



## Bibiana González Rave - Dreaming about wines you'll never forget

Colombia-born Santa Rosa resident Bibiana González Rave has always known that she wanted to be a winemaker.

“Growing up there wasn’t much wine in my country,” said Rave during a tasting at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone. “But for some reason wine bottles fascinated me. They were different from all the other containers and closed with a cork. I would look at it during special-occasion dinners and would ask my dad for a taste. I became more and more interested in the idea of making wine. Somehow I just sort of felt I’d become a winemaker.”

Becoming a winemaker in a tropical country without much of a wine culture and no winemaking role models might have been enough to stop most mortals. But Rave is no mere mortal. A few moments with her and words like “meticulous,” “passionate,” “disciplined” and “driven” seem almost inadequate to capture her essence.

“Bibiana is a remarkable winemaker,” said Virginie Boone, Kenwood resident and contributing editor for the Wine Enthusiast magazine. “She’s French-educated and very worldly in her approach, just incredibly disciplined as well as deeply entrenched in the vineyard, and yet she’s not in the least afraid to showcase the beautiful ripeness of fruit that is possible in California. I respect her for that. Her wines offer both a delicious juiciness and brightness while ably retaining acidity and structure. I think many of her current wines are due to become classics over the next couple of decades. The challenge will be having the patience to wait and see.”

After studying chemical engineering in Colombia, Rave looked to France to learn winemaking.

“I applied to 11 viticulture and enology schools in France. None of the schools accepted me. So in the summer of 2000 I went to France and planned to visit every school to see who would take me in. I didn’t speak any French. I only had a backpack and very little money.”

Rave was determined to study winemaking in France.

“My first stop was Angouleme, at the heart of the Cognac region,” she explained. “I arrived at 8 a.m. and had to wait until 4:30 p.m. to be seen by the director of the school. I waited on a chair without food or anything to drink. When we finally met, the director spoke to me in French, while I spoke to him in Spanish — the languages similar enough. For some reason, he believed in my passion and desire to learn. Two years later, I graduated with my viticulture-oenology degree from Lycee of L’Oisellerie in Cognac. I still remember that day and am extremely thankful for his believing in me.”

After obtaining her first degree in viticulture and enology, Rave still wasn’t done yet with her winemaking education in France.

“Once you get a viticulture-oenology degree in France, you are expected to enter the working life, not go back to the university, so they make it very hard. Thankfully, I finished with the highest grades in my class in Cognac. I was accepted, eventually graduating from the University of Bordeaux II with a diploma of enology.”

While in France, she also worked the harvest in some of the most prestigious estates in France, including Northern Rhône’s Domaine Michel & Stéphane Ogier, Bordeaux’s Château Haut-Brion and Burgundy’s Domaine Du Devevey, after which she spent three years in South Africa and eventually found her way to Sonoma County.

“I worked my first harvest in California back in 2004 in the heart of the Russian River Valley,” she said. “I didn’t know anything about the California wine industry and was truly brainwashed by the mystique of French winemaking.

“When I worked at La Crema for my first California introduction, I was amazed at the vineyards and fruit they were able to work with, them being such a big brand. It is hard not to be seduced by California, not to mention how beautiful Sonoma County is. I love the earth, the smell of the air, the potential, the unlimited opportunities and the chance to craft extraordinary, not just good, wines that can compete with all the French benchmarks I was trained with.”

Besides working in Northern California at La Crema and Peay, Rave also worked in California’s Central Coast at wineries such as Au Bon Climat and Qupé. But in 2009, she became winemaker at Sonoma’s Lynmar Estate. Rave left Lynmar in 2011 and became winemaking consultant for Pahlmeyers’ Wayfarer project on the Sonoma coast.

“She’s a genius in her craft,” said Cleo Pahlmeyer, proprietor, “Bibiana has a true understanding of winegrowing and meticulously oversees our vineyard. Wayfarer is all about the vineyard. She is uncompromising and challenges everything. Bibiana has fine-tuned our farming vine-by-vine to suit each individual clone. Her approach to making wine allows the clonal character and site character to speak for itself.”

Besides consulting, Rave has her own brands, too, including Cattleya and Shared Notes, a sauvignon blanc project that she and her husband, winemaker Jeff Pisoni, launched together. Additionally, she’s launching Alma de Cattleya (named for Colombia’s national flower, the orchid), a California-sourced, value-price brand, in her native country.

“Jeff, Lucas and I are in Colombia right now launching Alma de Cattleya!” she wrote in an email. “People are really excited about it. I am putting all my winemaking practices and experience that I use on high-end wine production into an affordable wine.”

In 2011, Rave married Pisoni, winemaker of Pisoni Vineyards, and Lucas is their nearly 1-year-old son. For the most part, they keep their work lives separate, but the couple has joined forces to launch the sauvignon blanc Shared Notes together.

“One of the many things that draw Bibiana and me together is that we both make wine,” said Pisoni. “And however passionate we are about it, we have always worked separately when it comes to the actual wines and vineyards we deal with. We wanted to do something together but not related to a variety that we were each already working with. We both love sauvignon blanc, especially the styles found in Bordeaux and the Loire Valley, and we both felt there was not enough high-quality sauvignon blanc grown and made in California.”

“For more than 12 years, Jeff and I have known each other as winemakers,” Rave said. “We are both quite passionate about the wines we make, and Shared Notes is a project meant to make us share all our winemaking ideas. This is totally an intellectually stimulating process for us, a way to make each of us better as winemakers, a couple and as human beings.”

“I love working with her for multiple reasons,” said Pisoni. “On one hand, it feels natural. I grew up in a family business, so working with family is something I love. It gives an even greater purpose. I find that the process provides an opportunity to communicate, coordinate decisions and share long-term goals. From a winemaking point of view, it’s incredible. We have very different backgrounds. I grew up around vineyards and winemaking with my family and studied at Fresno. Bibiana decided to be a winemaker when she was a young child. She studied at what I have always thought of as the most admirable enology school in the world, the University of Bordeaux. Not to mention she had worked at places I had admired all my life, like Chateau Haut Brion.”

Whatever she is doing seems to be working. The San Francisco Chronicle named her 2015 Winemaker of the Year.

“Both Bibiana’s wine and her story are inspiring,” said Sara Floyd, master sommelier and partner at Swirl wine brokers in San Francisco. “We represent her wines because her wines are wonderful and also because she is wonderful, too. Bibiana is meticulous and disciplined, but she’s also kind and loving, and her wines reflect that. She does not shy away from expressing the intensity of California, but she does it in a way that retains balance, amazing aromatics and a diversity of textures, even in her whites. She is a professional, driven, focused winemaker who does not cut corners. But don’t get the wrong impression — she is fun and a beautiful spirit to be around, too.”

Rave may represent the future of winemaking in California: highly trained, passionate and not willing to settle for anything less than making memorable wines from exceptional vineyards.

“I’d say my style is creating wines with soul, true to their terroir, with unique focus on improving farming practices to produce extraordinary fruit. Then the wines will come easily. I love to let each vineyard show its uniqueness. However, I love power and finesse, elegance, tannins and aromatic intensity. I am traditional and a romantic when it comes to winemaking. I dream about making wines that you’ll never forget from a place that is exceptional.”

Cattleya Wines are available at a few restaurants in Sonoma County and Napa, such as Healdsburg Dry Creek Kitchen, Redd, Press and Acme Wine Store. However, Rave suggests that the best way to get Cattleya Wines and Shared Notes is through their websites: [CattleyaWines.com](http://CattleyaWines.com) and [SharedNotesWine.com](http://SharedNotesWine.com), where one can join the mailing list and obtain priority access to the wines upon release.