



## Wine from the Big Mountain

Lise Pfau Ciolino '81  
Winemaker, owner of Montemaggiore

**My dad: his passion and hobby was wine.** We'd take trips to France, Germany, and Italy in the summers when I was a kid—eating great food, drinking great wine, going through gorgeous countryside.

**After studying computer science** at Brown, I eventually moved to California to work in Silicon Valley.

**In 1994 I began taking classes** on winemaking and grape growing, then started making wine with a friend in her garage.

**I met my husband,** then we started our wine and olive oil business in 2002. Our first vintage was ready in 2004.

**I produce two wines,** one made from syrah grapes and the other a blend of cabernet sauvignon and syrah—all from our estate vineyards.

**I love syrah** because of its complexity, mystery, depth, and richness. I remember the first time I tasted syrah as a child, because it was the first red wine I ever liked.

**My grapes taste very different** from my neighbor's grapes, or those grown in France, because wine grapes are very sensitive to soils, weather, and farming techniques.

**We farm organically and biodynamically.** For us that's important. Not just for the richer flavor, but knowing it's grown the right way. Biodynamic is the next step beyond organic. You're composting and applying preparations to the soil and grapevines which act like vitamins, bringing vitality to the wine's flavor.

**The flavor of my wines contains lots of fruits and spices:** blackberry, blueberry, and black cherry with a sprinkling of nutmeg and white pepper.

**We start just as the sun comes up** on a day of harvest. A small crew goes out and picks grapes. In the winery, we destem and sort the grapes, then put them in a stainless steel tank—each tank holds about four tons of grapes.

**Native yeasts** that are naturally occurring will typically start to ferment the wine. And I can add a laboratory yeast if I want a specific flavor profile.

**Each yeast will yield a different flavor.** Sometimes I'll start off with spontaneous fermentation from native yeast, then I'll add my preferred laboratory yeast.

**I do "punch downs"**—mixing up skins with juices to produce a nice, deeply colored, richly flavored red wine. Each tank, three times a day, for 30 minutes. At 9, at 3, and at 9 at night.

**It's quite a workout.** I'm in shape for two to three months out of the year.

**When the fermentation is finished,** the wine goes into special barrels made of French oak, harvested from state-controlled forests in France. Each forest has its own flavor profile.

**A cooper (barrel maker) will make the barrel** and toast the inside of the barrel. Each cooper has his own little secret for producing a barrel that results in certain flavors.

**My syrah** will stay in barrels for about 18 months. Cab-syrah blends for 24 months.

**Our wines cost** about 35 to 45 dollars a bottle. I don't consider myself at the lower end of things, but I'm not at the upper end either.