

## BREAKING THROUGH A WINE GLASS CEILING

Exploring and recognizing the connection between women and wine

By Jessica Yadegaran  
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When you think of women and wine, what do you imagine? Bubble gum labels like Pink Umbrella and Working Girl? Tasting groups marrying Mary Kay with Chardonnay? It's this lowbrow marketing that probably propelled a male industry colleague of mine to recently quip — in response to this weekend's Women For WineSense Grand Event — "Women and wine? What's the big deal?"

Well, I'm here to tell him. The big deal is that only 15 years ago, a salesman walked into Handley Cellars and asked founder and winemaker Milla Handley where the winemaker was. The big deal is that a woman like Mary Hall of Harlan Estate is actually considered a trailblazer for breaking into vineyard management 20 years ago. And if you believe the research coming out of UC Davis, genetically speaking, women are better tasters than men.

Incidentally, Handley tells me she actually misses those discriminatory days. At tastings and conferences, there was never a line for the women's restroom.

Now, there is. Today, 64 percent of wine consumers are women, and more women are working in every facet of the industry, particularly in roles of leadership. My editor's daughter, a 21-year-old UC Berkeley student studying abroad in Australia, plans to pursue a career in wine. She did not grow up frolicking in any chateaux. She's a product of Walnut Creek, not Dry Creek.

Perhaps another reason to care about women and wine is young entrepreneurs such as Sarah Gott, who not only makes award-winning Pomerol-inspired wines for a prestigious boutique brand, Blackbird, but also for up-and-coming labels, like Clif Bar. She's also a triathlete and helps with her husband's label, Joel Gott Wines. All in a modern day's work.

On women and wine, Dawnine Dyer, who revolutionized sparkling wines 25 years ago as VP of winemaking for Domaine Chandon, says she believes women have leaned toward entrepreneurship simply because of that glass ceiling.

"It's what caused Cathy Corison to open her own winery or Heidi Barrett to consult rather than work for someone else," Dyer explains. These days, she makes Diamond Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon with her husband, Bill, under their Dyer Vineyard label, as well as for their second label, Meteor.

Mia Klein does it all. The owner-winemaker of Selene Wines is also one of the most sought-after winemaking consultants in the country. In addition to her own 90-plus point Merlots and Sauvignon Blanc, Klein is the consultant to Araujo Estate, Spottswoode and Viader, and the full-time winemaker at Dalla Valle.

She tells me that being a female winemaker brings the much-needed idea of wholeness back into business. "Masculine seeks after perfection and feminine seeks after wholeness," Klein explains. "You need both, but when we swing to one side, it's usually the masculine, and then the feminine values become very appealing."

The idea of wholeness, she says, extends to everyone involved in the estate, from the people who market and sell the wine to those of us who consume it. The wine is alive, after all, and everyone is responsible for that.