

Napa Valley Pioneers: Heitz Cellar

Heitz Cellar Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon was one of the first Napa Valley wines I ever had the pleasure of tasting when I was a young restaurant manager over a decade ago and it is a wine that firmly planted the seeds of love for Napa Valley wines on both my palate and in my heart. Sadly, at the time on my salary, owning a bottle of this was just not happening (nothing much has changed!) but, a decade on it was my distinct pleasure to meet the lady behind the wine and revisit a wine that had such a profound influence on my love for American wines.

Kathleen Heitz Myers is the third generation of the family to run the winery and is currently the president of Heitz cellars and she was in Hong Kong this week to showcase the current vintages of the full range of her wines to both the trade and the media in the Ponti wine shop in the Miramar shopping centre in Hong Kong's Tsim Sha Tsui district.



Kathleen Heitz Myers

Heitz Cellar was founded in 1961 when there were fewer than 20 vineyards in the Napa Valley. These days they are certified organic although they have been practicing sustainable farming methods for decades. Whilst they are a well established winery, they still have to compete with a growing number of wineries in the region, most that sprung up in recent decades with the dot-com and super rich moving in to buy land and make wines that sell for extremely high prices.

Martha's Vineyard itself was founded by Tom and Martha May in 1963 when they bought a vineyard in Oakville that was already planted with Cabernet Sauvignon. The obvious choice for the couple was to call it Martha's Vineyard and hence, the legacy of one of my (and arguably one of America's most well known) favourite wines was born.



Speaking with Kathleen and her husband George they told me that “the 2007’s are drinking so well right now”, something I cannot disagree with as we are tasting the 2007 Napa Valley Cabernet and 2007 Trailside Cabernet Sauvignon which I found both to be extremely agreeable (whilst I do however, still prefer the more succulent Martha’s Vineyard to the Trailside Vineyard). The Napa Cabernet 2007 is a really approachable wine, whilst the Trailside has plenty of complexity and a nice rustic feel to it.

“2008 was a challenging vintage with smaller yields that heralded a smaller production”, the couple tell me as we taste the 2008 Martha’s Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon. This is a wine whose taste I well remember and something I like about Heitz Cellar is that they make wines the way they want, in a way that reflects the land from which it came. They have not pandered to certain critic’s tastes and started making wines to get higher point scores, they still make wine that is a true reflection of their house style and that shows off some of the wonderful terroir they have access to.



“2009 was a gorgeous vintage with great weather and perfect growing conditions”, George tells me and we taste the 2009 Heitz Cellar Zinfandel. As both the Martha’s Vineyard and Trailside Vineyard are held for 5 years in the cellars before release, the 2009’s are not yet ready to taste yet and will not be on the market for some time. The Zinfandel is truly reflective of the hot vintage and there is loads of fruit in it and a sweet, almost caramel finish to it.

“We have had such glorious weather this year and harvest for 2013 is the earliest I think ever”, George says. “2013 vintage...wow! We just finished harvest 2 days ago and it really is going to be something special”.

That certainly gives us something to look forward to!

Heitz Cellar wines are available from Ponti Wine Shops city-wide.

- See more at: <http://winetimeshk.com/napa-valley-pioneers-heitz-cellar/#sthash.Tzo6u7oj.dpuf>