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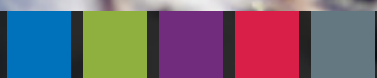
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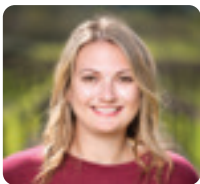
A preview of the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium



# The Elephant in the Cellar: The Unspoken Challenges for Mothers in Wine

When it comes to child-rearing, female winemakers and viticulturists need more support, flexibility and company policies in place.

Jess Lander



**Jess Lander** is a freelance wine, beer, food and travel writer based in Napa Valley. Her work has also appeared in publications like *Wine Enthusiast*, *Decanter*, *VinePair*, *SevenFifty Daily*, *AFAR*, and the *SF Chronicle*. Follow her on Instagram at @willwriteforwine.

**ANA DIOGO-DRAPER**, director of winemaking at Artesa Winery in Napa, had her second son in the summer and, theoretically, should have been able to take a relatively standard maternity leave before harvest kicked into gear.

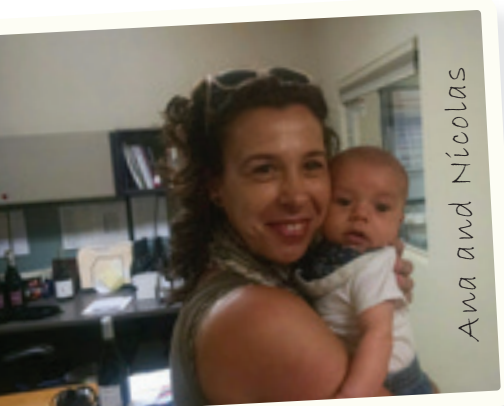
But it was 2016, and California was in year three of a drought. In the first week of August, the Chardonnay was ripe and ready, and on top of that, it was her first vintage as head winemaker. The winery didn't tell her she had to come back to work just one month postpartum, but she did anyway. Because that's the thing with wine: The grapes don't care about your plans.

"It was just my sense of responsibility. The grapes want to come in, and I have to be there to make those decisions," she said. "Physically, I was a mess. I had a baby who wouldn't sleep, and he would wake up every two hours. I was up all night. It was very, very grueling."

Navigating the newborn waters is just one of the many challenges mothers face when working in wine production and viticulture, and in the male-dominated industry, they're rarely talked

about outside of the whispers of female friend circles. But if the industry wants to continue to work towards evening out the gender imbalance, it needs to start here: with flexibility, support and policies that enable mothers to work and parent.

"The production hours are not [conducive] to having children. That's the reality of it," said Diogo-Draper. "When I'm home, I feel guilty because I'm not doing my work; and when I'm at work, I'm like, 'Oh my God, what a crappy mom, I should be home with my kids.' I'm getting pulled in two directions, and that balance is a struggle."



## Pregnancy Problems

The unique struggles of having children while working in wine production begin during pregnancy, the most obvious being that a winemaker's job is to, well, taste alcohol.

"When I got pregnant the first time, I had a doctor that was like, 'Are you going to take a leave of absence?' I was like, 'No, why would I do that? I'm tasting and spitting.' I was very, very careful about how much I tasted," said Nova Cadamatre, mother of two sons, a Master of Wine and the senior director of winemaking for Robert Mondavi Winery. She has also made wine in the Finger Lakes region.

Even when she was spitting, Cadamatre found herself repeatedly in uncomfortable situations while pregnant, where colleagues couldn't resist letting their opinions be known. "When you show up to a tasting and you're very clearly pregnant, you get weird looks. There are people who don't care and people who are very judgy about it, even if they don't say it to your face," she said.

"There's also a lot of pressure in the industry. It's like, 'Oh, it's ok, they'll be fine, you can have a glass,' and I just never felt comfortable with that. I was surprised at that. There were definitely vocal extremes on both sides."

Pregnancy is also known to affect a woman's sense of smell and taste—both of which need to be extra sharp on the job. Cadamatre remembers her sense of smell going on high alert with her first pregnancy. "Things like Pinot Grigio suddenly smelled like Muscat. Things like Muscat almost made me sick, the smell was so intense," she said, adding that it took some time to "recalibrate" her palate and sense of smell afterward.

Diogo-Draper said her palate "absolutely changed"





during pregnancy, too, and that she would always have another person tasting with her, especially on blending decisions, as a backup. For Katy Wilson, a consulting winemaker for several brands in Sonoma and Mendocino counties, and a new mother to a daughter born last summer, her sense of taste, especially bitterness, was heightened. She was also sick her entire pregnancy.

“Wine never made me feel more nauseous,” said Wilson. “You feel horrible, and you want to just lay in bed all day, but you have to keep working.”

Moreover, wine production, in both the cellar and vineyard, requires the handling of or being in proximity to chemicals. “For my first pregnancy, I was in the lab, and I was very concerned because of all the chemicals I was exposed to. I had gloves on all the time,” recalled Diogo-Draper.

Sadie Drury, general manager of North Slope Management in Walla Walla, Wash., and a mother to two daughters, said that while she wrote all the “spray recs,” she made a point to stay away from the actual spray rigs while pregnant. Even post-pregnancy, she’s continued to be careful. “I’m constantly mindful about re-entry periods and, in general, not handling any chemicals or being in the field,” she said. “I would hate to have it on my clothes, pick up my kids and somehow transfer it to them.”



Baby Charlie's first harvest  
at Emmaline Ann Vineyard.

Katy Wilson, David Meneses and  
Charlie LaRue Meneses



Sadie Drury, Stella & Brinley

## Timing is, Sadly, Everything

It's a no-brainer that most women winemakers would at least attempt to avoid having a baby right before or during harvest. But despite the best intentions and careful planning, the fact is that women have very little control over when they conceive and when their baby arrives.

“Definitely the timing was a big thing,” said Wilson. “It would not have been possible to have her during harvest; I wouldn't have been able to work.”

Drury had an even smaller window to work with than winemakers, for there's only one season of real downtime in viticulture: winter. “This is really sad, but I told my husband that if we were going to have kids, they'd have to be born in the winter, or we wouldn't have children. I felt like the only way I'd be able to not sacrifice anything in my career would be if I had my children when it was an appropriate time for me to have downtime,” she said.

“I'm in charge of hiring and all of the big decision making. I wasn't in a position where I could walk away from those decisions for a while. I don't know that there's any way I could have had a baby during spring, summer and fall and not sacrifice something for my career or leave the companies I work with hanging.”

A lack of backup is one big driver of this pressure to avoid a harvest baby at all costs and is a common issue within smaller companies or for consultants, like Wilson. “If you're the only winemaker, that's going to be a challenge,” said Cadamatre. “In that case, talk to the employer ahead of time. See if they're willing to hire and train an assistant. Or have a flying winemaker come in [during your absence].”



## Maternity Leave or a Lack Thereof

These days, maternity leave policies seem like a standard benefit for full-time employees, but in wine production, that's not necessarily the case.

"It still varies on what employers are offering in terms of paid maternity leave. There have generally been more men in those executive or winemaker roles, and so it hasn't been thought about as much for women," said Emily Santanelli, a broker with USI Insurance Services, which works with companies to find benefits for their employees.

"There are still a lot of employers who don't offer it in the wine industry; and if they do, it's maybe two weeks, six weeks," she said. "You can look up a lot of wine labels online, big ones and small ones, and it's difficult to find a career section on those websites; and when you do find them, there's nothing mentioned about maternity or paternity leave."

Yet Santanelli said that the current labor shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic could actually be a huge turning point for women in the wine industry when it comes to getting maternity leave and other benefits that cater to their parenting needs.

"Given the climate of needing to find employees now, this might be something [for employers] to consider," she said. "The wine industry being impacted by the labor shortage right now and with calls for diversity, equity and inclusion...it's an opportunity for companies to be more thoughtful about presenting their brand online and supporting employees as parents."

Even with a good maternity policy in place, several of the women interviewed, like Diogo-Draper, reported not taking the full time they were given due to the nature of the job and pressures they put upon themselves.

"There is a pressure that's there," said Santanelli. "Am I closing the window on opportunity? Is it going to be frowned upon, even if it's not explicitly frowned upon? Will there be missed opportunities?"

Similarly, Cadamatre came back early from maternity leave at six weeks postpartum and looks back on it as a mistake. "It's one of those things where you really need that time to really re-up and recoup," she said. "You think you can do it all, but you have to give yourself some grace since physically, you've undergone one of the most traumatic things a human can go through, and you need to heal from that."

Drury said that with her second child, she started bringing her daughter into work with her at just two weeks old. "It was so I could keep signing off on timecards, paying the bills," she said. "I think the thing the viticulture industry could do to help mothers is to make sure women in management positions have people who can step up to the plate when they're out on maternity leave. But if you're small, you don't necessarily have two people who do the same job."

As a consultant winemaker, Katy Wilson didn't have the luxury of paid maternity leave or a team of people who could cover for her, so she went fully back to work very quickly. "I only took two weeks off," said Wilson, who delivered her daughter in late June 2020. "And for those two weeks, I didn't go anywhere, but I still had phone calls and emails."

Wilson makes wine for several brands, including Reeve Wines, Anaba Wines, Smith Story Wine Cellars and BloodRoot Wines, in addition to her own brand, La Rue Wines. Each year, she crafts more than 60 different wines at three different facilities, with fruit coming from more than 50 vineyards across Sonoma and Mendocino counties. Taking an extended leave seemed completely out of the question, and on top of that, Wilson felt that she needed to provide extra reassurance to clients that her growing family wouldn't impact her work.

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“I was pretty nervous to let everybody know I was pregnant. You don’t know how people are going to react. You have the feeling from being around the industry that it is not totally an accepted thing for a very successful wine-maker to be able to have a baby without having any backlash or any repercussions,” she said.

“There’s a stigma that once you have a baby, you’re not focused on your work. I had a lot of people asking me if I was going to slow down, let go of clients or not accept new clients. The first reaction from people is, ‘Are you going to take a step back?’ Eight out of 10 times, that’s what people would ask me. It wouldn’t even be a consideration to ask a man to not work as much because they have a baby.”

Fortunately, Wilson said that all her clients were ultimately happy for her and supportive, but she’s also done everything she can to remove any shadow of a doubt. At the time of this interview in mid-October, Wilson said she hadn’t taken a day off since Labor Day weekend.

“It’s been a lot of sleepless nights. When I get home, I just want to be spending time with her, so I don’t sleep much,” she said. “Trying to balance everything...it’s not easy, that’s for sure.”

## Pumping, Not Pump-overs

When many mothers return to work post-partum, they need to pump if they’re choosing to breastfeed. In recent years, there’s been a movement for traditional working environments to provide offices or private rooms that mothers can use, but finding that in a wine cellar or vineyard? Good luck.

“It was hard to carve out the time to pump and to find the place to do it,” said Drury. “I would be doing it out in my truck sometimes in the field. My office door didn’t have a lock on it, so I was propping a chair up against my office door. I made it work to the best of my abilities.”

Santanelli said that ideally, wine industry employers should supply a private room for mothers to nurse or pump and a fridge in that room to keep their milk from spoiling, pointing out that employers “may not want bags of breast milk in the staff refrigerator.”

Cadamatre can attest to the fact that a comfortable room can make a big difference. She struggled immensely to find a place to pump with her first child, but by her second, her employer had installed a “Mother’s Room,” and she was “much more successful.”

“Employers could also help new moms cover the expense of a breast pump, by either having their medical policy cover some of it or by gifting additional money,” suggested Santanelli. “You want to encourage employees to have connections, especially with a newborn, and it’s the right thing to do.”

## The Never-ending Challenge

Childcare is certainly a nationwide issue, but the nontraditional hours of winemaking and viticulture can make finding childcare uniquely difficult, especially during harvest when mothers have to parent through the slog of long hours and virtually no days off.

Both Cadamatre and Diogo-Draper have had family come into town during harvest to live with them and help. Wilson’s mother-in-law moved in with her and her husband for harvest this year to be with the new baby, for her husband works with her. A single parent with no family nearby, Melissa Stackhouse, the director of winemaking at Simi Winery in Healdsburg, Calif., has a nanny to help with after-hours care and, on occasion, has had to bring her daughter into work.

“There were times, when she was young, when it was ‘Bring your daughter to work day’ when it really wasn’t ‘Bring your daughter to work day,’” said



*Oliva (Stackhouse) sampling grapes*

Stackhouse, recalling times when her daughter would be in her stroller at the winery while she tasted tanks during harvest.

But harvest isn’t the only culprit, Diogo-Draper argued. “On one end we have harvest every year, which is massive amounts of days and hours away from our families, but also, there’s the traveling outside of harvest to sell wine, promote it, media trips. That takes us away from home too,” she said. “I think there are a lot of winemakers who choose not to have children because of it.”

In the vineyard, workers are often required to come into work in the middle of the night or very early in the morning, but most daycares don’t open until much later. “For me, and probably my staff too, what’s hard is that farming hours aren’t 9-5, so it’s really challenging to find a daycare that’s flexible for those hours,” said Drury. “A lot of the ladies who work for me have to have someone watch their kids when they come to work at 4:00, 5:00 in the morning during harvest.”

Santanelli said that childcare assistance is another big way employers can sweeten the deal for prospective employees, suggesting they either offer some form of on-site childcare or a Dependent Care FSA, a pre-tax benefit account that can be used for childcare services. Employers can even opt to match up to a certain amount in that FSA.

“Some sort of childcare provided by wineries, or maybe even just during harvest, would go a long way I think,” said Diogo-Draper. “I think it would be welcomed by many, many women in the industry, bring more women into the industry and retain more women in the industry. This is a profession that’s very hard to do part-time. That doesn’t exist. You can’t just work two to three days a week.”

Even small gestures can make a big impact, said Santanelli. Employers can compile a list of childcare providers within a certain mile radius of the workplace and a list of vendors that can help find childcare in emergency situations, anything from unexpected school closures to weather events in the vineyard.

“In viticulture, in particular, everything we do is so dependent on the weather and the seasons, and so I can’t always predict when I’m going to need extra help with my kids,” said Drury. “It’s challenging, partly because of the hours I work and partly because of the unpredictability of the weather itself.”



Nicolas



## A Theoretically Easy Solution

Ultimately, the main thing mothers in the wine industry need from their employers is flexibility, and it's something that the COVID-19 pandemic has proven can be possible. "Women can be incredibly productive if given the freedom to manage their own time," said Cadamatre. "This whole concept of 'You have to be here 8-5, Monday to Friday' is very outdated. If people are just trusted to manage their own schedules, they will get a lot more done."

When Diogo-Draper arrived at Artesa, she had one non-negotiable: she wanted to take her children to school every day outside of harvest. "My team is here at 6 a.m. almost every day. If I was here at 6 a.m., I still wouldn't get home until 5 or 6, and I wouldn't see my kids. I had to find my balance," she said.

"There are a lot of women in the career path to becoming winemakers; and because of lack of support or the fact that it's such a demanding job, I know a lot of women who have moved away for a while, or they decide to forgo the career altogether for new opportunities that give them more flexibility and the ability to have more time with their families," she said.

Wilson believes that having more discussions about these parenting challenges could lead to impactful changes within the culture of the industry. "It shouldn't be an issue if you want to leave on a Saturday afternoon for a few hours to watch your kid's soccer game," said Wilson.

"There's a little bit of an air of 'It's harvest, and nothing else matters,' but I think there's room for balance there. I personally have too many fermentations going on and too many clients to be able to do that; but if you're at one winery and you have an assistant winemaker, you should be able to take a day off during harvest once a week."

Even if support and flexibility are granted during the trying newborn phase, it's important it continues permanently, for the responsibility of child-rearing only increases as the years go by.

"I think some things that people don't think about is that when you have kids, those kids have doctor appointments, dentist appointments, after-school events, during school events," said Cadamatre. "I think that's something we don't talk about enough; even after that baby period is over, people need to understand that there are other aspects of childcare."

"It doesn't get easier," echoed Diogo-Draper. "The challenges are always there; they just keep shifting as the years go by." **WBM**



Ana and Nicolas

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