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# TAKES OFF

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# UPfront

Maggie Kruse is head winemaker at Jordan Winery in the Alexander Valley.

## *Fermenting a* MASTERPIECE

MAGGIE KRUSE  
TAKES THE REINS AS  
HEAD WINEMAKER  
AT JORDAN WINERY

PHOTO: MATT ARMENDARIZ



# UPFRONT

by **Liz Thach, MW**

Nothing delights Maggie Kruse more than the scent of fermenting fruit: Her favorite part of working as head winemaker at the renowned Jordan Winery in the Alexander Valley is opening the cellar door early in the morning during crush and smelling the wine at various stages of its life. She takes careful handwritten notes on each tank and barrel, noting not only the vineyard block from which they came but the aromas and flavors as they develop. “This way,” explains Kruse, “I have both a mental and palate memory of the wines as they move toward the blending phase. It’s like I develop a relationship with each wine, and it is exciting because each vintage is a whole new discovery.”

Kruse’s passion for fermentation may well have been inherited from her father, who was a brewmaster at Miller Brewery Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she grew up. She remembers being fascinated by science from an early age and enjoying the opportunity to work with her hands in the high school lab. It was this intense interest that landed her in California at the tender age of 17, when she enrolled in viticulture and enology classes at Napa Valley College. “My parents encouraged me to study fermentation science in California,” she recalls, “and my mother drove me to Napa and actually lived with me for a few months in my rental apartment because I was too young to sign the lease.”

After a year at the junior college, Kruse was accepted to the University of California, Davis, where she graduated in 2005 with a degree in fermentation science. This, along with the experience she gained from internships—including a harvest stint at Central Coast estate Clos LaChance—secured her a job as an enologist for J Vineyards & Winery in Sonoma County, where she assisted in making still and sparkling wine. A year later, she was wooed away to Jordan by Rob Davis, who had been making wine at the estate since its first vintage in 1976.

“Rob has been an incredible mentor to me,” says Kruse. “He was trained

by André Tchelistcheff, whom Tom Jordan hired to work here from 1976 to 1992, and not a day has gone by when Rob didn’t tell me a story about André. It’s almost like I was mentored by both men.” Now, after 15 years at Jordan—first as an enologist and then as assistant winemaker—Kruse has

taken the reins with the level of training necessary to uphold the values and philosophies that have secured Jordan’s reputation as one of Sonoma County’s most revered “châteaux.”

Indeed, Jordan’s wines have long been known for their refined, elegant, food-friendly style, with moderate alcohol, crisp acidity, and a remarkable ability to age—as evidenced by the estate’s large library collection. “We sell



PHOTO: KENDALL BUSBY

**Winemaker Maggie Kruse tastes through the Jordan lineup with author Liz Thach, MW.**

## TASTING NOTES

### **Jordan 2017 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley**

Showing a complex nose of straw, muted apple, and chamomile, it's fuller-bodied on the palate, with a zing of lemon peel, a modest touch of toasty oak, and cleansing acidity on the finish.

### **Jordan 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley**

This wine entrances with complex, earthy aromas laced with black fruit, spice, and hints of root beer and oregano; after an hour in the glass, it transforms into a mélange of black cherry, clove, and hints of raspberry puree. Medium-bodied and elegant, with finely structured tannins and fresh acidity, it's truly magical.

### **Jordan 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley**

A powerful wine with concentrated ripe plum, raspberry, spice, and anise notes along with massively structured tannins, well-integrated oak, and a very long finish. Complex and evolving in the glass, it tightened up after two hours and should age well.

70% of our wine on-premise in fine-dining establishments across America," says Kruse. "Consumers know that with a bottle of Jordan . . . they are buying a very high-quality wine with history and pedigree. It is a favorite choice for corporate dinners because the wine has an excellent reputation but is not prohibitively expensive."

For all its consistency, Jordan has



experienced some changes over the years. For example, in 2000 the winemaking team made the decision to source all of their Chardonnay from the Russian River AVA, and in 2015 they decided to switch to 100% French oak for aging their Cabernet Sauvignon (which had previously seen some American oak as well). "We did some trials and decided that the French oak really elevated the wine, allowing it to be more integrated and seamless," explains Kruse.

Today, Jordan Cabernet is aged for a minimum of four years before release, including the 12–14 months it spends in approximately 50% new French oak barrels. It usually incorporates Bordeaux's classic blending grapes: For example, the most recent release, the 2015 vintage, is composed of 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot, 2% Malbec, and 0.3% Cabernet Franc sourced from both estate and surrounding vineyards. "I don't think we will ever be 100% estate-grown wine," Kruse says. "We like to have the flexibility of purchasing grapes from local growers and supporting our local community. There are some incredible vineyards in Sonoma and Mendocino where we source our

grapes, and we want to ensure we have the highest-quality fruit."

That said, Jordan is currently replanting 120 acres of vineyard. "Altogether, we have nearly 1,200 acres," says Kruse, "but not all of it is suitable for grapes. That's why we have cattle as well as our organic gardens." Visitors approach the winery via a twisting road that winds through many of those acres, passing hills covered with oak trees. Once they arrive at the large and impressive facility—designed to look like a French château with its golden stucco walls—they dine on fresh vegetables, breads, and appetizers made by Jordan's executive chef, Todd Knoll, as part of a paired tasting.

When asked if she thought Jordan would ever create a second label as most of the great Bordeaux houses do, Kruse shook her head. "John Jordan—our owner and the son of our founders, Tom and Sally Jordan—believes there is no second for Jordan. He says we will always make the best wine that we can each year." She pauses to take a sip of her Cabernet before continuing. "You know, I like this philosophy, because it is very rewarding to make a wine that you know is the very best that you can create." ■■