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SONOMA'S WOMEN *of* **Wine**

A toast to four winemakers who are putting their own indelible marks on California vineyards.

BY MAUREEN C. PETROSKY

Several years ago my husband and I drove our small car, complete with swaying U-Haul, north from our first apartment in Atlanta to our new digs in the Big Apple. As we got closer I couldn't stop myself from begging him to turn left and head to California. I was born and bred an East Coast girl — sand from the Jersey Shore and mud from the banks of the Delaware River as much a part of my makeup as my bones and blood — but after just one visit to Napa and Sonoma, I harbored an aching desire to spend my days barefoot in Northern California vineyards. Today, with two little guys in tow and a charming home full of laughter, that ache is more of a soft whisper. Luckily, none of us Northeastern girls need leave the comfort of our living rooms to enjoy the California dream. Several women (and many a glass of wine) make it possible for us to live vicariously through their experiences. Wine has long been a man's world, but these days girl power is proving a formidable force in California's wine country. Following are four trendsetters from Sonoma Valley who prove that creating good wine need not be left to the boys.



SARAH QUIDER
~ Ferrari-Carano ~

Ferrari-Carano's Sonoma vineyards produce delicious reds and whites that have earned accolades from noted reviewers. Quider is responsible for the white wines in the collection. Her elegant fumé blanc features mouthwatering citrus flavors swimming in a honey-suckle haze. Although many California chardonnays have been condemned as over-oaked butter bombs, Quider's version balances all the attributes we originally liked about the white wine. The French oak gives her chardonnay a luxuriously rich mouth feel, and you get to enjoy a bushel of apples in each sip. She knows how to caress each element to create a sensual experience.



MELISSA STACKHOUSE
~ La Crema ~

La Crema consistently serves up luxury through its Burgundy-style wines. The affable Stackhouse will even drink with you — virtually, anyway. In fact she makes you feel like her new BFF through her virtual tasting. Pick up a bottle of her pinot or her chardonnay and sip and swirl right along with her at lacrema.com. She has a degree in viticulture and enology from the University of California at Davis. Through her wines, she epitomizes what Sonoma is all about. Paired with food or all on their own, the wines are rich in character and yet friendly to the palate. They're real crowd-pleasers. Click on her tasting for your next wine club meeting.



MARGO VAN STAVEREN
~ Château St. Jean ~

Van Staaveren, one classy lady, has logged more than a quarter-century at the winery, which is known for focusing on quality — from \$13 Riesling to reserve reds that reach \$100 per bottle. With guys like Robert Parker Jr. giving endless props to Van Staaveren's work, it's no wonder she is somewhat of a star herself. The big reds in her stable usually get most of our attention, but she has something for just about every taste and budget. If you're feeling feminine, go for her 2006 Estate Vineyard viognier. If you're searing some steaks, bite into one of her malbecs, which offer ripe blackberries, lavender, and mocha — a mouthful to remember.



MERRY EDWARDS
~ Merry Edwards Wine ~

The female winemakers emerging from California can all take a page from the book of Edwards, a 33-year veteran of the vineyards. A pioneer who strives for perfection in every drop, she got into the business through her love of food. She became legendary for making some of the best pinot noir on the market — including her critically acclaimed Russian River Valley version — but she can tango with the whites, too. Her sauvignon blancs are in a class of their own, with citrus balanced with mango and other sensual tropical fruit flavors. She's got grace, spirit, artistic vision, and scientific training, and she understands how to share it all through her wine. **NJL**