



Renteria

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KAREN CULLER WINEMAKER



KAREN CULLER STARTED HER WINEMAKING CAREER AS A CHILD, MAKING HOMEMADE WINE WITH HER FATHER AND GRANDFATHER IN OHIO. HER JOB WAS DESTEMMING THE CLUSTERS BY HAND. MANY VINTAGES LATER, AFTER COMPLETING HER BACHELORS DEGREE IN BOTANY AND AGRONOMY (I.E. PLANTS AND DIRT) FROM OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, SHE MOVED TO SEATTLE. BORED WITH HER JOB IN A MARINE BIOLOGY LAB, SHE DECIDED TO USE HER EXTENSIVE OHIO WINEMAKING EXPERIENCE AND WENT TO WORK FOR COLUMBIA WINERY IN SEATTLE. IMAGINE HER SURPRISE WHEN SHE FOUND OUT THERE WERE MACHINES TO DESTEM THE GRAPES FROM THE CLUSTERS! IMAGINE HER OHIO PARENT'S SURPRISE WHEN THEY HEARD OF HER NEW CAREER CHOICE ("THEY PAY PEOPLE TO MAKE WINE?").

AFTER A YEAR AT COLUMBIA, SHE LEFT TO GO TO UC DAVIS TO GET HER MASTER'S DEGREE IN VITICULTURE AND ENOLOGY (I.E. GRAPES AND WINE). AGAIN SHE HEARD FROM OHIO, "THEY TEACH THAT AT A UNIVERSITY?" GRADUATING FROM UC DAVIS IN 1984, SHE STARTED A SIX MONTH INTERNSHIP AT ROBERT MONDAVI WINERY IN THEIR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT. SIX MONTHS TURNED INTO TWO YEARS AND WHEN ROBERT MONDAVI PURCHASED VICHON WINERY, KAREN DECIDED TO MOVE UP THE OAKVILLE GRADE TO VICHON AS ASSISTANT WINEMAKER IN 1986. IN 1989, SHE BECAME WINEMAKER. ALL WENT WELL MAKING CHARDONNAY, SAUVIGNON BLANC, MERLOT AND CABERNET SAUVIGNON UNTIL 1996 WHEN IT WAS DECIDED TO DISBAND THE VICHON NAPA VALLEY BRAND, IN FAVOR OF WINES IMPORTED FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE FOR THE VICHON MEDITERRANEAN BRAND. KAREN DECIDED TO KEEP HER ROOTS IN NAPA VALLEY AND SHE STARTED HER OWN LABEL, CULLER WINES, WITH THE HARVEST OF 1997. SHE ALSO CONSULTS AS WINEMAKER TO VARIOUS OTHER WINERIES IN NAPA VALLEY, INCLUDING: RENTERIA WINES, WOLF FAMILY VINEYARDS, LADERA, RIVERA VINEYARDS AND HER OWN WINE OF COURSE, CULLER WINES.

FOR CULLER WINES, KAREN SEEKS OUT VINEYARDS, PRIMARILY IN NAPA VALLEY AND A FEW SELECT AREAS OUTSIDE OF NAPA, FOR GRAPES THAT CAN BEST EXPRESS THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VARIETY, TERROIR, AND GROWER'S QUIRKS IN THE RESULTING WINE. SHE PRODUCES SYRAH, CABERNET SAUVIGNON AND A MERITAGE BLEND, USING THE "CABERNET FAMILY GRAPES". IDEALLY, SHE IS WORKING TOWARD MAKING VINEYARD DESIGNATED WINES WHICH WOULD NOT ONLY SHOWCASE THE VINEYARD'S QUALITIES, BUT ALSO HONOR THE GROWER'S EFFORTS IN THE WINEMAKING PROCESS.

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