

GENTRY DESTINATIONS

RESORTS | HOMES | TRAVEL | ADVENTURE



OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2016



Calling all electric car owners . . . Inman Winery is home to the North Bay's first privately owned and publicly available electric vehicle charging station, allowing guests to "fill up on sunshine," as Kathleen puts it.



CRUSH WORTHY

Amalia McGibbon discusses pinots, passion, and electric cars with vintner Kathleen Inman.

If ever there were a winery that represented the vision and passion of its proprietor, it would be Inman Family Wines. Since 1999, when Kathleen and her husband Simon Inman purchased their 10.5-acre parcel in the Russian River Valley, every single decision, operation, and process has been overseen and managed by Kathleen. She's worn every hat imaginable: grape grower, winemaker, general manager, sales person, accountant, operations manager . . . even forklift driver.

She's such a natural that it's hard to believe that the winery almost didn't happen. Sure, Kathleen was a third-generation Napa native who'd discovered her own nose for wine while a student at UCSB. But during a summer job at Napa Creek Winery she met a handsome Englishman named Simon. They married two years later and spent the next 15 years living in England—she with a successful career in finance at companies like Price Waterhouse and GKR Group, and he as a solicitor. Lucky for us, a vacation to Mendocino changed all that. In 1998, the Inmans packed their bags and left their friends and careers in England to indulge Kathleen's passion for Pinot Noir. The couple spent a year looking everywhere for the perfect parcel, including the AVAs of Anderson Valley, Carneros, and Sonoma Coast, before coming across an old farm at the junction of Olivet and Piner Roads. After making some calls, Kathleen discovered it was for sale, and before long, the Inmans were the proud (and petrified) owners of an old 10.5-acre property which would soon become home to 7.4 acres of planted Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris vines. (The land was named Olivet Grange, in

honor of their last home in England, the Grange at Elvington.) Kathleen has always been passionate about environmental issues, and since her first small vintage in 2002, has been an ardent supporter of non-interventional winemaking practices. In the winery, the fruit is handled as gently as possible. More often than not, the "must" is allowed to ferment with only the natural yeasts found in the vineyard (i.e., no enzymes or inoculation). All movements are made via gravity or pushed through inert gas, and the juice undergoes natural clarification without fining and ideally without filtration.

The proof is in the Pinot. Kathleen has chosen to ignore the critically acclaimed 'jammy' style and lead the movement toward subtler, more nuanced wines with a sense of place. Take a *Gentry Destinations* favorite—the 2013 Inman Family Wines Olivet Grange Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$68), whose bright red fruits and complex savory components are born of the vineyard's sandy, gravelly loamy soil and high iron content water.

The Inman Family Wines tasting room opened in 2010 and is the ultimate representation of sustainable wine country chic. It occupies the footprint of an old redwood barn that formerly stood on the site, and features furniture made from that original structure's wood.

Tasting appointments are available Thursday through Monday at 11AM, 12:30PM, and 2:00PM. The fee of \$20 per person is waived with a minimum purchase of \$100 per person. (Tasting is complimentary for Inman Family Wine Club members and up to four guests.) A private "Meet the Maker" tasting and vineyard tour with Kathleen is also available for \$35 per person (or waived with a purchase of \$150).

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Q&A WITH
WINEMAKER
KATHLEEN
INMAN

What do you believe makes your vineyard special? The sandy, gravelly soil, the blend of clones, the location in the Russian River Valley and the organic farming techniques I employ. It is a magical combination.

Natural can be a vague term, used often but its meaning isn't always clear. As a winemaker, what does 'natural' mean to you?

I agree that it is vague, and I think everyone has his or her own definition! I try not to use "natural" as a label for my wines. My goal in making my wines is first and foremost to make delicious wines that reflect the place and the vintage. To achieve this, I try to harvest my organic and/or sustainably farmed fruit when there is nice bright, natural acidity in the grapes. When the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes come into my cellar, I do not add SO₂. I do not want to harm the natural yeast and bacteria. I do not want to add water to reduce alcohol or add extra acid. I do not add enzymes or tannins to the wine. Natural fermentation occurs spontaneously, with only the addition of some certified organic yeast nutrients. The secondary fermentation, the malolactic, happens spontaneously too. In the process of finishing the wines, I do not "fine" the wines. I do not use machines to de-alcoholize the wine, concentrate, or remove volatile acidity. The aging of the wines is done in very little new oak, with small stainless steel, concrete, and lots of neutral oak barrels used. This is how I define natural wines.

How do you have time for yourself? Do you have a lot of staff?

My family and friends would probably say I don't make enough time for myself. I'm trying to address this, but my business continues to grow and just as I get new staff, I find I need to focus on a new aspect! I have two part-time and two full-time employees; one of them is my sister, Diane, who joined me two years ago. Like a meme we have posted in the cellar: "How do people make it through life without a sister?" I often ask how did I run this business without her!? As grape-grower, winemaker, forklift driver, sales director, IT help desk, etc., etc., I was able to unload compliance and accounting to Diane and what a huge relief that has been!!

I believe there's a story behind your Pinot Noir Rosé called "Endless Crush"—can you share it? It was created as a make-up gift for my husband, Simon, when I forgot that it was our 20th wedding anniversary and I had called the harvest day! I was so busy with the vineyard I had forgotten to buy a gift or a card and

when I woke at 3AM to go to the vineyard, Simon woke up and said, "Happy Anniversary" and had a lovely gift for me. My quick recovery was, "I'll make a special wine for you today." I chose a rosé because I had always thought of the first delicious Provencal rosé we had in the

south of France on a romantic picnic near the Gorge du Verdon. Endless Crush Rosé is an intentional rosé that is picked with the intention of being a pink wine and is made from my estate Pinot Noir. The grapes are direct to press and then fermented slowly in stainless steel. The goal is always a bright, fresh yet complex rosé with great mouthfeel and off-the-hook aromatics. Over the years since I first made it, it has become one of my best-known wines.



Have you encountered difficulties as a woman winemaker? I really haven't had any difficulties. A few funny stories, but I'll tell you those over a tasting!

Favorite wine region in the world, other than your own? Champagne.

Do you purchase from any mailing lists? Yes, I am a HUGE fan of Pam Starr's Crocker & Starr Wines, as well as Cathy Corison.

What's open in your kitchen right now? At this time of year, I am not leaving a lot of bottles open in the kitchen! They get consumed! This weekend we had a fantastic bottle of Chambolle-Musigny, a bottle of my Endless Crush Rosé, and a bottle of Navarro Late Harvest Gewurztraminer. More likely on a weeknight at this time of year is a bottle of Russian River Brewing Company's "It Takes a Lot of Great Beer to Make Great Wine," my favorite U.S. brew that is only available at harvest time.

What do you like best about your job? My favorite thing about what I do is seeing something I planted, that I have nurtured through the growing process and in the cellar become a wine that people enjoy with their family and friends. It is so gratifying when people send me images of themselves sharing my wines at weddings, birthday engagements, or even just Wednesday night suppers. It makes me feel a part of their lives and is just so rewarding. It never gets old!

Favorite food pairing for your wines? Duck breasts, served on a bed of beluga lentils with an Italian salsa verde and roasted beets and spinach on the side, with a bottle of my Olivet Grange Estate Pinot Noir is always a favorite. ♦