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AMY CHENOWETH OWNER AND WINEMAKER, CHENOWETH VINEYARDS

Amy Chenoweth wasn't destined to make some of Sonoma County's most sought-after Pinot Noirs. The small-town West County girl, born and raised along the famed Russian River in the rustic hamlet of Guerneville, was less interested in Wine Country's celebrated vineyards than its iconic river, rugged beaches and towering redwood forests. But the vineyards eventually won.

Not unlike every good wine, Amy's path to winemaking started in the vineyard, specifically the ones tended by her husband Charlie, a grape grower and vineyard manager who has attained legendary status in the Russian River Valley and beyond for producing some of Wine Country's most prized fruit. Ever since they married more than two decades ago, Amy has worked alongside her husband, managing the business that produces the grapes for such well-known cult brands as Patz & Hall, Kosta Browne, and Bob Cabral, among many others.



Over the years, Amy had the chance to observe the region's best winemakers ply their craft, and she "became a sponge, learning from the masters," absorbing both the broad strokes and the finer points of transforming Charlie's grapes into world-class wines. Though the classroom training in oenology she received at UC Davis bolsters her knowledge, her real education came through long days on the crush pads and in the barrel rooms of the most respected Sonoma County wineries.

The winery's first vintage was in 2010, just fifty cases or so of Pinot Noir from the Chenoweth's own vines, planted on the family's historic, sprawling hilltop ranch in the Green Valley appellation of the Russian River Valley AVA. Since then Amy has steadily increased production and the portfolio with Chardonnay and Rosè, with a plan to bottle around 600 cases in 2019—tiny by commercial winery standards, but totally in keeping with their quality-over-quantity ethos.

When asked to describe the philosophy that underpins her winemaking, Amy sums it up this way: “start with epic grapes and then don’t screw it up.” In actual practice, that means using French oak barrels, but only 30% new ones, so the oak doesn’t mask the flavors of the fruit. “Why hide that?” she asks, answering her own question, “everything we do emphasizes the fruit.”

Amy still spends part of her time helping Charlie run the vineyard management business and tending to a select handful of restaurant accounts that serve Chenoweth wines. With their two sons, Jakob and CJ, now grown and working alongside their parents in both the vineyard and winery, Amy has more time to devote to her winemaking, which for her begins in the vineyard, where she and her husband collaborate on every key decision, including choosing rootstock, pruning vines, and determining when to pick.

Starting with the 2017 vintage Amy moved beyond Pinot Noir to introduce a few cases of a Rosé as well as a Chardonnay that Charlie has planted on a celebrated ranch in the Green Valley appellation. Whatever wines eventually bear the Chenoweth label, one thing is certain: they’ll start with epic grapes, and end with wines reflecting the passion, skill and artistry of the team who made them.

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