

RAISE A GLASS

An early grad of CALS' viticulture and enology program, winemaker Nova Cadamatre '06 has one of Napa's top jobs



IN THE HEART OF WINE COUNTRY: The first-year aging room at Robert Mondavi Winery. Below: A bottle bearing Mondavi's iconic arch and tower.

Nova Cadamatre '06 has a heady title: senior director of Napa Valley winemaking for Constellation Brands, the parent company of such celebrated wineries as Robert Mondavi, the Prisoner, and Mount Veeder, not to mention various lines of beer and spirits. But the way she looks at it, her primary role is something more evocative and elemental: “yeast wrangler.”

It's a gorgeous fall day in Napa—toward the end of October, with its summerlike days and chilly nights—and Cadamatre is sitting outside at Mondavi, on a bench beneath a dark wood pergola. The winery's historic To Kalon Vineyard (first planted in 1868) stretches out before her, with the Mayacamas Mountains in the distance; behind her is Mondavi's Mission-style arch and tower, whose iconic shapes are emblazoned on its bottles.

As Cadamatre explains, her day-to-day job is to manage winemaking, from harvest to fermentation, aging, and blending. “But to me, the most critical section of that is the actual fermentation—the changing from juice to wine,” she says. “That chemical process isn't done by me; it's done by yeast.” Smiling, she talks about the single-celled microorganisms as though they're toddlers down for a nap, adorable but demanding. “There's this balancing act of, ‘Do you have everything you need? Are

you comfortable? You've got your blanket, your food?’ I don't physically make wine—they do, and I manage them.”

Cadamatre's role at Constellation encompasses both the art and science of winemaking—from walking the vineyards as she determines optimal harvest time to tasting as many as 200 individual samples a day. There are myriad decisions to be made—for example, whether it's time to remove the skins from nascent red wine, which Cadamatre likens to discarding a tea bag once the drink has been steeped to one's liking. “During harvest, timing is essential,” she says, now standing in a clinical-looking room lined by shallow countertops bearing dozens of wine samples, each stemmed glass capped with a saucer to keep out fruit flies. “It's urgent that we taste every day and make sure things are going okay.”



One of the first-ever graduates of CALS' viticulture and enology (V&E) program—which allows undergrads to major in the making of wine and growing of grapes—Cadamatre is one of the few women to serve as a head winemaker nationwide. (The official figure, she says, is 10 percent; if you add in other roles, such as assistant winemakers or enologists, she estimates it would grow to around 20 percent, still a distinct minority.) “One of the real fascinations with grape vines is you can grow the >



GROWING CONCERN: Cadamatre among the vines. Below: A bottle from her small Finger Lakes winery, Trestle Thirty One, which began sales in 2017.

fruit, bring it to the winery, produce something with your own hands, then take it to the marketplace and sell it," observes Cadamatre, whom *Wine Enthusiast* named to its 2014 list of the Top 40 Under 40 Tastemakers. "That's one of the things I love about winemaking—you can be part of the whole chain."

Cadamatre boasts yet another distinction: she was the first American female winemaker to be named a Master of Wine (MW). That honor—currently held by fewer than 400 people in various roles in the wine and hospitality industries worldwide—requires the completion of a notoriously exacting, years-long course of study, including an exam with blind tastings of three dozen wines and a 10,000-word research paper (Cadamatre did hers on barrel sanitation). "It's very, very challenging," says Alan Lakso, a professor emeritus of horticulture who taught Cadamatre on the Hill. "When you get the Master of Wine you've learned an awful lot about the industry—not only the

taste of wines and those sorts of things, but a lot of technical background as well." On top of her MW—not to mention her degree from Cornell's V&E program, whose graduates Lakso notes are in high demand in the industry—Cadamatre holds a diploma from another global leader in wine education, the London-based Wine & Spirit Education Trust, which gave her its Outstanding Alumni Award in 2018. "There aren't a lot of winemakers that have that breadth of training," Lakso notes. "It's quite unusual."

A South Carolina native, Cadamatre didn't grow up in a household of wine aficionados; she was in high school when she met her now-husband, whose Italian-American family introduced her to the concept of serving wine with meals. "There was a

social aspect; I really liked that gathering around," she recalls. "And I liked the fact that each wine had its own flavors and aromas, and each variety was a little bit different." After earning an associate's degree in horticulture from SUNY Morrisville, Cadamatre transferred to Cornell, where she dived into the newly established V&E major. "She was very keen to learn as much as she could," recalls enology lecturer Kathy Arnink. "She always had big goals and lots of motivation, and was really focused on what she wanted to do in the wine industry. Her career is impressive, but it's not surprising. You knew that Nova was going to succeed at whatever she wanted to do."

Cadamatre worked at nearby Thirsty Owl Winery while still a student, and after graduation went on to various roles at wineries owned by Constellation and others in California. In 2013, she became head of red winemaking at Mondavi, and two years later accepted a transfer back to the Finger Lakes to serve as director of winemaking at Constellation's Canandaigua Winery. Around that time, she and her husband purchased land on Seneca Lake and took the first step toward realizing a long-held dream to open their own winery, dubbed Trestle Thirty One. A boutique luxury brand, the winery produces some 120 cases a year, starting with a 2015 Riesling released in July 2017. While the couple ultimately aim to grow their own grapes and build a winemaking facility and tasting room, they're currently sourcing their fruit from other growers and making wine at a nearby winery. "When I got into this industry, I never set out to be the head winemaker at Mondavi; it kind of evolved that way," Cadamatre says. "I wanted my own vineyard, to walk my own land and see my own fruit. That was my goal—to have a piece that was mine."

When Cadamatre was offered her current job at Constellation—entailing a relocation back to Napa—it was too good to refuse. She and her husband are still running Trestle Thirty One, with

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the help of New York-based staff. As she notes, she has some experience in making wine from afar: for two years starting in fall 2015, she participated in a competition in which four dozen winemakers from eighteen countries vied to make the finest Cabernet Sauvignon using grapes from a vineyard in Ningxia, China. After making numerous trips to the other side of the globe—but mainly managing the process remotely—her team won a silver medal. "Winemaking is a very traditional field, and in some ways it hasn't changed radically in the last 300 years—but in some ways it changes every day," Cadamatre says. "To me, that's really exciting. Every vintage is different; the weather is different; there's always some quirk of the season you haven't dealt with before. So every year you can make wine generally the same way, and come out with so many different things." ■

— Kitty Kemp

