

Heitz Cellar

About Heitz Cellar

Founded in 1961, Heitz Cellar is a Napa Valley legend that has helped shape the history of Napa winemaking. Pioneering vintner Joe Heitz ushered in Napa's modern era with his iconic, globally-celebrated wines—including Napa Valley's first vineyard-designated Cabernet Sauvignon, the renowned Heitz Cellar Martha's Vineyard.

In 2018, the winery entered an exciting new chapter as the Heitz family passed this rich legacy into the hands of the Lawrence family, whose deep roots in agriculture and commitment to the same core values of fine winemaking made it a perfect match. "I've enjoyed coming to the Napa Valley for some time and have long admired the wine industry from afar," says new owner Gaylon M. Lawrence, Jr. "Our family was fortunate to have an extraordinary opportunity to acquire such a remarkable family business with Heitz Cellar. We're very excited about the winery's bright future."

Under the Lawrence family's guidance, the winery will continue to offer wines in the quintessential Heitz style. Made with an unwavering commitment to quality from organically farmed, 100% Napa Valley fruit, Heitz wines continue to represent the Lawrences' agrarian roots and commitment to the stewardship of Napa Valley.

A new chapter for Heitz Cellar

Before the Lawrence family took the plunge into the wine world, their agricultural focus was mainly on cotton, soybeans, rice, and citrus in the South Eastern part of the United States. When Gaylon's daughter Westin Lawrence relocated to Napa Valley to earn a degree from the Culinary Institute of America, she became captivated by its vineyards and culture. "My family loves farming," she explains, "And vineyards are pretty much the pinnacle of farming."

Visiting Westin, the Lawrences soon found that her enthusiasm was contagious. "My father was fascinated by the vines and the passion that the surrounding community held for them," she recalls. "People in the valley live and breathe vineyards, vines, grapes, and wine." The family decided to pursue becoming landowners and when they learned of the opportunity with Heitz, they knew they could not pass it up.

Early days

When Joe and Alice Heitz founded Heitz Cellar, fewer than a dozen wineries called Napa Valley home; it was, in Joe's words, "asleep." At the time, the belief that Napa Valley could become a globally recognized wine region had yet to take root, and creating a winery in the area was still considered a risk.

In 1951, Joe had earned his master's degree in Enology from UC Davis and was working hard to hone his skills in wineries located in Lodi and Fresno. He caught the eye of revered winemaker André Tchelistcheff at Napa Valley's historic Beaulieu Vineyard and became his right-hand man.

Ten years later in 1961, Joe and Alice purchased their first property: an eight-acre vineyard south of St. Helena in Napa Valley. Working out of the small winery attached to the parcel, they worked around the clock to build their business. By 1964, Joe and Alice had discovered 160 acres in a small pocket of St. Helena on the east side of Napa Valley known as Spring Valley, where Joe sharpened his focus on Cabernet Sauvignon.

The handshake that changed history

When Tom and Martha May bought their Oakville home and vineyard in 1963, the previous owner left them two bottles of Heitz Cellar wine as a gift. Impressed with the wine, they decided to visit Heitz Cellar, where they purchased more. Soon a friendship grew between the two couples that marked the beginning of one of the most important relationships in the winemaking industry.

In 1965, visiting what Tom had impishly named "Martha's Vineyard" after his wife, Joe admired the quality of Tom's first harvest of Cabernet Sauvignon and offered to buy all of the grapes. The two shook hands and the deal was done—and the rest, as they say, is history. The wine Joe made from that fruit so impressed him that in 1966, he and Tom decided to recognize this amazing vineyard by putting the actual vineyard name on the bottle. Napa Valley's first vineyard-designated Cabernet Sauvignon was born, long before American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) existed. Half a century later, Heitz Cellar Martha's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon continues to garner acclaim and admiration.

Second generation Richard May and Laura May Everett approach the farming of Martha's Vineyard—which was one of Napa's first organically farmed ranches—with devotion to the preservation of the extraordinary land that is their heritage. And the May family's exclusive arrangement with Heitz Cellar continues to this day.

Heitz Cellar today

From the beginning, the Heitz family believed that in order for them to succeed with integrity and purpose they must be stewards of the land—a point of view that resonates with the Lawrence family as well. Westin Lawrence notes, "The estate vineyards of Heitz were a major reason behind our decision, because at heart, we really are just farmers. We love the land and cannot wait to give back to the land, and the community surrounding it."

Heitz Cellar has a collection of vineyards in six of Napa Valley's appellations, carefully selected to convey the breadth of geography and climate that makes the Napa Valley one of the world's finest winegrowing destinations. Of the 1,100 acres in their care, only 425 are planted. Heitz Cellar has granted a conservation easement to the Land Trust of Napa County, restored riparian areas and provided wildlife corridors in their vineyards. The winery also practices sustainable and certified organic farming in order to preserve Napa's rich agricultural heritage and contribute to a healthy future for everyone who calls the Napa Valley home.

Winemaker Brittany Sherwood has been with Heitz since 2012 and worked closely with previous winemaker, David Heitz. Now at the head of the winemaking team, she sees her role as staying true to the quintessential Heitz style while taking advantage of new resources for continuous improvement. “Our commitment to quality has always been at the forefront of the Heitz legacy, and that rings even more true now with the support from the Lawrence family and our leadership team,” she notes.

Heitz Cellar offers an illustrious portfolio of prestigious Napa Valley varietals, including Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The winery also creates a Port made from Portuguese grape varieties and a Rosé made from Grignolino, a charming Italian variety rarely found in the US.

Current vintages and an exceptional wine tasting experience can be found in the Heitz Cellar Tasting Salon, located at the winery’s original site just south of downtown St. Helena. Reservations are strongly recommended; call 707-963-2047.

In the hands of the Lawrence family, Heitz Cellar has found a lasting home. “We are committed to the same core values of fine winemaking, and we look forward to advancing the legacy of Heitz Cellar for generations to come,” Gaylon affirms. Westin agrees. “I love hearing people talk about their favorite vintage of Martha’s Vineyard or the Trailside Cabernet,” she says. “We understand what an important brand we have. We want to make sure each and every person who enjoys a bottle of Heitz has this same remarkable experience. I cannot wait to hear many more of these stories; this is the future I truly look forward to the most.”