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# THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

The community of North Bay women winemakers is growing stronger by the minute.

By Annie Gieser



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Courtesy of Chandon

Pour a glass and raise a toast — women in wine are having their moment. Although women make up 59 percent of the wine drinkers in America, they only constitute 14 percent of winemakers in California (the state that produces the most wine in the country). However, the community that female winemakers have created among themselves is an empowering force and one that is changing the industry dynamic. Allow us to introduce you to these dynamic players.



Laura Fontaine,  
Pauline Lhote, Anna Muthig  
and Quynh-Lan Truong

## PAULINE LHOTE

Chandon

Chandon's first female winemaker, Dawnine Dyer, started back in the 1970s, and now Chandon is proudly home to an all-female team of winemakers. Dyer's legacy still holds tremendous importance for the Chandon team today, including the head of winemaking, Pauline Lhote.

"Some of my greatest mentors and role models have been the generations of female winemakers who came before me and blazed a trail to show that women can lead wineries and make truly exceptional wine," says Lhote. "Mentorship is crucial in winemaking, which is why I feel a huge responsibility to provide my team with the same supportive mentorship I benefited from early on in my career."

Even outside of Lhote's team of Anna Muthig, Laura Fontaine (who is a Marinite) and Quynh-Lan Truong, she finds that "there are so many amazing and inspiring women in the industry today — in Napa Valley, Sonoma, Marin — that make working in this industry incredibly fulfilling."

Although there is still a long way to go, Lhote has a lot of hope for female representation in the future: "I think there's an amazing dialogue going on inside and outside of the workplace about these issues. I am definitely a part of this as a female mentor and leader at Chandon."

### WHAT SHE'S DRINKING RIGHT NOW:

"I am really enjoying our delicious Chandon By The Bay Reserve Blanc de Blancs."



**KATHLEEN INMAN**  
Inman Family Wines

Kathleen Inman started Inman Family Wines in 2000, working as a grape grower, winemaker and general manager. But tasting room visitors still ask her husband the technical questions.

"People don't assume I'm the winemaker," Inman says. "Our gender certainly doesn't impact how well we make wine. As more women winemakers and winery owners step into these roles, I'm hoping they do what I have tried to do."

Inman found her own way to make a difference: coaching young women in the industry, giving them encouragement to work hard, move up the ranks and make a name for themselves.

"It's been wonderful seeing the women I have mentored start their own brands," Inman proudly says. "I think leading by example is the way to change that prejudice and culture to ensure more women do succeed in senior positions in our industry."

*WHAT SHE'S DRINKING RIGHT NOW:*

The wines of Pam Starr from Crocker & Starr in St. Helena

**ELIZABETH DELOUISE-GANT**  
Conn Creek Winery

Elizabeth DeLouise-Gant grew up working on her parents' vineyard in Napa, so she's no stranger to the labor that goes into learning the winemaking process.

"If you don't know, learn it," DeLouise-Gant says to women looking to make it in the wine industry. "Build confidence through experience."

Having been in the industry for so long, she's experienced the downsides of being female in a male-dominated industry. But above all, she believes you can't control what happens, just how you react to it. And that it's the people along the way who make a difference in your path.

She notes two impactful groups: Women for WineSense and Women of the Vine & Spirits, both communities of women looking for professional development, fun events, and of course, discussion of good wine. Communities like these help younger women learn from the ones who came before them — and make connections that turn into opportunities for growth.

"It's a good opportunity to connect with other women in various winemaking roles. I have worked hard to get to where I am. But I am also grateful to those who believed in me and gave me an opportunity," she says.

*WHAT SHE'S DRINKING RIGHT NOW:*

Antinori portfolio, specifically 2018 Prunotto Barolo Cerretta



**MAGGIE KRUSE**  
Jordan Winery

Maggie Kruse, Jordan Winery's head winemaker, worked her way up the ladder after joining the team as an enologist in 2006. At Jordan, Kruse works to push the boundaries of tradition, making innovation, progress and research big goals each year.

For instance, Jordan is revamping its chardonnay-making process by sourcing grapes differently to adapt to a changing climate and "replacing some of our barrels with concrete eggs, which will elevate the fruit while emphasizing its minerality," she says.

Kruse balances that duality between tradition and innovation every day at Jordan, which isn't always such an easy task in work that requires constant teamwork. But she sees women as the glue that brings it all together.

"I believe that women bring a unique ability to create harmony in the workplace and in winemaking," she explains. "As a female leader, I strive to foster seamless collaboration and unity among the various teams and individuals I work with on a daily basis."

*WHAT SHE'S DRINKING RIGHT NOW:*

Navarro gewürztraminer from Anderson Valley

**KATY WILSON**  
LaRue Wines

LaRue Wines named its brand after founder Katy Wilson's great-grandmother: "Veona LaRue Newell always lived by the belief that anything was possible through hard work and determination," says Wilson.

Wilson is the proprietor and winemaker for LaRue Wines, and she also makes wine for Anaba Wines, Reeve Wines and Smith Story Wine Cellars. But being a woman in wine was (and still can be) isolating for Wilson — she felt she had to work harder than any man with her same level of experience. The struggles have shown her the importance of advocating for herself and other women.

"By talking about the disparities in compensation, visibility and leadership in this industry, our collective voices are helping to swing the pendulum in the right direction," says Wilson, who also serves on the advisory board for Women-Owned Wineries (WOW) in Sonoma. On average, female winemakers make 85 cents to a male winemaker's dollar.

Wilson's advice to young women in the industry is to learn everything about the craft and continue to learn more. And, most important, "know your worth and don't settle for anything less."

*WHAT SHE'S DRINKING RIGHT NOW:*

"At our house, we bought a small 10-liter barrel that we have filled with negronis. I love that it is something completely different from what I do and taste all day long. It allows me to relax and enjoy a drink!"



Courtesy of Conn Creek Winery (top); courtesy of Inman Family Wines (bottom)

Laurel Anderson Creative (top); Marc Olivier Le Blanc (bottom)

