

# WOMEN OF WINE

*Wineries*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We continue our series profiling the Women of Wine (WOW) of the Santa Cruz Mountains. This time we include a woman who founded a Web site specializing in the wines of our area.

By **JUNE SMITH**  
SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

## Valerie Ahlgren, Ahlgren Vineyard

"It is all Val's fault," Dexter Ahlgren says when asked how he and his wife became involved in wine making.

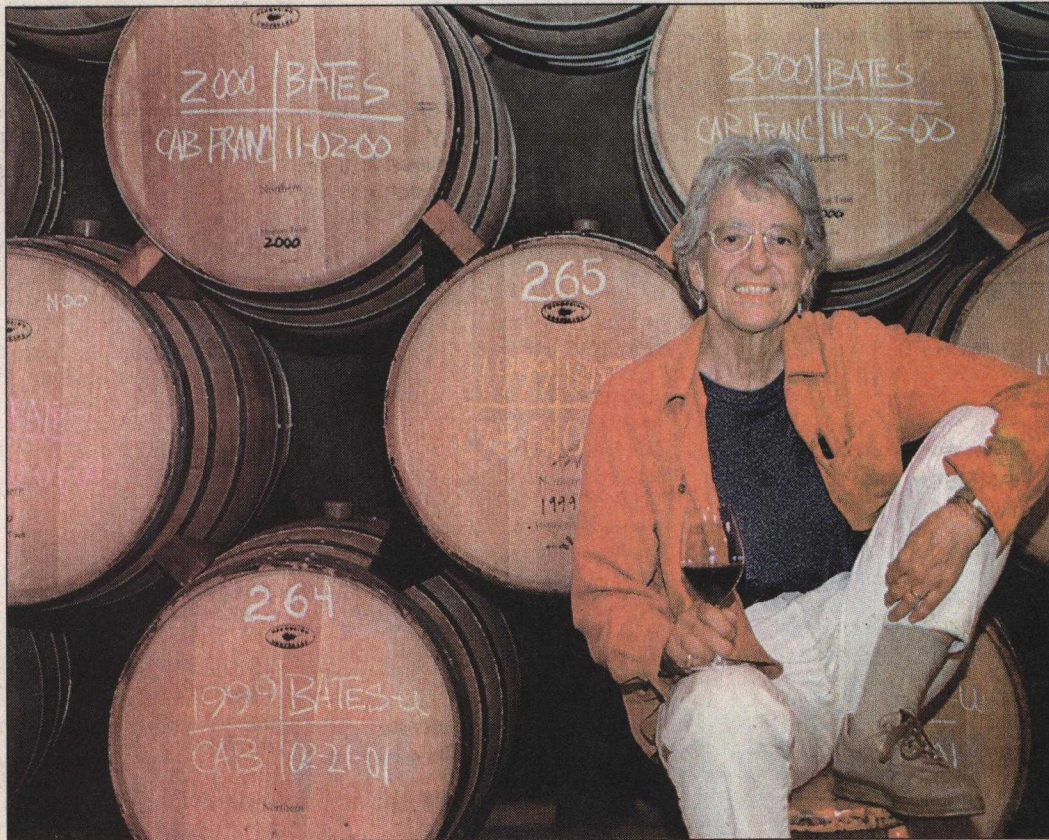
He was a consulting civil engineer, and Val was an English instructor at De Anza Community College when she started making all sorts of fermented goodies from beer to elderberry wine to mead in their Silicon Valley garage.

When things began to taste surprisingly delicious, Dexter got interested. He turned out to be a truly gifted wine maker with that combination of palate, intuition and common sense that stands behind the making of exceptional wines.

"Things got out of control," says Val. The winery dream took over their lives.

Val now writes the Wine Club News, manages the on-line store and works hands-on in wine making activities, helping to care for the small vineyard and managing the property in an environmentally responsible manner. She also helps Dexter with the Saturday afternoon tastings and sales at the winery, and works with daughter, Beth, on everything from the wines, to administration, to shipping.

Val was a voice ahead of her time, speaking for wine grape growing and organic farming during her seven years serving on the County



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Valerie Ahlgren of Ahlgren Vineyard takes a break against the backdrop of a lot of fine wine.

Agriculture Policy Advisory Commission in the 1980's. And, Dexter and Val worked with the vintners group to gain the designation of the Santa Cruz Mountains as a federal appellation for a wine grape region.

Val spent years attempting to improve timber

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harvest regulations and to successfully protect the San Lorenzo River watershed lands surrounding their property from logging. These activities led her to create and become a found-

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# Women

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ing board member of the Environmental Council and the Resource Defense Fund, and a founding director of the Valley Women's Club.

"I love making wine, living in this uniquely beautiful spot surrounded by views of the San Lorenzo River watershed, the redwood forest. It is a great life.

"The winery is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. I wish it could go on forever, but our family has decided that ultimately the winery and property will be sold. We're in no hurry, feeling blessed to be here and to make these much respected wines."

## ALISON CROWE, BONNY DOON VINEYARD

While Alison Crowe was growing up in Santa Barbara, she was very aware of her parent's appreciation of fine wine. They spent much of their leisure time visiting wineries and tasting the fruits of the vine.

By the time Alison was 17, she knew that she wanted to study enology at UC Davis.

While there she earned a bachelor's degree in fermentation science and in Spanish, and took advance coursework in winery management, winery design, brewing, and distillation technology.

She wrote wine columns for the Davis Enterprise newspaper, Brew Your Own magazine, and was a contributor to WineMaker magazine.

In 1998 she was voted UC Davis Outstanding Senior.

During her college years she gained valuable experience as a harvest intern at both Chalone Vineyard in Soledad, and Curtis Winery in Santa Ynez.

Her next stop was as a temporary cellar and vineyard worker under winemaker Don Blackburn at Byington Winery in Los Gatos, and she was invited to stay on for a time after the fall harvest.

But after calling several local wineries, Alison landed an interview with Bonny Doon Vineyard operations manager Eric Laumann. Her resume spoke for itself and in March of 2000 she was hired as enologist. This year she became Associate Winemaker working alongside Andy Poole, from Australia. The two work immediately under Randall Graham, winemaker, owner and "president for life."

Working for Randall is challenging, maddening and wonderful, as he is fearless. He will change a plan that has been already set in motion if he gets a better idea. Thirty to 40 different products are made each year, and no two years are alike, so Alison must be willing and able to do whatever it takes to make these ideas materialize.

She also works with the special wines that are offered to the DEWN (Distinctive Esoteric Wine Network) club members only. They are usually very special lots — that year's brainstorms from Randall. Alison says that these wines represent the essence of Bonny Doon.

Some of these wines that Alison has been responsible for include the Ice Wine, Big House Red and Pacific Rim Riesling among others.

Long days are spent at the winery, but when she has time off Alison enjoys reading or exploring the area on her mountain bike. She eagerly anticipates owning a long board, as the winery employees are planning to start their very own Bonny Doon Vineyard Surf Club.

"At any winery, no matter how big or how small," says Alison, "the wine is never made by just one person alone. It's always a team effort, from the leadership of someone like Randall down to the cellar guy who's rolling a barrel.

"It's what I call, 'Winemaking by Committee.'"



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Lorraine Schumacher offers a sample in the tasting room at Hallcrest Vineyards.

## ANNE MOULTON, BURRELL SCHOOL VINEYARDS

Anne and her husband, David, moved to the Santa Cruz Mountains in the 1970s with dreams of planting a vineyard and starting a small winery.

The immediate reality proved to be decidedly different.

First, there were old prune and walnut orchards to be reckoned with. Then, there was the question of what to do about the abandoned 1890 one-room schoolhouse.

The vine-related dream was set aside while Anne concentrated on restoring the Burrell School as their family home. While caring for their two young children, she spent her time designing a plan that would incorporate the 1890 architecture into a functional addition to the original building.

Then it was time to develop the vineyard and Anne took charge of the planting of Chardonnay and Merlot grapes.

The couple decided to name the winery after the original mountain settler in that area, Lyman Burrell, who was the namesake of Burrell School.

Anne designed the wine labels based on the original photograph of the school, and she incorporates as much of its history as possible into their marketing materials.

The unique historical grounds attract people to the tasting room, where you can generally find Anne telling stories on weekends.

A favorite is that of school teacher, Belva Plaike Krafft, who taught at Burrell School in 1918. At that time they used a pot belly stove, coal oil lamps and candles. Her salary was \$65 per month, with \$5 extra for cleaning and tending the stove.

Belva boarded at the nearby Wright's mansion, a large two story residence shared with Miss Wright's 30 cats who slept on one of the unused stoves in the kitchen.

Belva died in the early '90s at the age of 92.

## LORRAINE SCHUMACHER, HALLCREST VINEYARDS

It was a chance meeting at 1 a.m. that started Lorraine Schumacher in the wine business.

It was 1981, while Lorraine was living in Sacramento, that she stopped in to visit her brother.

Her husband-to-be, John, was rooming at her brother's home and interning at Felton-Empire Winery.

The two met when both arrived at

the home one morning at 1. For Lorraine it was love at first sight, but John, at age 21, was not entertaining such feelings.

But soon they begin dating, and Lorraine helped John with the chores in his small Davis winery, Schumacher Cellars where everything had to be done by hand.

They married in 1986 and in September of '87 John, Lorraine and John's sister Shirin purchased the Felton-Empire site and restored the name, "Hallcrest Vineyards."

Lorraine did the bookkeeping, and handled winery events such as the annual Jazz Festival, while caring for their first child, Sean.

She then took a two-year break from the business as the commute to the winery from their home in Bonny Doon was becoming tedious, especially since there was a second child, Jeannine.

Later, when a one-acre parcel of property behind the winery became available for sale, the Schumachers jumped at the chance to build their own two-story Victorian home, designed by Scotts Valley architect Russell Short, whose sister worked in their tasting room. Lorraine remembers the 13-month process as a stressful year, and to top it off, baby Austin arrived just as they were about to move in. His arrival prompted another retreat from the business, this time for three years.

During this time, Lorraine kept her position as a director for The Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers Association board. She remains a director today.

Each year John and Lorraine employ interns from countries such as Austria, Australia, Russia, Switzerland, Costa Rica and France. They stay in the family home from as little as two months to as long as a year.

At this time, the main emphasis is on time spent as a family, wine promotional opportunities are sometimes set aside.

But publicity generated by The Organic Wine Works, started in 1987, has more than made up for any missed promotional opportunities. About 80 percent of the total 20,000 case production is devoted to organic wines, enjoyed by many celebrities.

Entertainer Sting and his wife use the wines for "Save The Rain Forest" events at the New York Waldorf Astoria.

Lorraine occasionally opens up their home for personal wine dinners, and has donated the entire winery site to non-profit groups who have proven to be responsible hosts for their events.

"Having a business in Santa Cruz, close to the ocean and the redwoods, is the best of all possible lifestyles," she says. "What more could anyone want?"

## JAN AULL, WEBWINERY.COM

WebWinery.com was founded by Jan and Ken Aull in 1995, to fulfill a passion they shared for the wines, and the wineries of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Jan had worked for 16 years as an office manager for TRW in Silicon Valley, and was a willing partner in the decision with Ken to "bet half the farm," quit her job, and start up a business that utilized both their talents. Within three months WebWinery.com was born, specializing in the Web sites and sales of the wines of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Ken, a TRW Technical Fellow, bought special security software to allow safe credit card transactions, and wrote a system to meet the special requirements needed to sell wine on the Internet. Jan, as Web Master, is responsible for advertising, accounting, the daily operations, and all customer and client relations.

She treats the clients as extended family and enjoys working closely with the creative winemakers, who often have very different ideas about how their Web site should look. WebWinery represents about 30 wineries, which include a few from other areas of the state.

Jan can now work at home and be her own boss. She can stop work when daughter Katherine comes home from school, and even attend school functions. This is something there never was time for with son Keith, who now helps with the business and works in Silicon Valley in Web site development.

Jan's biggest frustration comes when she is asked for a wine recommendation, and then finds that that wine is sold out. No matter how hard she tries to keep on top of this situation, it always seems to happen after she has spent a lot of time with a customer.

Once, a customer from Florida ordered a particular wine, Jan says. Since it is a felony to ship wine to that state, Jan asked her if she had a friend in a nearby state to receive it. After the woman received the wine from her friend, she decided she didn't like it. Because she lived in Florida, she couldn't return it to the winery, as UPS couldn't pick it up.

The woman kept calling and e-mailing Jan, saying that the wine must have been spoiled and she wanted to try it again. Finally someone from the winery was going to Florida for the holidays and offered to bring some to her personally.

And Jan and Ken boast that their business can be run from anywhere in the world, even sitting on a beach with a laptop.