "A Little Bit of Rain," and so she puts it on. I let the song work its magic. It's a heartbreaker, and after it's over, White just looks at me and says, "That line: 'A little bit of rain'..."

That White holds on to this lyric and savors it isn't surprising, as I learn she wanted to be a writer when she was a child. "Of course, when you're a pre-teen writer, it's all crap, but my family was very supportive of me, and they'd hang my writing on the fridge," she tells me. Admitting she was a "pretty smart kid", her big, working-class family gathered around her when she was quite young, encouraging her to relentlessly pursue her interests. Those also included playing in a high school rock band – "Spork", a "noise band" – for whom she played "guitar badly and keyboards somewhat worse."



Later, she played for the Saturday Saints, Mass (Radius), Bipolar Bears, and would occasionally jump on stage to play with Super Awesome.

Though White ended up an accomplished writer and educator as an adult, she did take a serious detour into the sciences during her formative years. “I’ve always been very influenced by great teachers. Early in my education, I had a couple of teachers – when I was 10 or 12 – who encouraged me to write. Later on, in my high school career, my best teachers were in Math and Science. I think that’s part of the reason I went down that path. To be honest, I can be a bit of a dilettante. I generally can be good at a lot of things, other than anything having to do with athletics or coordination of any kind. But I feel like I could have gone in a couple of different directions, so the interests I chose to pursue were really in response to teachers. As I look back at my life, I see these individuals who were like bumpers that I bounced off of; these teachers and mentors changed the direction of my life.”

While attending an over-crowded public high school, she exhausted all of the science classes they had to offer by the time she was a sophomore. In a study hall one pivotal day, she became frustrated that all of the students around her were goofing off, and bee-lined her way from there to the principal’s office. She promptly informed him she was leaving school for good to join the work force. “There’s nothing left for me here,” she told him. “I’m not good at being bored.”

“He was a good principal,” she says now. He helped her to enroll in the Massachusetts Academy of Math and Science, a two-year course school. Only around 30 students were accepted at a time, and each had to pass an arduous science and math exam to even make the cut. “I went from being the smarty pants of a 1,500-student public high school to a dumb ass in this very small pool of real geniuses. It was super-humbling, as I was not at all on their level of intellect.” By the time she completed the course successfully, though, she was told she could attend practically any college she set her sights on.

At the time, the young White was fascinated by the brain and neuroscience, and, though accepted at numerous Ivy League colleges, she chose to attend Brandeis University, where she was accepted into their famed Neuroscience program. While working the summer of her sophomore year there in a Neurogenetics Lab for Leslie Griffith, MD, PhD – her idol and someone whose path White wanted to emulate – she received the esteemed Howard Hughes fellowship (a sizeable sum of money) to perform a self-guided experiment in a Neurogenetics lab over the summer. “This is the only time this has happened to me in my life, because I’m perpetually late and perpetually hyper-extended financially,” White says, laughing, “but I came in ahead of schedule and under-budget.” White took the funds left over from her fellowship and sent herself on her first-ever trip to France. It proved revelatory.

Having grown up in a modest household, and having rarely eaten in a fine-dining restaurant, White found herself indulging in the life of the senses in Paris for the first time in her life. She discovered leisure, visiting museums and restaurants, drinking wine. The trip changed her life. Upon her return stateside, White immediately changed her major to Art History. Propelled by the art exhibits she’d seen in Paris, and by discovering at the tender age of 19 the music of John Cage – especially his ‘4’33”, a composition in 4 minutes and 33 seconds, White fell headlong into the world of the Arts. “I had never allowed myself to live there intellectually before then,” White says now.

We add a log to the evening’s steady fire and move from plum wine to Japanese whiskey. “I’ve had a life of happy accidents,” she continues. “I did well in Art History, and won a

curatorial internship at the University's Rose Art Museum." The Rose Art Museum offered a small but meticulously-curated post-war collection of art from the likes of Rauschenberg and Warhol. While there, White was mentored by Neil Printz, a pre-eminent Warhol scholar, with whom she would later become lifelong friends. "He was at my wedding."

Upon graduating, Printz put White in touch with the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, where White got her first curatorial job out of college as a Fine Arts major. "I quickly realized that there was really no way to make money working in museums or in the Art History world." Having occasionally worked in wine stores throughout college to supplement her income, White once again got a job at a wine shop to make ends meet. All the while, she continued to perform in rock and pop bands, and even recorded two albums during that time, but never became competent enough at music to make a go of it. "It was all just for fun."

Like other areas that captured her interest, White pursued wine as if it was an academic subject. She immediately set out to learn about the world's most storied wines and spirits. "At the time, all I drank was cheap Bordeaux and cheap scotch because that's what I thought I was supposed to do to learn about wines. Because all I could afford was this cheap stuff, I just didn't get what the fuss was all about." After saving up some money, though, and taking herself to a "nice dinner in Beacon Hill", a sommelier sold her a bottle of white Châteauneuf du Pape. "I was all of a sudden in this warm, fuzzy, low-acid zone of Rhône whites – John Kongsgaard once described Rhône whites as 'hugging you,' – and I suddenly felt comforted by those varieties. So I kept at it and kept working in wine stores. I decided I could make a living in wine, and I enjoyed

the lifestyle. It also provided the perfect intersection of everything I loved: academia, travel, languages, art, history. I'm also kind of high-strung, and for once I found a career choice that helped me to slow down. Wine has been a force for civilization in my life. It's also an endless pursuit. You can never really master it."

It was during another trip to France, much later in her career, that White mentioned to friends wanting to write a book about the Napa Valley. "I had only been living in the Napa Valley for about six months. I was staying with the Wassermans (importers) in Burgundy. Allen Meadows was there and had just finished writing his definitive Pearl of the Cote. Clive Coates was there as well. "It was amazing, this confluence of brains," White says.

"They were all talking about writing and publishing and I sort of mentioned, meekly, that I was thinking about writing a book



about Napa. There was room for it. So Becky Wasserman heard me say that, and as this tourist group visited later in the day, she introduced me as ‘Kelli White, who is writing a book on the Napa Valley’ and that was the moment I knew the book was going to happen. Once it had been spoken about out loud, to strangers, I knew now it’s on. The moment that switch was turned on, there was no way for me to turn it off.”

When White was told by the designer that the book, upon layout, would clock in at over 1,000 pages, “I went home and cried,” she says now. “I didn’t think anyone would take me seriously. I was concerned it would come across as this exaggerated caricature of wine in an exaggerated caricature of a book. Was it going to do the opposite of what I intended? Instead of delivering thoughtfulness and gravitas to a region that maybe wasn’t being taken seriously in the right ways, was I just piling on top of existing stereotypes?” Though she is grateful the book has been very well received – by literary critics and the industry itself – the one criticism it regularly receives is the size of it, that it’s a bit unwieldy. For me, the size of the book makes perfectly good sense; a region as sweeping and successful in its ascendancy seems to merit its own tome. My copy at home is dog-eared from constant referencing. It is a particularly great resource for its tasting notes of older, rare, historic Napa Valley wines.

As the evening progresses, White pauses to commandeer the sound system and toggles through a line-up of largely forgotten or obscure singers and songwriters. She decides to put on Lee Hazelwood, whom she informs me was briefly married to Nancy Sinatra. I ask her if that’s the guy who sang “I’m Proud to be an American”, and she says, “I don’t know who that is, but it’s not Lee Hazelwood”, and I pour us a little more whiskey. Before long, Hazelwood’s plaintive voice comes on over the sound system – an old-timey country-folk song he released in the ‘60s. While working on her book, White continued her decade-long work as a sommelier, first at New York’s Veritas, and then later at Napa Valley’s Press. White says she has now finally landed her dream job and is currently the Senior Staff Writer for GuildSomm.com, where she regularly writes in-depth research-driven, feature length articles and teaches a handful of classes for the trade.



“Sommelier culture is complicated. When I was younger, I was very much a bratty, east coast New York sommelier, rolling my eyes at California wines and really chasing Burgundy. Then I evolved into someone who is much more omnivorous. I’m now much more in-line with the consumer,” she says. She regards this as a personal evolution. “At the beginning, you’re almost like ‘fuck the consumer’ because you want to buy wines for your own palate. ‘Here I am putting together this amazing list and most people just want some ordinary chardonnay.’ Now, though, at least for me, I have gotten to a point where you start to prioritize the act of service over your own hubris. Suddenly, when I put service first, I found my personal tastes didn’t matter as much. I stopped judging my guests, which one should never do. It’s an arc.”

Sometimes, White confesses, she sees wine lists by somms that seem almost too personal and alienating; “there’s a difference between having a point-of-view and creating a self-serving wine list. I think great wine lists have a point-of-view, a perspective, but there’s room for the consumer within good lists. A good wine list, White adds, moves “beyond the us-versus-them mentality that some somms can have and towards a middle ground. I personally love how a lot of modern sommelier service has become more casual. But casual does not always mean friendly. A flannel shirt and a sleeve tattoo can be just as alienating as a formal suit and tastevin, if the wearer is talking down to you because you aren’t familiar with the pet nat they’re into. That’s not to say one shouldn’t be excited about something they’re keen on, but ultimately, a sommelier is a position of service.”

White sees wine snobbery, especially state-side, as a vicarious ennobling. “We’re a country without an aristocracy. We do have a class system, though. If you’re ‘lower-class’ and don’t know what the little fork is for, then the upper class thinks they’re better than you. We have these sorts of little trappings in place. It’s subtle psychological warfare that unfortunately is played out at the dinner table. You see these types of moments in cinema a lot: someone is in an aristocratic setting and they just don’t have the right table manners. These moments cause such anxiety. And we Americans have no real royalty, so we hypothetically create these artificial moments around the table during which we try to define ourselves and others, and wine can – and often does – become a of weapon of class. It can become very elite. I think that really sucks, ultimately. It’s the opposite of conviviality, communion and community.”

White herself has been undergoing a “personal process” of lightening up about wine over the last few years. “I have a lot of friends and family members who don’t know a lot about wine. But I will drink whatever they put in front of me. I sometimes see these members of the trade who seem to have lost the art of being a Gracious Guest. You go to someone’s home with industry professionals, be they somms or from other areas of the business, and if a wine is corked, everyone around the table has to raise their hand and make a big deal about it. Or maybe it has brett. This can be very upsetting to the host who may not be in the industry, who may not understand that this was not their fault. I’m of the position that if you go to someone’s house for dinner and they serve you a flawed wine, just shut up and drink it. Be a gracious guest. Don’t force them to open something else because that just causes anxiety for the host. If I were out for dinner with relatives and they ordered a style of wine that I didn’t like – say, a really sweet, very oaked chardonnay – I would drink it gladly. I would rather do anything other than see someone I love upset or not enjoying themselves. I’d rather be punched in the face, actually.” White tries to view her customers through the same prism, and this has allowed her to “take a step back from my ego” and remember that service is about making people feel valuable, comfortable and excited.



When White is serving herself wine, which is on a daily basis, she does revel in the act of wondering and pondering about what she'll drink. "It's a really big part of my life. It factors into a lot of things; mood, temperature, food, company." One of the reasons White loves being a wine educator with GuildSomm is that she can spend time with engaged, up-and-coming, inquisitive sommeliers. "I love teaching and tasting with earnest sommeliers and getting excited about wines they're excited about. Being connected to that culture and energy is incredible. I just never want to stop doing what I'm doing now...educating young people in the trade. I don't think I could live without that anymore."

White does see another book in her future. Even though finishing her first book "was a real struggle, it never occurred to me to give up," she says. "I have a real addiction to follow-through. I have friends who have opened restaurants, written books... People who have not done these types of things think there's some kind of movie-moment where the act

of completion occurs and there's this stepping back and folding one's arms and smiling with satisfaction. In reality, if you're creating something you then need to sell, or you're opening a restaurant you then need to make sustainable, or you start a wine brand you then need to promote, you don't have that movie-moment. There's no break in the mania. With my book, the only shallow moment of satisfaction I had was when I was first introduced as "the author, Kelli White." I liked that. It was awesome! Super shallow and dumb point to get caught up on, but I'll take it."

When I ask her if she'll write about other topics in the future, she tells me with a relaxed, confident smile that even though she has dabbled in fiction, "wine is my beat. I just love it."

**All photos courtesy of Kelli White*

A Chat with Julia Coney

In recent years, the wine writing landscape has witnessed the arrival of several exciting new voices, among them Marissa A. Ross, Randy Smith, Elaine Brown, Alisha Sommer and Jess Lander, to name a few. Julia Coney, whose former beauty blog, *All About the Pretty*, reached a national audience (*The Washington Post*, *Lucky*, *Essence* and *Ebony*), adds an informed-yet-casual perspective on wine for the consumer to explore.

As I write this, the Washington, D.C.-based Coney is in Paris, sitting as a judge on the *Concours Mondial des Feminalise* panel, an all-woman wine tasting and judging competition.



RH Drexel: *You grew up in the South—in Texas and Louisiana. What were your first experiences with wine growing up, and how did they shape your interest in wine today?*

Julia Coney: I come from a family that doesn't drink. The only memory I have of wine is my aunt who drank wine, but not regularly. If I was visiting her in Louisiana, she would have a glass with dinner, but not all the time. Wine wasn't an item on our dinner table.

Did your interest in wine lead to an interest in travel, or vice versa?

The travel bug bit me through reading. I'm a bibliophile. I started getting into wine in my early 20s, and after studying abroad in Paris, I was hooked. Travel is one of the best ways to open your mind, and wine is a constant study in travel (regions, grapes, history). I grew up in a house where reading was encouraged. My father believed African-Americans had it better in Paris. I don't know if he read that somewhere, but this was also a man who dealt with a lot of racism in his career. He gave me *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin, and I was

immediately hooked. I couldn't quite understand why I took to his words until I was actually studying abroad in Paris. It was a full-circle moment. My entire life I felt I belonged in France, and here I was actually going as an adult. I just wish my dad had been alive to see me go.

Can you describe for me the wine epiphany or epiphanies that led you to want to write about wine?

My first wine epiphany was in 1998 – a bottle of Caymus Cabernet Sauvignon at a dinner party for my former boss. I worked for a lawyer who was really into wine. The second was in 2003 at a friend's parents' house. They owned restaurants, and it was a Chateau Latour that made me a believer in why wine is a big deal. I didn't think of writing about wine until December 2015, when my husband and mother encouraged me to rethink why I wasn't writing about wine. Most of my mom's family are educators, and she's a teacher. I always read and kept a journal. I majored in English Literature and always planned to write. It wasn't until I started blogging where I found I did have a voice. My mom is one of the best editors I know. She is stealth with

her edits. I used to send her my papers in college to edit. I send her my blog to edit before I post it.

I enjoy that you write for the consumer versus writing mostly for the wine trade or other writers, which I find to be a somewhat disconcerting trend among many wine writers. Why is the consumer important to you?

The consumer is important because, at the end of the day, wine needs to be sold. The job is to make consumers more knowledgeable so they buy more wine. Yes, as wine writers we can geek out over producers, terroir, grapes and history, but we need consumers to help carry the story.

Who is your audience? Can you describe your reader to me?

My audience is 30+ with a disposable income and doesn't look like consumers you see in ads. Let's be real. When we think of wine consumption we do not think of people of color being wine consumers.

I really enjoyed your blog about wine as it relates to each character on the HBO series, Insecure.

The idea to write about HBO's *Insecure* hit me after the first episode. The second I saw the cheap wine bottle, I realized I could write something about great value wines for each character. Not all characters on television can afford expensive wine, and I wanted to showcase wine to match the characters' personalities.



Julia during her travels to Cairo.

When you're buying for yourself—drinking just for yourself versus working on an article—do you buy mostly based upon wanting to explore the terroir of a certain place, a certain producer? What lights your fire when shopping for yourself?

My fire is lit first by region. I'm a traveler so I think in those terms. If I want to visit Spain, I think of where I want to visit in Spain, what I want to eat, and what wines I want to drink while eating. Next, the exploration of grapes and producers follows.



Why write about wine? You've written about beauty in the past. You've written about travel. Why explore the world of wine, and what do you hope your writing will bring to the reader?

To me, wine is about travel. They go hand in hand. I want readers, through my writing, to feel as I do when I read. I want

their innate curiosity to come through.

I want them to think about not only what they are drinking, but possibly planning a trip to that region to visit and taste wines you can't always get at your local store.

You recently wrote an open letter in response to an article penned by Karen MacNeil about the glass ceiling in the wine industry. Your letter was very civilized, but you did call her out for not portraying any women of color in her article. She in turn responded to your article. I found your original piece very, very moving. Talk to me about how your open letter and Karen's response to it have affected you.

I didn't think that blog post would reverberate in the industry like it did. As an African-American woman in the world of wine you can't help but notice how people of color are left out of the wine discussion in all aspects. I attend a lot of trade and media events, and knowing there are more people of color who want to be included but are not invited is disheartening. I have to mentally talk to myself before every trade event.

We've talked about how you're sometimes mistaken for someone who is working at a trade event, rather than a professional attending the event. Can you give me other examples of what it's like when you attend these types of events?

It can be from rude comments to reps not actually pouring enough in my glass for me to actually taste the wine. I was recently at a tasting in NYC. There were four of us standing in front of a wine rep holding out our glasses. Each of the men received a substantial pour—about two ounces. The lady next to me received less than that, and I received a splash of wine. Before I could say anything the woman had to tell the rep she wants the same pour and to give me the

same. Mind you, he had just opened the bottle in front of us.



How do we move forward as an industry with regard to being more inclusive of people of color?

It's certainly something that wineries talk about, I think because it's P.C. Still, I don't see a lot of them changing up their hiring decisions, particularly on the executive level. How do we as an industry start to do the real work here?

We wouldn't be drinking wine if it weren't for people

of color. Seriously. Are we kidding ourselves about who actually picks the majority of the grapes? It's asking if someone who works for you wants to be mentored to expand his or her job opportunities. I've heard from numerous people that this issue has been discussed, but it falls on deaf ears.

I am guilty of that myself. I am often invited to wine industry tastings and exclusive events, and I

cannot recall inviting a person of color to join me. This realization just recently struck me, and I'm deeply ashamed of it. Why is that? It reminds me of a very powerful quote by Martin Luther King Jr.: "I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. The Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not...the Klu Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who constantly advises the Negro to wait for 'a more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will." I must actively change my behavior, not just pat myself on the back for thinking in platitudes.

It is a start that you are acknowledging where you can grow. It's as simple as mentioning to wine public relations companies the name of a person of color for a press trip if you can't attend. It's the little things that add up. The woman standing next to me at the tasting didn't have to say anything about the wine in my glass and the slight. But she did. We have to start there.

To read Julia Coney's blog and learn more about her, visit www.juliaconey.com.

All photos courtesy of Julia Coney.

Of Telenovelas and Syrah: A Chat with Lupe Solorzano

Harvest is underway in the Ballard Canyon AVA of Santa Barbara County as I pull up to Stolpman Vineyards, one of the appellation's better known producers and a grower of Rhône varieties whose fruit has become coveted by a number of celebrated winemakers. I've come to chat with legendary crew manager, Maria Guadalupe Solorzano – she prefers to go by Lupe – a laid-back and confident farmer.

Around these parts, Lupe is highly regarded not only as a highly capable crew boss but also as one half of the Solorzano power couple; her husband, Ruben is a partner at Coastal Vineyard Care Associates, one of California's leading vineyard management companies.

Often seen together at wine industry events and tastings, the Solorzanos bring a wealth of experience, understanding and intuitive know-how to the Central Coast's winegrowing community.

Lupe meets me under a huge oak tree where we settle in at an old picnic table just feet from meticulously-farmed vineyard rows. Her daughter, Marissa, who is 22-years old and attending college in Santa Barbara, sits in as our interpreter, though it turns out Lupe answers most of the questions herself.



RH Drexel: *Where were you born?*

Lupe Solorzano: In Jalisco, Mexico. I grew up on a corn farm. I came to the United States in 1990, when I was 13 years old. I always dreamed of coming to America.

RHD: *And how old were you when you started working in vineyards?*

LS: I was 19 years old. I went to work for Ruben, who is now my husband. I was on the picking crew. He was the foreman. I worked for one year at Stolpman, then I went to Lafond Vineyards. I came back to Stolpman in 2007, and in 2012 they made me crew boss.

RHD: *How old were you when you and Ruben got married?*

LS: I was 22 years old. We had our wedding in Mexico. In Jalisco. My little town.

RHD: *What do you love most about living in the United States?*

LS: Knowing that I can wake up each day and go to work to provide for my family.

RHD: *What do you like most about being a crew boss?*

LS: I like to work outside. I cannot work indoors. I don't even like to be inside the winery at harvest. I like the outdoors. Fresh air and sunshine.

RHD: *Do you manage both women and men?*

LS: About 10 women and 16 men year-round. During harvest, we have more people.

RHD: *Do you find the men listen to you? Do you think men might have issues taking farming orders from a woman?*

LS: We have to work together. They listen because they know we have work to do. They listen because they want to do good work.

RHD: *What does a typical day look like for you?*

LS: Every day at the vineyard is a little different. Even during harvest. But harvest is hard because I work very long days...sometimes 17 hours a day and I can only take little naps...for 2 hours at a time...here and there. Our harvest is from around September to November, so it's very hard. But the rest of the year it's not as hard, and every day we have different things to do...leafing, hoeing, so it doesn't get boring.

RHD: *Your husband, Ruben, is overseeing vineyard management at Stolpman. Do you and he talk about work a lot at home?*

LS: I will talk about work sometimes at home. Or he will talk about work at home. But not all the time. It's okay, though, because when we talk about work at home it's to help each other usually.

RHD: *Aside from Marissa, do you have other children?*

LS: Yes, our son Omar is 8 years old, and Marissa is 22 years old.

RHD: *Do you hope they go into winemaking or winegrowing?*

LS: Whatever they want. Everybody is a little bit different.

RHD: *What is the hardest part of your job?*

LS: There is nothing really hard because if I don't know how to do it, I just ask for help.

RHD: *And do you enjoy drinking wine?*

LS: Yes. Now, yes. Before, I did not like wine. I drank beer. Tequila. Now I like wine. Red wine, white wine, but I like more reds. Syrah is number 1 for me and Grenache number 2. Of course, Stolpman Vineyards is the best. Peter Stolpman introduced me to wine.

RHD: *Tell me a little more about what it's like to work for the Stolpman family.*

LS: Peter Stolpman has shown his appreciation for the work we do in the vineyard by giving back to whole crew through the Cuadrilla project and anytime he is around the vineyard he tries to connect with each member the crew.

RHD: *And, how long do you think you'll work in the vineyards?*

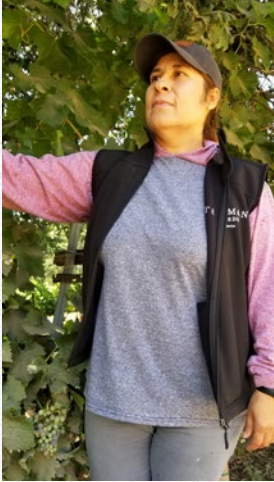
LS: Until I am too old and I cannot anymore. I like to do it.

RHD: *And when you're not working. What kinds of things do you like to do?*

LS: I like to watch telenovelas. And, until just a little while ago, I was on a co-ed soccer team with family and friends.

RHD: *When harvest is over, what kinds of things do you look forward to?*

LS: I like to go back home, to Jalisco. We all go together. We go there and we have good parties with our family and we are happy. I try to never miss a good party in Jalisco. It's a very happy time.



READING STUDIES



I READ A NEW STUDY ABOUT HOW WOMEN'S PALATES AND SENSE OF TASTE ARE BETTER THAN MEN'S. SO GLAD THESE TYPES OF STUDIES KEEP COMING OUT. I TELL MY FRIENDS ALL THE TIME... MY SALE GALS OUTSELL MY SALE GUYS MOST OF THE TIME.



WELL, SINCE YOU LIKE READING STUDIES, HERE'S ONE YOU MIGHT ENJOY ABOUT PAY DISPARITY AMONG GENDERS. AFTER YOU READ IT, MAYBE YOU CAN TELL ME WHY LARRY GOT A BIGGER BONUS AND IS GETTING A BUMP IN PAY, EVEN THOUGH I SOLD MORE WINE AND OPENED UP TWO ADDITIONAL SECONDARY MARKETS?

Judy Chan: Winemaker of the Year



Winemaker of the Year: Judy Chan

Winery: Grace Vineyard, Shanxi, China

Benchmark Wine: Deep Blue, a Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (68%), Merlot (22%) and Cabernet Franc (10%). This restrained, delineated effort possesses fine-grained tannins, is nearly opaque in appearance, and delivers precise, elegant aromatics of cedar, high-toned red fruit and petrichor.

Grace Vineyard was founded in 1997 by Judy's father, Chun-Keung Chan. In 2002, her father asked her to join the family business even though she didn't know anything about wine. She was 24 years of age. She was immediately made president and winemaker.

Under her leadership, the winery has expanded its market beyond Hong Kong and China, and now includes Japan, Singapore, Great Britain, Belgium and Netherlands. Judy has been feted in the press by everybody from Decanter to Robert Parker's Wine Advocate.

Considered China's top winery, Grace Vineyard is recognized mostly for its Bordeaux varietal wines, though its Marselan is a memorable effort, a wine with presence and length.

Recently, I spent a couple of days with Judy Chan while she was visiting here stateside. Below I captured a few highlights from our meandering conversations:

"That's why I love that movie, Sliding Doors. Just one small decision – one moment – can change your whole life. I quite like where I am now, but I would like to know out of curiosity, not regret, what my life would have been like if I attended graduate school." [Judy was accepted at Yale, but went to work at the family winery, instead.]

"I haven't always digested alcohol well. I used to drink one beer and pass out. At first I didn't like

wine. Now I love it. And I enjoy talking to consumers about it. Consumers enjoy learning about wine and feeling smart about it.”

“I never imagined being a winemaker. I was going to become a professor or work for the United Nations. It has been challenging, but I enjoy it very much.”

“Out of college, I went to work at Goldman Sachs. I had never studied finance. I had studied Psychology and Women’s Studies. Working in finance turned out to be a very interesting experience. It was a very fast-paced firm with many perks: at-your-desk massages, full concierge service for employees... If your mother-in-law needed a birthday gift, the concierge would go out and buy it. I remember once asking my boss what the budget was for an event he wanted to have. He said, “There’s no budget.””



“Culturally, it wasn’t really a challenge for me to step into a leadership role at the winery. My family is very liberal.”

“My father is a very interesting person. When we were children and it was typhoon season, my father would drive us to the water to see the waves. You were supposed to stay inside, but he was not afraid, and so we were not afraid. And then we’d go to the movies...4:30, 7:30 and 9:30 – three shows in a day. He’s very curious and interesting. I think that’s why I said ‘yes’ to joining the family business.”

“The first time I visited the winery, it was pitch dark. I had no idea what I was getting into, but I was not scared. That’s the thing about being young; you have no fear.”

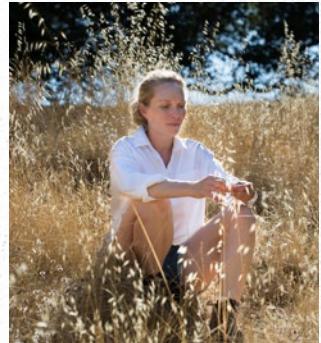
“I don’t want to be talking to the same crowd as every other Chinese winery owner. At Grace, we sell a lot of wine on-line to younger Chinese people. We also have prices that range from \$10 (US) a bottle, to \$80 (US) a bottle. The most affordable wines are bought mostly by locals, who approach it the way they would a beer – just something casual. But we also make wines that are for banquets and events. Others are more interesting to sommeliers and collectors. We like a wide range of wines.”

“The day I start rejecting new ideas, that’s the day I hope someone taps me on the shoulder and tells me to step down.”

“The export market is very difficult. When I speak to people about exporting to the US, they want to sell to Chinese restaurants, but most buyers at Chinese restaurants want to feature beer. We’ve created a wine at Grace Vineyard called “Chinese New Year”. It’s a wine – almost like a Beaujolais Nouveau-style – that we harvest in October, bottle in December and have on the shelves by January. We are hoping to someday export this wine to the US. It will be for American consumers, and also for Chinese-Americans who are nostalgic for their homeland and who cook Chinese food at home and long for a wine from home to have with it.



Words of Wisdom from Women in Wine



This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. We are all, regardless of our sex, working away from a patriarchy towards matriarchal, community-based systems. We are all, in the wine production, moving away from man-made fertilizers and poisons to more natural, holistic farming alternatives. We are all moving away from chemistry driven winemaking to open-hearted intuitive winemaking. We are all, men and women, experiencing a feminine awakening. To be aware of it furthers the shift. Once you see the world as a flow of universal energy from soils to vine to grapes to tank to the hands and hearts of the people who handle those grapes and tanks and finally the people who enjoy those wines at the dinner table, and that wine itself acts as a point of communion of all of those parties, it is easier to let go of the pain caused by duality and abuse.

My advice to women beginning a career like mine, in production, is to stay grounded. Have the courage to follow your heart and gut, which are so much wiser than your head. Women are at a physical disadvantage, there's no denying it. Build a health regime that will support you through all the jobs you have to do. I train for harvest every year, especially now that I've reached 40. And then, when you are doing your thing in the cellar/vineyard and someone makes a shitty, sexist comment – I'm talkin' anything short of a true threat – my preferred technique is to ignore it. Michelle Obama urged girls to "disregard anyone who demeans or devalues them". To do otherwise would only feed bad behavior, a waste of your precious vital energy. In a tug of war, what happens to the other side if you choose to just let go?

Good luck, sisters.

Diana Snowden Seysses, Winemaker



When I worked in the corporate world, my best mentors were women. There were three of them, and they were the toughest women in the office, and also the most successful. They didn't always tell me what I wanted to hear, but I knew they wanted to see me succeed, and they were really smart and didn't take any sh**! The men I worked for gave me the best compliments, and these three women gave me the hardest time, which made a lasting impression and made me want to do better. If I were to give advice, I would think back about these experiences, and I would try to pass along what I learned from them, as well as what I've learned myself.

I would say - working in wine is not like getting good grades in school or doing well in an accounting career. You can't simply wait passively to be given a project, and then accomplish it. There is always more you can be doing, and you can always do it better. The possibilities and potentials are unlimited. If you are making wine, there are new methods no one else has tried. Be creative. If you are selling wine, there are customers you aren't reaching, or new ways to market or talk about your product. If you are managing employees or working with distributors, they can always be more motivated to build the brand and you can always teach them more about the product.

My advice is: don't be ever be passive (I would repeat that statement again), and don't be afraid to ask for what you need. Be aggressive in asking for more of yourself and others, give ideas for how to accomplish the goal, and still be nice. You can be aggressive but still be kind.

Samantha Sheehan, Winemaker



Own that you're smart.

Being recognized for your intelligence, and not shying away from it or hiding it, can serve you well when it's done right. Remember that intelligence is meant to be shared, with the respect and care it deserves. It's about making a contribution. It's about giving a voice to information (or knowledge, or wisdom) that you have come to possess. It's about being the voice of that, in a way that strikes the balance between confidence and humility.

This is the tricky part.

Yes, you need to be confident in owning your intelligence. I suspect that your intelligence is hard-won, and that you've survived plenty of hard knocks about it along the way. Own those,

too. You've earned it. But this isn't about arrogance. It isn't about thinking you're the smartest person in the room. It isn't even about showing off if you do in fact happen to be a subject expert on whatever it is that's being discussed. This is where you also need to be humble.

This does not mean prostrating yourself. This does not mean being submissive. What it means is that intelligence is never finished, and in that way intelligence itself is humble. You never know everything there is to know. You are part of a much larger evolution of intelligence. Recognize that. Know that there is a lineage, and you are one part of it. This is the humble part. Your job, while you are here, is to contribute what you can. Maybe that's a little; maybe that's a lot. But if you don't contribute, if you hide your intelligence and don't own that you're smart, then you've betrayed the gifts you've been given. And there is nothing intelligent about that.

Cathy Huyghe, Author, Educator

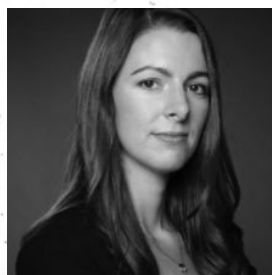
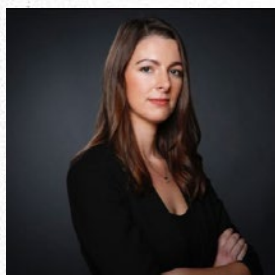


My staff is made up entirely of women at the moment, so I think very hard, very often, about how I have the opportunity as well as the responsibility to manage them in a way that gives them all the support I wanted to feel coming up in the wine industry.

Personally, I sought compassion and encouragement, ample praise, and space to express myself authentically. On the other hand, I also wanted very direct, honest feedback on my work. I wanted clear guidelines and ample structure. And within that, I wanted room to freestyle, to be given creative license and the trust to implement new ideas. I also hoped that my managers and mentors would recognize when I needed one of those things more than another in order for me to best grow. I realize now that that's rather a lot to expect of a human manager! Still, in order to empower women in my workplace, I believe it's my responsibility to offer that, however tricky it may be.

Directly, some ways I do that are through quarterly or semi-annual, individual check-ins to find out what's challenging each team member, where they need more support, or where they want to grow. Daily, I inquire about their personal lives so I can get a fuller picture of what matters to them and understand how they work. I solicit their opinions in making decisions that may impact their work – from wine tasting and buying, to scheduling, to new systems or organization – and I expect them to learn how to do every task in the shop regardless of their natural preferences or skillsets. I have a Bay Grape Ten Commandments list posted in various places, which includes things like “Take ownership of your mistakes and share your lessons with the team,” and “Don't ask for permission; state your case for why you intend to do something.” This lets them know they are both responsible for and empowered to make decisions – and decision-making is ultimately where organizational power lies.

Stevie Stacionis, Retailer, Founder, Batonnage Forum



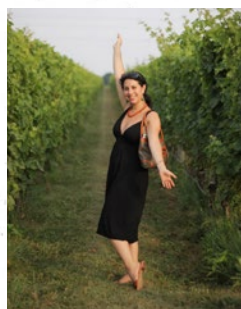
Open a Roth IRA while you're still so young. Contribute to it every month! (Seriously.)

Also: Do not expect that anyone other than you will make your career happen. No single mentor, boss or colleague will be everything you need at every point in time. If you have a supportive supervisor who is giving you opportunities, that's great, but don't put all your stock in one person. Remain open to other opportunities if they come along. Cultivate everyone you can. Be fearless in reaching out to people. Approach them, shake their hands, make eye contact.

Promote yourself. Own your successes. Be humble and deferential only insofar as you need to in order to be polite; beyond that, be outspoken and proud.

Always ask for more. More opportunities. More space. More money. Just because they haven't given it before doesn't mean they won't give it to you now.

Esther Mobley, Writer, Journalist



Earlier this year I walked into an event and was surprised to realize that I knew a substantial number of the people in the room. I'd only been living in the Bay Area for about two years at that point, and I hadn't really coordinated meeting up with anyone.

Apparently I'd figured something out, something I'd wished someone had told me earlier on. Networking does not have to be (groan) NETWORKING. Earlier in my life, in a previous career, I diligently attended networking mixers. They were fine, but often felt like a bit of a chore. I hadn't really done much of that here.

I prefer small groups. Moreover, meeting up around a common interest is a much stronger starting point for real relationships, much more so than merely trading business cards. We're particularly lucky in this business that so many of us already share a passion for the thing we work on.

I participate in two tasting groups – one I help run and another that is all women. I look forward to them every month. Other common interests work just as well. I'm also in a couple of book clubs and a writing group, all of which I really value. I realize not everyone has time for all of that; I probably won't always have the time myself. However, I really think it's worth carving out some space for these kinds of meetings.

The beauty is that we meet up to discuss wine/books/writing, but inevitably discussions turn elsewhere. You get to know people in a much more genuine way. You have some laughs. Inevitably, conversations also turn to work, and you find yourself getting free career advice. Little by little, people bring new friends to join. The circles grow. Then one day you walk into an event and realize you know half the people in the room.

Nicole Ruiz Hudson, Writer and Educator



The wine industry is pretty unique. It combines innovation with tradition, socializing with physical labor, collectors with sommeliers, business with service, science with art. It's for all these reasons that I love working in this field, but being a woman in this industry comes with its own challenges: gray area around appropriate behavior in a variety of settings; misplaced perceptions around expertise and capabilities... This list goes on.

I've been so lucky to be surrounded by strong female mentors in my careers who have spoken frankly with me about positives and negatives in the workplace, and who have also offered me tools to take into negotiations, meetings with higher level executives, perspectives on how to handle a variety of situations, and more. As a result, I think shining a light on the issues is of huge importance, and I think it's still very important to show women at work in this field. I've done a lot of work in championing the cause of women in wine, from highlighting them in articles I've written to putting on the first *Bâtonnage* Forum this past summer, the focus of which was to highlight the unique challenges and opportunities that women in this industry face. I hope that by doing so others can find inspiration, as I have in the people that have been my mentors and examples.

I think the question of sexuality is a big challenge that women face. There's a lot of gray area around appropriate behavior and responses between customers and you as the salesperson — yeah, sex sells, but what if you don't want it to? It's a hard topic that I'm still feeling my way around and being fairly young, fairly attractive, and very single, it's one that comes up a lot. Since I'm in a marketing position that often deals with private clients, I'm super conscious about how I dress and how I engage with the predominantly male customers I deal with. I consider myself to be a pretty strong feminist, but then I find myself frequently having to shrug off things that, if I weren't working, I'd be confronting. I've also had to relax my point of view, given that I spend a lot of time with European men, where the standards of what's appropriate are very different than what's acceptable in the U.S., whether in the office or in a sales environment.

For me, working in the beverage industry just heightens my sense of needing to be alert and in control, given the gray area of working in a social field when a lot of my working hours are spent over glasses of wine. Building a sort of wall around myself has worked fairly well, giving me the distance I need to deal with everything from superficial quips to more uncomfortable issues like unwanted guests showing up at a hotel door, but it also is a mindset that seeps into my dating life, at times leaving me with a sort of inflexibility in how I deal with men generally; I tend to put everyone immediately into a friend zone, where I'm comfortable dealing with them.

Sarah Bray, Writer and Educator

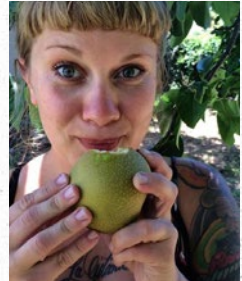


As an educator and journalist, I strive to empower women both in the classroom, when I collaborate with them in the industry, and in the way I report on their professions and businesses. I make an effort to respond thoughtfully to student inquiries, to reply to requests for introductions and referrals, to share insights where they are welcome, and to express gratitude sincerely and often.

The biggest disparity I see among women in the industry is how they define success. While I'm rarely satisfied with my own efforts, I make a point to acknowledge the efforts and successes of younger women in particular. I was recently coaching a young sommelier who was nervous about presenting a trade education seminar. Beyond guiding her around the obvious pitfalls, it was my reassurance and the confidence I expressed in her that ultimately empowered her to trade her fear for joy. I recall saying, "We love wine and we (as wine educators) have one of the best jobs in the world." It was a statement based on my own conviction, and she realized the truth in it.

On a practical note, I shared a simple technique called “smile therapy” that she found helpful. When I’m driving to a lecture or a speaking engagement I dispel nervous energy by smiling. The physical act of smiling helps lift my mood and chase away negative self-talk or harsh words that may be dragging me down. Sometimes empowering one another comes down to the simple act of sharing – sharing our truths and our discoveries so that others can benefit even a little from that wisdom. I’ve benefited from adopting a motto so I’ll share that too: “To learn, read. To know, write. To master, teach.” – Hindu proverb.

Deborah Parker Wong, Writer, Editor, Educator



Do not think of your gender as a handicap. It is your superpower.

While you are being underestimated in the early part of your career, take advantage of the opportunity to quietly lay the foundation and put in the railways to build your empire. While building my business, I spent a lot of time trying to prove to people that I was capable of having my own winery, and it did not matter how hard I tried, people either believed in me, or they didn't. The same still applies.

Keeping your head down and focusing on your goals is the best way to make them come to fruition. If someone seems to doubt you, quietly tip your hat and knock on the next door, you will find plenty of allies and people who will help you, but only if you do not give up. And most importantly, do not view rejection as a vote against you, but as a lesson in being more selective.

We are extremely resilient.

Laura Brennan, Winemaker



Working in wine production can be a dehumanizing and infuriating experience for women. Women are evaluated on their performance, men are evaluated on their potential. Always keep that in the back of your mind. If a woman starts a cellar internship with very few skills, she may remain seen as inexperienced throughout the entire harvest – even as she is cultivating her skillset – whereas an inexperienced male intern may be given more responsibilities early on for the sole reason that he is male and therefore seen as capable of learning. The most effective way I've found to combat this issue is to lose the oh-so-unfortunately socialized 'female' passive attitude and just go for it. Manage the pump, set up the hoses, do the punchdown. Just start doing it. You have arms and legs and a body with weight that you can leverage to push, pull, and lift. A man's body isn't a working body; any body is a working body, if it does work. When you make a mistake, don't smile or laugh it off. Maintain your professional, serious attitude and try again. Watch how the men respond to their failures and emulate it (not because it's better of course, but because you have to be strategic). Once you have their respect, you can begin to cultivate changes in behavior standards. There is no avoiding negative work experiences in the beginning. As you gain more experience and make connections, you will be able to choose work places that better fit your standards. There are plenty of wineries with fantastic staff who will value and respect you. Good luck out there!

Megan Bell, Winemaker



First they need to be passionate and a little bit crazy. If that's in place, I often tell young women interested in a career in winemaking to keep reminding themselves that there is absolutely nothing about winemaking that a woman can't do. Period. Personally, I have always been grateful that the title "Winemaker" connotes no gender. I also remind them to be persistent and not give up when the going gets tough. Winemaking is a long-term endeavor on so many levels.

Cathy Corison, Winemaker



In 30+ years of teaching I have had over a thousand undergraduate and graduate student advisees. One important thing I have learned is that people are not limited by lack of talent so much as by a lack of belief in themselves. This is due to a phenomenon I call “anti-mentoring” – the planting of the seeds of self-doubt by someone placed in a position of esteem (for example, parent, teacher, coach, older relative, peers). Anti-mentoring is a powerful force. The anti-mentors tell us to aim low so as to not be disappointed in ourselves, amplify our inadequacies, intensify our weaknesses and instill a fear of failure as failure only serves to validate self-doubt. These seeds of self-doubt are incredibly fertile and will grow in any personality, any gender identity, any ethnicity. The most important empowerment tool is to weed out the self-doubt and replace it with self-confidence.

To me the key to building self-confidence is to put failure and the fear thereof in proper context. To quote Yoda, “The greatest teacher, failure is”. Failure teaches us where our talents truly lie and then hones those talents. Embracing its lessons enables us to push the envelope intelligently, to succeed where others have simply accepted disappointment, to innovate, to excite, to thrive and to be truly happy with ourselves. The trick to empowerment is faith in oneself. True empowerment in the workplace requires successfully transitioning failure from a mere fertilizer of self-doubt to the greatest teacher of self-confidence. Teaching people how to learn from failure is essential to countering anti-mentoring and assuring they achieve their full potential in whatever career path they might choose. Teaching students how to embrace and learn from failure was a fundamental component of my wine production courses.

Linda Bisson, Professor



I make my wines at a custom crush facility in Healdsburg. They tend to hire a good percentage of female interns, which is great for me not only to connect (and borrow tampons or hair ties) but to perpetuate the lady footstomps. As I meet the new interns, I try and connect with them, ask them about how and why they got there and what they envision for future work. I share my own circuitous story of getting into the wine world. I do so selfishly, so they care about my brand and also to be a good example of what they can potentially do.

Another important part is positive reinforcement and encouragement. I had this in the beginning of my wine career and it has made all the difference. It can be intimidating getting on the forklift and moving around ½ tons of grape bins...dumping them into the sorter or press. Or driving a 26 ft. box truck or truck with a trailer attached to pick up harvested grapes. It is scary and caution should be executed. The feeling of accomplishment is amazing when you

do these tasks, pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. The wine industry has put so many challenges in front of me. I take a deep breath and go about handling them, and I've come out a changed fierce, independent, humble and confident woman. Winemaking is not easy – physically, emotionally or financially; it takes so much work, dedication and passion, but I don't want to do anything else.

Kristie Tacey, Winemaker



I wish that I'd been told when I first started out how much age discrimination is in our industry so I could plan for it. It's not easy for a woman well established in her viticultural career (and over 40) to find a position that is at her level of skill and experience. Prospective employers really do not want to pay for that experience (regardless of gender), and when they are willing to do so, their implicit bias is to pay it to a man.

The best opportunities I've gotten have been from women in my industry networks; these are relationships and connections I've built from two decades in the industry. Work on forming friendships and connections. It not only enriches your life and work experience, but can also be a life saver when you are in need of new opportunities and positions!

If there isn't a good network, then create your own! This includes reaching out to other like-minded women to see if they are interested in helping out with this networking. You never know until you ask. (You can do a lot with even a simple Google Group.) As the saying goes, a rising tide lifts all boats, and these networks will help everyone involved, both in the present and the future.

Debby Zygielbaum, Farmer, Vineyard Consultant



Things are changing rapidly in the workplace and in the world. I grew up in what would probably be considered “second-wave” feminism. I’m more than a bit older than many of the participants at the forum, and as I was talking with another speaker closer to my age, we both acknowledged that no one had talked about feminism at the forum. We also both realized that we grew up with that cliché-yet-inspiring song of our youth “I Am Women”, and it empowered us both to be stronger and push harder as women in the work world. As second-wave feminists, we were taught that we had to work harder, be smarter, and just accept the comments and looks from our male colleagues.

I think this approach and attitude has had mixed results; as women, we have made huge strides in the workplace, but we haven’t pushed men enough to change their attitudes and behaviors, and we still have to work harder for lower pay while expecting not to be taken as seriously.

Steve and I recently hired a younger woman (late 20s) who is helping with HR, among other things. She has also worked in the vineyard and cellar, and she is a badass. She is going to be leading an HR training with our staff in a few weeks, and we talked about the need to do a sexual harassment training. We will have one other woman – also in her late 20s – working in the cellar during harvest, and I expressed my concern about how they will be treated.

Both women responded with the same answer: “I’ll be OK, I grew up with a bunch of brothers, so I can handle it.”

In the past, I would have thought this was a great answer and I would have been very pleased to have smart, hard-working, tough women on my team. But now I have a college-aged son who has been taking classes at his liberal arts college on race, gender and feminism, and his attitude is very different. He continually asks the question “why is the onus on women/people of color/ LGBTQ folks to change their behavior to adjust to the expectations of (basically) white men.” These are not his exact words, but pretty much the sentiment. So I shared this thought with our employee who works on HR, and she couldn’t even quite relate to this idea. And I have to admit, it’s taken me a bit to wrap my head around it, but I have come to realize that I think my son is right, and we don’t have to tolerate this behavior but instead learn ways to kindly suggest that they are inappropriate. (I’m still working on this.)

As an example, I carry boxes full of wine all day long, and I don’t need help. I know when guys offer to help they are trying to be nice, and in many cases it was the way they were raised, and they aren’t bad people, so I am still trying to learn what to say to them when to let them know that I am perfectly capable of carrying a box of wine.

SO, the advice I would give to any women in the work world is to find a way to kindly express that we don’t need to be treated or thought of as less capable and less strong and that we are much more capable than we are given credit for. We need to expect men to change more and not have to do all of the adjustments ourselves. It’s something I need to work on, and I’m not even sure I’m there yet.

And to that point, I really think we need to continue the dialogue about expectations. I tried to bring that up at the forum because I think we are not all on the same page.

The other advice I would give is: Raise your sons to be feminists!

Jill Klein Matthiasson, Winemaker



The biggest challenge I face as a woman in the wine industry is one that I'm quite sure is not exclusive to this industry alone. (Are any of them?) For me, the biggest challenge is not judging myself. I am a workhorse by nature. I pride myself on my work ethic. I find myself judging my work-life balance. Am I working too much? Will it ever be enough? For my bosses? My coworkers? Myself? It doesn't help that in our industry we CAN be working all the time; in hospitality, business is always open. I see the men in my field asking for raises (and other women; don't get me wrong) while working regular hours, stating that they're just getting their due, but I don't want too much to be expected of me. I always want to exceed expectations. Always want to please. I'm not sure what that means, but I know it's mostly in my head. It's pressure I put on myself. I continue to search for the balance.

Lauren Feldman, Wine Marketer, Writer, Educator



I ask the most of women and always give them honest feedback; my motto is: "hard on issues, soft on people"

I give women opportunities even if they are scared that they are not capable. One difference

between men and women is that women often have self-doubt. At least this is what I see in Argentina. But I know when somebody is great and has potential, even if they themselves sometimes don't see it. I push them with love. I say, "Let's try this new job or challenge for a few weeks, and then we check-in on how you are doing." Every woman that I have pushed to move up, to do brave things, to stretch themselves has succeeded.

When there is an issue with childcare or family responsibilities, I listen. Family is the most important thing in men's and women's lives. I try to help find a compromise. But I always make it clear that for us women to achieve workforce equality, we need to be fair equally to men and women. My wish is that in the future it will be just as common for a man or a woman to take child-leave when a baby is born or to stay home for a sick child or family member.

I encourage women to study, to specialize, to learn more and more. Wine is both art and science, and one must stretch oneself in both realms to be great at making and selling wine. I make myself available as both employer and friend. I am a doctor, committed to the Hippocratic Oath – the duty to heal and to help others. I feel the same kind of responsibility towards my mentees. I take my job as mentor to both men and women very seriously.

Laura Catena, Winemaker

A Thirst for Life

A Thirst for Life: Chatting with Theo Lee

“You have my permission to record because California is a two-party consent state,” Theodora “Theo” Lee tells me, laughing, after I ask her if I may record our interview. I’m trailing her as we make our way into her modest Yorkville Highlands home where she’s come to care for her Petite Sirah vineyard this weekend. She maintains another home in the San Francisco Bay Area where, during the week, she is a Senior Partner and very successful trial lawyer at Littler Mendelson.

I’m struggling to keep up with Lee, who’s a few years my senior but has energy to spare. I was instructed to arrive early as she has a big day planned for us. After a morning tasting, we’ll be heading off to a neighborhood potluck at mid-day, and a bit later I’ll be shadowing her as she hosts a few retailers from out of town.



For now, though, Lee – dressed in a checkered, short-sleeved work shirt and work pants dusty from a busy morning in the vineyard – is eager to share her jewel-in-the-crown wine with me, her estate-grown Petite Sirah, which she bottles under her Theopolis Vineyards label.

This is my first time exploring the Yorkville Highlands appellation. When I visit with winemakers, typically they’ll provide driving directions in advance, and add that upon arrival I’ll see their winery sign and immediately know where to turn. In Lee’s case, she instructs me to look for a little blue address sign with some plants painted on it.

The Yorkville Highlands appellation is located in Mendocino County and consists of about 40,000 acres, straddling the Anderson Valley to the northwest and Alexander Valley to the southwest. That may sound like a lot of land, but only about 450 of those acres are planted to wine grapes. It’s a fairly recent appellation, too, relatively speaking; AVA status was granted in 1998. Growth in this region has been slow these past 18 years. There are only a handful of wineries hidden in this mountainous region. Though various varieties are grown here – including Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel – I’m most attracted to its Petite Sirah, for which this area seems ideally suited, due to its hot days, positively frigid nights, gravelly and clay loams, and its high elevation.

During the week, Lee may litigate upon everything from wrongful termination and employment discrimination to race discrimination as a Labor Employment law attorney, but she’s equally as comfortable hopping on her tractor and working her vineyard and small orchard. Next year will be her 30th anniversary as an attorney. A 1987 University of Texas Law School graduate, she has practiced only Labor Employment Law her entire career because, as she says, “It’s sex, drugs, rock and roll, and hourly wages,” laughing heartily and openly. “You can’t open a paper without seeing a lawsuit about misclassification or off-the-clock work. I enjoy it, but obviously wine is my passion.”

It was Lee's mentors and colleagues in law who first introduced her to the world of fine wine. "I grew up in the South, in Texas, on a farm. We had wild Muscadine grapes growing there, and my father used to make home brew. Have you ever had Muscadine? It's so sweet. It tastes like cough syrup. It's so nasty! I thought that's what wine tasted like, so I didn't drink wine until I moved to California in the '80s and learned about fine wines."



Lee learned about wine as a young associate from her colleagues, and, in particular, from her mentor at Littler Mendelson, Barbara Oddone. Oddone, who is now retired, had a home and vineyard in Healdsburg at the time that Lee visited often. Back when she was starting out in law "you didn't have faxes and emails and all of these other ways to communicate. Basically, if you had a brief due, if you got it done on a Saturday and it was due on a Monday, you drove it to the partner's house. So, I would go to Healdsburg to deliver briefs for Barbara to review for the following Monday, and she'd invite me to stay for dinner and we would drink wine from her vineyard. I would walk the vineyard, because I'm really an outdoors person. I was driving a tractor by the time I was eight years old. I fell in love with the wine lifestyle – great wine, great food and being out in the vineyard. Other partners and associates had places in Oakville and Calistoga, so it from them and Barbara that I started to appreciate wine."

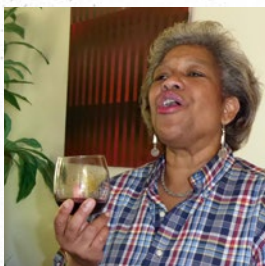


Lee soon began to envision owning her own little vineyard. She is quick to point out that she wanted to be a grower, first and foremost, but land in the Napa Valley, on an associate's salary, was an impossibility. Her mentors suggested that she look into Lake County and Mendocino County. "In 2001, I finally felt like I could take some equity out of my house and put it into buying a piece of land. I felt confident I could do this. I kind of knew I liked Mendocino. It's a

beautiful place. I used to visit the coast there. Alice Walker, the author, whom I knew because she went to Spelman [a historically African-American college in Atlanta, Georgia from which Lee graduated], had a place in Mendocino, and we have mutual friends. She lives further out near Boonville, so I looked at properties up there, but then I saw this property in Yorkville.”

The land itself was mostly fallow meadow, redwoods and firs. The 20-acre property came with two sheep and eight chickens, and a house that was in ill-repair. “It was a nightmare. The lady I bought it from was an English teacher from London, and she only spent half of each year here. The room we’re in now [the dining room] was her library. There were shelves on all the walls, floor to ceiling. It had been badly neglected. While she was in England, cats roamed this house and I’m allergic to cats, so I had to get people who clean baseboards and floorboards to come in and take up everything and clean it all up.” She gave the sheep away but kept the chickens. “I knew how to raise chickens and they laid beautiful eggs, but then a fox came one night and killed them all.”

Before escrow even closed, Lee had soil pits dug throughout her property to ensure that it was ideally suited to the growing of fine wine grapes. After learning that her land was suitable for grapes, she went about refurbishing her home and property. She put in a hot tub and pool. “I got in the pool late last night, and the moon was so beautiful.” She also put in a fruit orchard, but laments her failed cherry trees. “The cherries were so sweet, but one year the birds ate them all and then they never blossomed again.” She seems especially proud of a 500-square-foot deck she had built, “It’s perfect for my bottle release parties for my wine club members. We prep food here,” she says, excitedly, pointing at a small, clean food prep area. “I’ll have a live band over. We have wine tasting in the garden.” Lee typically hosts about 200 club members annually for her release party.



For the first few years, though, she sold all of her Petite Sirah to Carlisle Winery and a few urban wineries in the Bay Area. She was quite content simply being a grower. Then, in 2012, an ill-timed rain fell during harvest and she rushed to pick her grapes at 23 brix. The buyer at that time (no longer Carlisle) had contracted for grapes at 25 brix, so they rejected the entire lot. Faced with no one willing to purchase fruit at a lower brix level at that time, she decided to have her fruit custom-crushed in Hopland, a few miles from her home.

Her 2012 wines were made entirely on the barter system. She gave the winemakers at the custom crush facility half of her harvest for free, if, in turn, they’d process the other half of her harvest and make her wines for her. At the time, she says, she couldn’t afford to hire a winemaker, and so the barter system worked in her favor. She paid only for the bottles, capsules, corks and labels. Her 2012 Petite Sirah received a gold medal from Sunset Magazine and soon thereafter, Theopolis Vineyards was underway. She began hosting tastings at her homestead, and invited

neighboring wineries – sometimes five at a time – to pour alongside her.

Today, Theopolis produces four wines: her hallmark Petite Sirah, which is beautifully balanced, elegant, yet powerful; a very refreshing dry Rosé of Petite Sirah; an arresting, delicate bone-dry Symphony (a hybrid of Muscat of Alexandria and Grenache gris); and an unfiltered, lovely Pinot Noir from nearby Anderson Valley. Her wines are all priced between 20 and 40 dollars, by no means cheap but certainly fairly priced for their high,



definitive quality. "I know that a lot of people who buy my wines buy them because of me. If I put a 75 dollar price tag on my wines, they wouldn't be able to afford it. I'm not a snob and I don't want to sell my wine to snobs. I am the common man and I want to appeal to the common man. I actually have always specialized in pleasure in the bottle," she tells me, "because when I was in high school I used to throw parties and I used to make something called Wonder Punch."

Wonder Punch, I learn, is made up of Everclear, moonshine, vodka and various fruit punches. Lee would charge party goers 10 dollars to get into her parties and an additional 5 bucks for a cup of Wonder Punch. Lee ran this little enterprise through high school and college. "My boyfriend's father owned a bar and under alcohol regulations, alcohol purportedly expires, but alcohol really never expires, so he would give me half gallons of the liquor that had been rendered 'expired.'" As president of her freshman class in college, Lee threw parties in her dorm room and served her popular Wonder Punch. Lee believed then, as she does now, that "food, wine and drink bring people together from all walks of life. It doesn't matter what your race, color, creed or orientation is."

As the day unfolds, Lee's energy remains positively boundless. We head off to the neighborhood potluck where she engages easily and confidently with about 30 or so neighbors, many of them winegrowers themselves. We have to drive deep into a redwood forest to arrive at the potluck site, and I'm starting to get a little fatigued, but Lee acts as if she's just hopped out of bed after a full night's rest and has had about three espressos to boot. It's a good thing she has a lot of energy ("I take vitamins," she tells me), because she has her hands full.



Lee lost her father earlier this year, in March. Currently, she's dividing her time between her law work, her vineyard, and visiting her 90-year-old mother, who still lives in Texas. "She suffers from early-onset Alzheimer's, but she wants to stay independent, so every two weeks, I go to Dallas and take care of her. My dad had a 150-acre farm [he bought the first 10 acres when Lee was a little girl] and that's where I learned to drive, shoot guns, etc. So now I'm raising cattle and hay at their farm in Bristol, Texas." She has clients in Dallas (Neiman Marcus, American Airlines) so she "works it" as best she can.

Lee credits her parents with her tough, no-nonsense approach to life, tempered as it is by an inherent sweetness. She believes she inherited her aggressive and strong-headed ways from her father, while she credits her mother with her tender streak. But there are a few things she inherited that don't always work in her favor. "My father was domineering and controlling and I have a tendency to be that way, and my mom has to have everything in the right place, so I'm really neurotic about where things go. Everything has to go in its right place. You wash a glass as soon as you use it, etc. So that's why I live alone", she adds in a charming deadpan followed by a full-throated guffaw.

She may live alone, but Lee's life is populated by many adoring wine fans and loyal, ardent friends. She also devotes what spare time she has to a number of charitable organizations. "All women working in the wine business ought to help each other. 'From those to whom much is given, much is expected.' I can't take my legal career and this winery and vineyard and not give back to the community. People lifted me along the way. I have to go and lift as I climb." To that end, she sits on numerous boards, including the Bay Area Legal Aid, the San Francisco YMCA, the United Negro College Fund, and the California Women Lawyers, to name just a few. "My grandfather was a sharecropper. He didn't own anything. My father left Midway, Texas at the age of 12 because he wanted a better life for himself. He worked as an orderly and finally saved enough money to go to college and then he met my mother. They would have been married 65 years this past September. It is something that I feel obligated to do - to help others, especially women and minorities. If we don't help each other, then why are we here?"



Though she admits that the wine business is very demanding and a lot of work, she wouldn't have it any other way. She is a one-woman show and does all of her own sales. She sells all of her wine through her wine club and directly to restaurants. Just recently she picked up a broker in Los Angeles - her first one. "I'm an employment lawyer. You start having employees, you start getting in trouble," she says, laughing. There are many perks to having a wine brand of one's own, including getting to meet all kinds of interesting people. Through wine, Lee was able to meet her childhood idol, Diane Carroll, who came up to Lee's home in the Yorkville Highlands

and dined with her. “I took her around and tasted wine with her. She is still absolutely beautiful.”

We’re starting to lose the light and it’s nearly time for dinner when we wrap up our chat. Back at her house, she’s eager to put on some jazz music and start dinner. She invites me to stay and share a meal with her, but I have to head out for the long drive home. I tell her I’m a bit tired, and comment one last time on how much I admire her energy level. “I have my hands full, but I really like life. I figure you can sleep when you die, ‘cause you’ll have nothing else to do. I have a thirst for life.”



BADASS of the YEAR



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