

PICK & CHOOSE

JUST RED? JUST WHITE?
JUST CALIFORNIAN?
JUST ITALIAN?
HOW ABOUT A
COMBINATION?

CALIFORNIA WINES

Artisan Series –
\$29.50/month, a red and a white
Winemaker Series –
\$59.50/month, 2 reserve reds
Artisan red–Winemaker red –
\$46/month

ITALIAN WINES

Artisan Series –
\$32/month, a red and a white
Winemaker Series –
\$62/month, 2 reserve reds
Collector Series –
\$112/month, 2 collectable reds
Artisan red–Winemaker red –
\$48/month
Winemaker red–Collector red –
\$87/month

CALIFORNIA–ITALIAN COMBINATIONS

CA Artisan red–IT Artisan red –
\$33/month
CA Artisan white–IT Artisan white–
\$29.50/month
CA Winemaker–IT Winemaker –
\$62/month
Alternate CA & IT Artisan Series –
\$29.50/\$32/month
Alternate CA & IT Winemaker Series–
\$59.50/\$62/month

DOUBLE UP

You can also receive more than two bottles per month. California sales tax is included. Shipping is extra.

maker has to make the call on certain vineyard practices. Certain winemaking scenarios require dropping more fruit or trellising the vine in a different way. The technology changes. We're not buying a gismo for this and a whojamajiggy for that, but the relationship between the winemaker and the vineyard manager has become much more intense over the last four years. We're hand-crafting our wines and bringing them into the winery in smaller lots. Instead of bringing in 20 tons of Sauvignon Blanc all in a day or two, we're bringing in what is riper first. So we might bring in only the top three acres. Instead of bringing in the Cabernet at the same time, we're looking at different portions of the vineyard that mature at different times.

It rained through the end of June on the coast, and the vineyards were behind. What happened to the 2005 vintage up here in the Foothills?

That's an interesting question because when I was in New York at the wine tasting, talking to other winemakers from Napa and Sonoma, they said it had been a lot cooler there than normal, a lot more fog, a lot more moist. We did get rain and hailstorms in May, but for the most part, and I better knock on wood when I say this, we had a warm July. The temperatures are now cooling off, and that's perfect for maturing the fruit. We're going through veraison now when grapes are ripening, getting ready to go into harvest, probably in the next two and a half to three weeks. We've had, not so much a longer growing season, but the quality of the fruit coming out of the Foot-

hills is going to be excellent. I don't believe that our tonnages are up. We don't try to put any more fruit on the plant than we want for quality. We've been thinning. My foreman dies when he sees all the fruit on the ground, but that's one of the techniques that improves quality. We just dropped 20% of our fruit in one section. In another we're OK, and in another we've dropped 30% of the fruit because we want the quality. We produce about 10,000 cases a year now. And long term, I've pulled the number down to 14,000 cases. I had been thinking of going up to 20,000 cases, but instead we're slowly raising our prices because of the quality of our fruit.

Is Calaveras moving toward a specific identity, like El Dorado, which has made a name for itself with Rhone varieties?

The Rhone varieties obviously do very well here, and I'm surprised that more of our wineries don't have more of them. They grow beautifully for us. Zin is having a comeback. We do have our Chardonnay, but we also have more unusual varieties like Grenache and Tempranillo. Reds are the dominant focus, but we haven't quite figured out a specific theme. I think that the whole Foothill area needs to band together to market the Foothills. For the most part within the Highway 49 corridor and the 11 counties that are included within the Sierra Foothill region, there are a lot us, and we really need to band together to develop a reputation. It would be nice to have a Sierra Foothill map for visitors and full representation in Wine Spectator, Wine Enthusiast, and Connoisseur Guide.

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- Italian Artisan Series \$32/mo.
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California Winery of the Month



She Wines, He Wines, & All Wines Chatom Vineyards



CelebrationsWineClub.com

Anna Maria Knapp, Owner
75 Pelican Way G1
San Rafael, CA 94901

1-800-700-6227

celebrate@
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July 2005

A lot has changed in 25 years since Gay Callan bought 1000 acres in Calaveras County, one of 11 wine-producing counties in the foothills of the majestic Sierra Nevada mountain range and one of the largest wine regions of the 11, along with El Dorado, Amador, and Placer counties. Because she was a woman, the prevailing response among the neighbors when she began to plant the vineyards was that she was nuts and would never make it. But she did, and today she has plenty of notable company in the business, which now includes women on all levels, from owners to winemakers to growers to support personnel. Her wines are up there with the best, although the press doesn't yet spend much time looking for the best in the Sierra Foothills. For now, the coastal counties have garnered that distinction. ➤

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The wine business, like most others, has changed markedly since 9/11. Because of a slower economy and global competition, domestic producers have been concentrating on improving wines, pricing them well, listening closely to what the market seems to want, and increasing marketing, all of which Gay Callan has done with much success. And she attributes that success to the decision-making team at Chatom Vineyards, which is overwhelmingly composed of women, with notable exceptions. Vineyard manager David Bassham has been there from the beginning, although often enough the only member of his gender on the team. Right now he has the company of winemaker Mark Künz, who recently succeeded Mari Wells. So since most of the Chatom team is most of the time made up of women, and women consumers buy more wine than men do, why not acknowledge the reality with a

special wine, they thought, the *She Wine*. Chatom will soon be releasing a red and a white *She Wine* with screw caps, which will retail around \$12 a bottle. But the wine is not the equivalent of cheap merchandise that a high-end department store might bring in for a sale. The *She Wines* are made from premium estate grapes, and although they fill in the lower end of the Chatom price spectrum, they are delicious wines like all the rest in the lineup. Our conversation about *She Wines*, *He Wines*, and *All Wines* is reprinted here and has undergone minor editing for clarity.

What issues are demanding your attention lately?

Since 9/11 hit, the wine industry has changed dramatically in that we have to pay a lot more attention to what the consumer is looking for. The quality of our wines has definitely improved over the last four years, although that was going to be a concentrated effort whether 9/11 or hurricanes or earthquakes hit. That's been a focus here for a long time. But I think that Chuck Shaw didn't help either. Those wines brought new consumers into the market, but they also promoted a tremendous number of \$2.99ers out on the shelf, whether from California, Chile, or Australia. A tremendous number of imports are undercutting us, and yet wineries that have quality, handcrafted, award winning wines and are dedicated to marketing and to the positive integrity of their wines are the ones, who will survive. That's why I stay on the road, and why we have an exceptional reputation,



Chatom owner, Gay Callan

and good prices. Last year we released a screw cap *She Wine* that will probably be retailing for \$12 this year, and we go up from there to \$30 for our other wines.

Does the screw cap actually save money?

Not so much that it saves money, but it's a novelty. We are the first to use it in our neck of the woods. We put it on our *She Wine* last year and called it "high octane" because it was a 15% alcohol Zinfandel. The whole package lent itself to whimsy and elegance, and we retailed that wine at \$16. We're following it this year with a red and a white *She Wine*, and we'll donate a portion of the white sales to the Breast Cancer Society and a portion of the red sales to the American Heart Association for women. Both the red and the white will be blends. The base for the red will be Merlot and for the white, it'll be Semillon.

Why do you call it a *She Wine*?

Because we're predominantly women here. Our present winemaker is a man, and we adore him. He's great. The poor guy followed Mari Wells, who was with us for only three years. Most of us were women at the time and thought, what fun; let's do a *She Wine*. When we first talked to Mark, we asked

him how he felt about continuing the *She Wine* program. He said, "That's cool. Absolutely no problem with that." He's in his late forties, and his background is with BR Cohen, Matanzas Creek, and White Oak. He has some excellent experience and is a delightful man, someone who is extremely pleasant to work with. His experience and know-how have added to improving the quality of what we're doing. He loves the area, so that's nice. It's hard to find someone who wants to stay because it's very quiet here. You're not in the mainstream with lots of activities. It's beautiful but remote.

Getting back to what you said about trying to please the market, that has led to a lot of high alcohol wines that are controversial now. Sounds like you have some too.

We did. The 2004 whites were 14.5%. Harvest came on so fast and furious that all the whites came off at the same time. It wasn't a matter of choosing. It was what the weather delivered, the cards Mother Nature dealt. But you're right. I would say that last year was the highest we've gone with alcohol, and it was by accident really. One day the sugars weren't there, and the next day it was, "Oh my god, the fruit has all got to come off immediately." We're definitely looking at not having alcohol that high this year. We don't oak our whites or put them through malolactic fermentation either, because we feel that the characteristics

of the fruit we grow are much better represented without that. There are still people who love over buttery, oaky, malolactic Chardonnay, but for the most part, the sophisticated consumer doesn't necessarily want to pay for that extra time in oak barrels. Years ago, someone who was assisting with making our wine put the Chardonnay through malolactic and then totally over-oaked it. It won a gold medal at the Orange County fair, but we hated it. It sold out because of the medal, but I made sure that the next year it wouldn't be put through malolactic or oaked. We've been supported with the response. Our Chardonnay sells out at \$16 a bottle, and I don't understand the new wineries coming in and pricing their wines at \$40 with no accolades. But they're brand new and don't know what the market will bear. Consumers are becoming a lot more educated, and I think a lot shrewder in their wine purchases. I was in New York last week, pouring for a wine tasting, and when anyone tasted our Sauvignon Blanc or the Chardonnay, they would say, "What a delightful wine. There's no oak in this."

So the market is picking up on what an over-oaked white wine is.

How about your reds?

They're really pretty consistent with what we've done all the way along. It's not about the alcohol level but about the whole structure of the wine. So it's up to the winemaker to handcraft a well-orchestrated wine.

In the beginning, we brought in the grapes, crushed them off, put them into a tank, and then into barrels, and then into bottles. But in the last several years, our winemakers have really handcrafted the wines. It's artistry. There is no formula for making wine. Actually, there's a company that consults and gives you formulas to get 91 ratings. I can't bring myself and neither can our winemaker to entertain that program, because we would lose the artistry. It's good that these people are getting their 91 ratings, and I really commend them, but they're not in Calaveras County either. The big wine magazines probably wouldn't give us those scores anyway. They give those only to Napa and Sonoma.

What's the most important thing that you've done to improve your wines?

Over the last five years, I've worked with our winemakers and our vineyard manager and tried to create a cohesive relationship between them. The winemaker needs to know what we're doing in the vineyard. Our winemaker Scotty worked with David, but Mari nurtured a more meaningful relationship with him. David knows that vineyard like the back of his hand, so that as we went forward from Scott to Mari and now to Mark, they're learning the vineyard through David, and telling him that we need to try this or that. David listens because the wine-

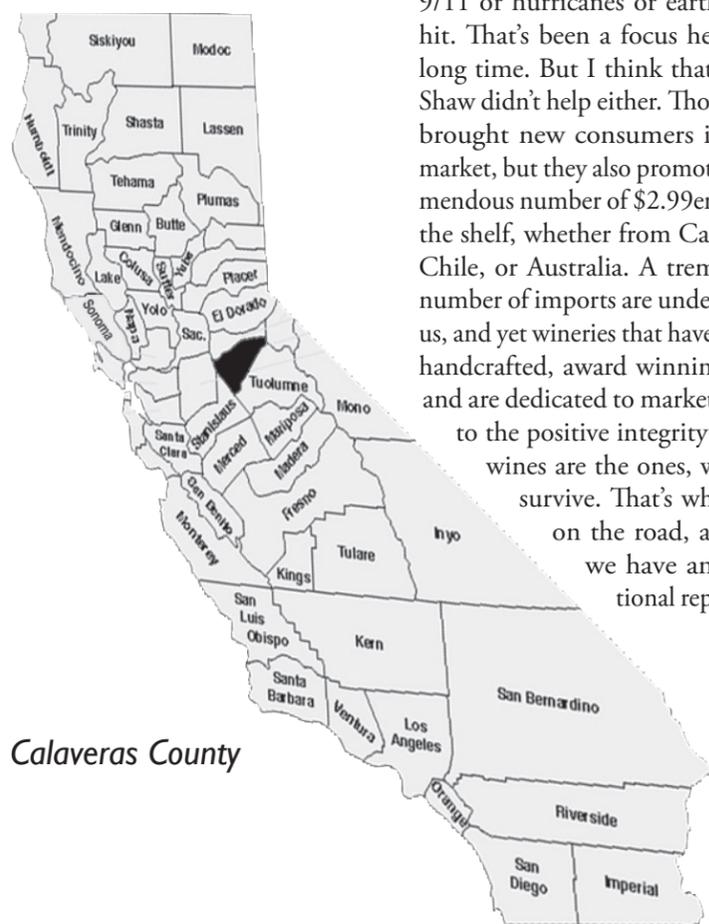
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