



DIRECT PRESS

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WOMEN WINEMAKERS

Wine throughout its history has always

been propelled by women. From early archaeological research it is likely that women made the first wines. Technological advances like riddling Champagne were famously invented by Madame Clicquot. Hannah Weinberger won one of the first international awards for California wines in the late 1800's. But as a luxury good wine is caught up in all sorts of trappings from many, many centuries of making wines appeal to rich, white men. Last time I checked, white men were still disproportionately richer than anyone else, and they are still getting plenty of attention from the wine industry. Though describing a wine as “sexy” or “slutty” is nowadays frowned upon in my circles, there's a looong way to go towards the deeper changes. One small thing we can do is to highlight exceptional wines from women winemakers and give some context to the additional challenges these winemakers have to face — whether they want to or not.

On the agricultural side of things, it's a common trope that women in wine have to prove their physical strength where men are assumed to have it. Some of it starts during internships, where tasks like moving heavy bins, driving tractors, and climbing on top of barrels are quickly doled out to the male interns. They keys to the forklift get casually tossed to a male, without much thought. I've heard this from many women, it is an obstacle that faces future women winemakers from day one.

Some of you may remember Monica Palenzuela from her time at, ahem, Vanderbilt Ave Wine Merchants. She came to us after working her way up the ladder at Scholastic and wanting to change careers. In addition to her Master's in Education, Monica can drive a forklift. In fact, she can do every other task required of a seasoned winemaker, including making smashingly delicious wine that we are featuring this month (Press 4 mix/red). Yet throughout her time at the winery in Spain where she interned last harvest, despite her qualifications (including speaking fluent Spanish), she had to continually assert her desire to be working in

the cellar and highlight her experience and skills to the winemaker. The aging patriarch of

the estate was outraged whenever he saw her carrying heavy things, rushing to her aid to help and many a time stopping her mid-climb when she was about to dump the buckets of grapes she had just picked into the tractor.

As shocked as I was to hear this, she said she got through the experience by keeping in mind cultural and generational differences, imagining her late Cuban grandfather, similarly stuck in pre-feminist ways, but not short on grandfatherly love. Though I thought that was an overly-generous way to treat outrageously sexist behavior, it was also a reminder that she had to pick different battles than I would in that situation. Eventually she left this internship, coming away with far different experiences than any man would have.



In California, luckily, she is getting far more respect. After working with Sam Bilbro of Idlewild, who owns the Fox Hill Vineyard with Evan Lewandowski, Monica is now Cellar Master at Larkmead Vineyards, one of the oldest and most respected Napa wineries. Her own Cultivo label's 'Monterito el Grande' (*Press 4 mix/red*) is a blend of Montepulciano and Negroamaro from the Fox Hill Vineyard. I know I'm biased — but the wine is fabulous, and I made sure to secure a near-exclusive on it for Vanderbilt.

Stories like Monica's are so common I could go on for pages describing the extra work and diminished respect every woman winemaker we are featuring this month has experienced, let alone the more traumatic events. Even Mimi Casteel (*Press 2*) was no exception, even though she was instrumental in proving the efficacy of no-till farming to many in the US by bringing the Hope Well vineyard back to life. While away on a trip, a neighbor decided to 'help her out' by plowing a row of her vineyard, which undid years of Mimi's devoted stewardship towards regenerating the delicate networks of microbes and mycorrhizae in her soil. When I visited her back in 2019, Mimi told our group he literally called her 'little lady'. Even owning a property and being on the cutting edge of viticulture was not enough to protect her from a man assuming she didn't know what she was doing, and, in such, destroying years of her work that had been inspiring winemakers around the world.

Mimi is in Oregon, a supposedly progressive part of a developed nation. In Georgia, recovering from Soviet rule and partly occupied by Putin's army, things are divided along more clear patriarchal lines. When Marina Kurtanidze (*Press 4 mix/red*) started her winery in 2012, there were no female

winemakers in Georgia. But she was inspired by European women winemakers like Elisabetta Foradori (*Direct Press July 2021*) to become the first woman in Georgia to bottle and export her own wine.



Above: Mimi Casteel serves dinner at her Hope Well vineyard in Oregon Previous page: Monica Palenzuela of Cultivo

Marina now has similarly inspired a whole other generation of women to make wine in Georgia. It's typical for women to pick the grapes but men are allotted twice as much as traditional feasts, as they have the luxury of being at the table the entire meal while the women are typically cooking, cleaning, or standing vigilant at the kitchen door instead of sitting down. Hopefully Marina and her cohort will help gain a literal seat at the table for women all over Georgia, as well.

I am not a woman or a winemaker, so at best I can only relay second-hand what that experience is like for some of the female winemakers I know. While I'm glad that we have featured women winemakers in every month's Direct Press, it's still necessary to set aside space to speak about the struggles women winemakers encounter, their achievements, and the inequalities that persist. The wine industry is not a fair or equitable environment, and natural wine is hardly immune. Sexual harassment and abuses of power are still common. Efforts to remove abusive men from influential positions in the industry are hard-fought and not always won. It is vital to keep insisting that we can all do better to support women in this industry. Making sure there are opportunities and support for women of color in the wine business is even more pertinent and requires even more work, disassembling an industry that is still largely built on catering to rich, white men.

At the core of wine is a culture of sharing that still has the power to bring us together. That spirit is diminished immediately when people are left out. There's a lot of work to be done, but opening a bottle of wine and being ready to listen and reflect on the women behind the wines is a place we can all start.

Cheers!

[Jonathan](#) and [Kirk](#)

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Noëlla Morantin “Stella Maris” Sauvignon

Blanc 2020

Touraine • Loire • France

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

I f&*%ing love Noëlla Morantin. Her wines have a very special place in my heart, as when I was first starting to work with natural wine she was beginning to rent 8.5 hectares from the vineyards that got me into this whole in the first place, Clos Roche Blanche. Though she no longer makes wine from the CRB vineyards, her wines will always have a home with me, as they are vibrant, soulful and utterly delicious. Stella Maris is Noëlla's everyday-drinking Sauvignon, made from grapes purchased from another Loire Valley legend Mikael Bouges. The grapes are gently pressed directly into fiberglass lined vats where the juice ferments and ages on its lees. Bottled unfiltered after about 10 months, and given a Vin de France labeling because she doesn't have time for the politics of the Appellation control board.

The 2020 bottling is a bit of a return to normalcy for this wine, as previous vintages had been a bit rough and much hotter. Clocking in at 13%, it's got everything I love about unfussy, unmanipulated Loire Valley Sauvignon Blanc: picked at proper ripeness to avoid the overly green character assassinating flavors the grape has had to endure for the past 15 years, revealing a wine that is nonetheless bright and high-toned, but takes on a more elegant profile. Medium-bodied with a slightly creamy texture, packed with notes of Anjou Pear, juicy peach and Jasmine Pearl iced tea. **KS**

Castel Pujol “Folklore” Pet-Nat 2021

Rivera • Uruguay

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

I can certainly say this was a first for me — a Pet-Nat from Uruguay. Castel Pujol has a deep history with winemaking, tracing their roots back to 1752 in Catalonia, Spain The family have been trailblazers, chiefly by the fact that they were first to plant and make wines from Tannat, the grape now synonymous with Uruguayan wine production. It comes as no surprise that Pia Carrau, the daughter of the current winemaker of the family's estate Cerro Chapeu, is now making waves with her new line of innovative natural wines called Folklore.

The 2021 Pet Nat is 80% Trebbiano and 20% Malvasia, fermented in stainless steel and bottled under crown cap just before primary fermentation finishes, capturing the final bits of co2 as the wine finishes fermenting. This process, known the ancestral method, naturally infuses the wine with playful bubbles. Just in time for things the warm up, this is exactly what you want to crush on your stoop. The bright, floral nose is full of joyful peach and orange blossom aromatics, and reminds of grapefruit Ting soda in all the right ways. Dry, zesty and an absolute blast to drink, I highly recommend you drink this outside. **KS**

Cultivo “Monterito el Grande” Fox Hill Vineyard 2020

Mendocino • California • USA

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Vanderbilt Ave seems to have an unusually high amount of winemakers in its present and former staff. Kirk Sutherland has his Erde

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Wines, Matthew Hawkins is at Clos Saron, and even Fifi, the former owner of this space, is making wine under his La Bascule label. Monica Palenzuela left us in 2019 to pursue her winemaking dreams and so far she is well on her way, as she was recently hired as Cellar Master at Napa's famed Larkmead Vineyards.

In 2020 she interned with Sam Bilbro of Idlewild, who shares a winemaking facility and the Fox Hill Vineyard with Evan Lewandowski, which is planted all to Italian varieties. She made only 52 cases of this Montepulciano/Negroamaro blend and I took as much as I could get. Don't expect to find this anywhere else! It's made with 9 days of whole cluster fermentation, then aged in neutral oak, minimal sulfur added.

Sage, raspberry, black cherry and just a touch of feral aromas, it is unmistakably Italian in feel but keeps its own identity. The mixture of spicy blueberry, tangy cranberry, and ripe cherry on the palate is downright scrumptious. But the texture is where it all comes together, with fine tannin that reins in the juicy red fruit. The overall balance is impeccable and yet it doesn't lose the tension that makes it an exciting, satisfying wine you will want to drink again and again. Pair it with anything from red sauce and pizza to grilled vegetables, burgers, and hard cheeses. **JK**



Marina Kurtanidze and her husband Iago Btarishvili, who also makes wine and encouraged Marina's trailblazing work

[Marina Tavkveri/Chinuri 2019](#)

Kartli • Georgia

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Marina Kurtanidze began her small winery in 2012 and was the first female winemaker in Georgia to bottle and export her wine. This wine is a co-ferment of Tavkveri, a red grape, with Chinuri, a white grape. It says rosé on the label, but in Georgia any light red often gets labeled rosé, and this is more of a light red. It kind of reminds me of the Cornelissen Susucaru of years past, when there was zero sulfur. This also has a little smoky note, and it's mixed with beetroot, rooibos tea, crunchy herbaceousness, and umami.

Made in the time-honored 8,000 year-old method of whole cluster fermentation and aging in underground clay *qvevri*, this has zero sulfur added and is now showing some wild funk, but nothing too egregious. Chill it down a bit and try it with [this recipe](#) for *phkali* from Bon Appetit, a traditional Georgian dish made from dark leafy greens, walnuts, herbs, and pomegranate seeds. **JK**

[Nana Vins et Cie "Konjo Fouzitou" Rouge 2019](#)

Languedoc • France

[Press 4 Red]

Some of you may already know Nathalie Gaubicher's wines from the Loire, like her 'Patapon' Pineau d'Aunis that we love so much. This is from her other project in the Languedoc, which she started when her husband, Emile Heredia, left the Loire for the south of France. Before meeting Emile, Nathalie and her first husband Christian Chaussard were part of the early wave of natural winemakers in the late 1990's. After his untimely death, she has

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continued to make amazing, “non-conformist” wines.

Konjo Fouzitou is a red/white coferment of Cinsault and Terret, two workaday grapes common in the Languedoc. The combination was really surprising to me, but they seem to bring out the best in each other. Spicy, candied cherry, sumac, and some darker, animal notes are met with really nice tannin and crunchy texture. There is a little bit of barnyard funk but it adds some nice depth. Unique, interesting, and fun as hell to drink. **JK**



Maricruz Antolín

Solar Del Alma "Natural Aglianico" Mendoza

2021

Mendoza • Argentina

[Press 4 Red]

Agronomist Maricruz Antolín heads this project that was one of the first in the region to make fully organic and Demeter-certified Biodynamic wines. The winery is also reputed to have featured a one-woman show that explains Biodynamics using mythological gods and extols the connection between Biodynamic farming, wine, power, peace, and one's soul. I hope that's still on the playbill.

Whatever you may think about woo-woo farming, the proof is in the tasting. Her Aglianico is reportedly the first-ever produced in South America. A variety native to Italy's coastal volcanic Campania region, it seems to be liking Mendoza's dry, high-altitude plateau, too, judging by the results here. Dark and meaty, it is unmistakably Aglianico, with juicy black cherry notes, black olive brine, cacao nib, and chewy tannins. There's a peppery lift and solid grip that makes it the most full-bodied red of this month's lineup. It's perfect for lamb chops, ragú, or Friday pizza night. Zero sulfur added but also no funk, this is another suave and impressive offering from Maricruz, whose Natural Malbec we also are big fans of. **JK**

Martha Stoumen "Post Flirtation" White 2019

Mendocino, Contra Costa • California • USA

[Press 4 White]

Fans of American Natural Wine are probably pretty familiar with Martha Stoumen at this point. She burst on to the scene a few years back as part of the Living Wines Collective before venturing out on her own, launching a brand that has become one of the main faces of Domestic Natural Wine. Martha sources thoughtfully farmed fruit from around California, producing a fun mix of quaffable everyday drinkers and contemplative, age-worthy wines from more obscure grape varieties.

The Post Flirtation wines have kind of become Martha's calling card: energetic, youthful and easy-drinking, with packaging that easily draws the eye. The white is a blend of 33% Colombard, 26% Marsanne, 23% Roussanne and 18% Muscat blanc. Fermented and aged 6 months in stainless steel, then bottled unfiltered to

capture the wines freshness. The nose is delicately floral, with notes of pear and orange blossom and chamomile. Light-bodied, with crisp citrus and stone fruit tones. Now with about 2 years in bottle, the wine has taken on a pleasant nuttiness that rounds out all the brightness — at just 9.5% alcohol, it packed a serious punch of acidity upon release, which has integrated nicely. **KS**

Margins Muscat Contra Costa 2020

Contra Costa County • California • USA

[Press 4 White]

While Martha Stoumen is nearly a household name in natural wine these days, Megan Bell is just starting to get recognition for her work that echoes Martha's approach, working with lesser-known organic vineyards on the 'margins' of California's wine regions. Megan is young but already known for being extremely scrutinizing of her fruit suppliers, in addition to farming and managing her own vines. Her exacting standards really show in all the wines I tasted from her. She is working with some beautifully farmed grapes, that is for sure.

This Muscat from Cecchini Ranch is mouth-watering and refreshing. Sometimes dry Muscat smells sweet and is jarring to your brain when it's really dry. This is really peachy but the palate is lush and viscous, with just enough citrusy bite on the finish. Perfect as an aperitif or with sushi, it's deeply satiating and delicious and shows off far more dimension and texture than I was expecting. 50% is whole cluster direct press and the other half is destemmed and sees two days of skin contact, but it's not orange at all. It is a fun contrast in New-Wave American styles, compared to Matha's leaner, crunchier

Post-Flirtation White included this month. Though Megan's wines are new to me, I am totally on board with her style and can't wait to get more of her wines on our shelves. Keep an eye out for her Mourvèdre. **JK**



Megan Bell of Margins Wine

Hope Well Wines Chenin Blanc Estate

Eola-Amity Hills 2020

Willamette Valley • Oregon • USA

[Press 2]

Hope Well, founded by one of the country's most respected vineyard whispers Mimi Casteel, is the liquid embodiment, quite literally from the ground up, of the commune between humanity and nature. Mimi quickly became the face of regenerative agriculture, an approach to farming that works to actively sequester carbon, healing the land and purifying air and soil. Her commitment to this exhaustive modality yielded amazing, highly sought after grapes, producing wines that really turned by head and blew my hair back (yes, I know I'm balding).

2020 was a year that broke many of our collective hearts. It's was especially difficult in

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Oregon, where the double gut punch of the Covid-19 pandemic and unprecedented smoke from wildfires made winemaking in the Willamette Valley nearly impossible. Mimi persevered, and made some spine-tingling good white wines. The 2020 Chenin Blanc was the first vintage for wine produced from the estate's Riesling vines grafted over to the notoriously finicky variety and the results were outstanding, but when considering what the year threw at Mimi, the wines should win some damn awards.

The Chenin grapes were harvested after the smoke dissipated and were pressed off skins right away, and fermented in neutral french oak. Beautifully ripe, with a nose of mandarin orange and cream. Bright, vibrant acidity lifts the medium-bodied palate up higher than I was initially expecting, creating a lightness to the power this wine has. Nectarine, fleshy pear and wildflower honey notes shine through. Nothing short of breathtaking. **KS**

[Claire Naudin "La Plante d'a Cote" 2020](#)

Burgundy • France

[Press 2]

Claire Naudin is another familiar name for our customers, as her Burgundies are some of the most near and dear to our hearts. Since taking over her family's winery in 1994 she has been unrelenting in her drive to hold Burgundy to a higher standard, criticizing rules that 'standardize' winemaking and pushing to

improve farming practices across the region. Though she works organically, she dislikes organic certification because she feels it misses the forest for the trees, so to speak. Her insistence on the importance of originality and freedom is one of the reasons I like her wines so much. She seems able to cut through the layers of Burgundian BS and deliver some of the most transcendent, soulful Pinot Noirs in the world.

The Bi-Naume project was started when she had devastating loss due to frost in 2016, which wiped out most of her fruit. She was able to source grapes a few hours away in the hinterlands of Saint-Pourçain from her friend Jean-Yves Bizot, and has continued this project since.

What's nice about these wines is an immediacy that the more pedigreed Burgundies don't offer up as easily. Pinot Noir with zero-sulfur added, it shows off a more wild side of Claire's style. Gamey and piquant with earthy, spicy aromas, it's got raspberry, sour cherry and cranberry tartness with grippy layers and beguiling, savory depth. It's distinctly alive and entrancing, a wine that blows up any stereotypes of natural wine and delivers an exciting, original wine with gastronomic range and finesse. Where Claire's other wines may require cellaring, this one one is ready to drink now. **JK**



Pictured above: *Claire Naudin in her Myosotis vineyard*