

# PALATEXPOSURE



## WEDNESDAYS WITH WINEMAKERS – BECKY GEORGE

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### WHY DID YOU BECOME A WINEMAKER?

I tried out winemaking when I was 20 years old because I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I knew that I loved the outdoors, the biological sciences, and working with my hands, but didn't know where to take that. I took a few wine intro courses while at UC Davis, worked as one of Dr. Ann Nobles' "elves" in the wine sensory lab, and then took a quarter off to work in the cellar at Artesa in Napa. After that first vintage, I fell in love with the industry and just kept going. Right after Artesa I did an international exchange and studied winemaking at the University of Adelaide, and of course had a blast. I've never looked back and always felt grateful to have found the wine industry.

**IF YOU WEREN'T A WINEMAKER WHAT WOULD YOU BE AND WHY?**

Maybe a conservation biologist. I love being outside and exploring nature, and feel like I should be doing more to help protect it.

**WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH AS A WINEMAKER?**

Curiosity. Constantly asking questions—what can we do differently, what else can we try, what can we do better? Both from a winemaking and grape-growing perspective, and also for efficiency/conservation in the winery and vineyard.

**WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST WEAKNESS AS A WINEMAKER?**

Short attention span. I find myself saying, “focus, focus...”

**WHAT'S THE ONE MISTAKE YOU MADE IN THE CELLAR YOU WOULD NEVER REPEAT?**

Just one? I've made more than my fair share of mistakes in the cellar (not that I will be revealing here). Mistakes are an opportunity to grow and learn. They don't define who we are but give us a chance to make adjustments and do better.

**WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENT?**

I don't think I've reached my proudest achievement. Thus far, it would be becoming winemaker for Kelly Fleming. I started here 5 years ago hosting tastings and working part time in the cellar, so it's been an interesting evolution.

**WHAT WAS YOUR SCARIEST VINTAGE TO DATE?**

I would say this vintage (2015) was pretty ominous because of the destructive Valley Fire that happened within 20 miles of our winery. It was heartbreaking to see so many people displaced from their homes, but it was also very scary seeing the red glow behind Mt. St. Helena, from my front porch.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WORD OR SAYING?**

“Moving in the right direction.”

**WHAT IS YOUR MOST PRIZED POSSESSION?**

My health. Easily taken for granted until you have an injury or illness.

**WHAT'S THE ODDEST THING ABOUT YOU?**

Eclectic musical taste and knowledge.

**WHAT SONG BEST SUMS YOU UP?**

Forever Young by Bob Dylan.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY?**

So many great memories with family and friends, but some of my favorites are from solo travel in my early twenties in Europe. Young, foolish and fearless.

**WHICH OF THE FIVE SENSES IS YOUR STRONGEST?**

Smell.

**WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST MOTIVATION?**

Being productive. And also trying to be present!

**WHICH BOTTLE OF WINE WOULD CHOOSE TO BE STRANDED WITH ON A DESERTED ISLAND?**

Magnum of Salon Champagne.

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GOOD AND GREAT WINE?**

A good wine is clean, straight forward, pleasing. A great wine paints a picture in your brain—it's got color, dimension, movement, soul. It tells you who it is and where it came from.

**NAME THREE INDIVIDUALS YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE DINNER WITH.**

Maya Angelou, Paul McCartney and my great-grandmother Helen MacArthur.

### **WHO IS YOUR WINEMAKING HERO?**

A few: Laure de Lambert Compeyrot of Chateau Sigalas Rabaud, Thomas Duroux of Chateau Palmer, Francoise Peschon of Araujo and Vine Hill Ranch.

### **WHAT DOES THE CONCEPT OF “BALANCE” MEAN TO YOU?**

When all of the components of wine come together in seamless precision—acidity, alcohol, tannins, flavors. The wine feels knit together and complete.

### **WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WANT PEOPLE TO REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR WINE?**

Well, mostly I want people to enjoy my wine and not think about it (because that’s why we drink wine—to relax and enjoy our lives with other people). But I’m hopeful that my wines have a distinct energy, and most importantly, reflect a sense of place.

### **BEST COMMENT MADE ABOUT YOUR WINE? WAS IT BY A CONSUMER, TRADE OR PRESS?**

When my vineyard manager tells me I’ve done my job well! That’s very satisfying.



*Ilona Thompson*

Ilona Thompson is a serial entrepreneur with several successful business ventures under her belt. Awestruck by the beauty of California wine countries, she moved to San Francisco Bay Area to pursue her passion for food and wine. She splits her time between visiting wine regions worldwide, attending a diverse variety of tastings and taking professional educational courses. She studied at the Culinary Institute of America, (CIA) and holds a California Wine Appellation Specialist certification, (CWAS). As a journalist, Ilona covers numerous high profile wine and food events, such as

Auction Napa Valley, Aspen Food and Wine Classic, Cayman Cookout, Nantucket Wine Festival, New York City Food & Wine Festival and lots more. She has interviewed numerous elusive, fascinating, highly notable chefs, vintners, winemakers and wine personalities. She is Editor-in Chief for [www.palatexposure.com](http://www.palatexposure.com) and has contributed to Broadside News, Chic Metropolitan, DrinkMe Magazine, Glass of Bubbly, Preiser Key to Napa Valley and Snooth. She also writes about artisanal spirits and luxury tourism.