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A Three-Pronged Winemaking Approach Yields Outstanding Results

Cattleya's Bibiana Gonzáles Rave brings France, California and Colombia to her wines

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Bibiana Gonzáles Rave approaches winemaking from at least three perspectives. The first is French, and the exacting standards she learned and rigorous training she received during her five vintages in France. Then there's the free-spirited, emotional South American approach that comes from growing up in Colombia. The third is what she's learned since making California her home.

Drawing on her global experience, Rave described her wine, Cattleya, as parallel with her wine philosophy. "Rather than look for a certain 'type' of wine," she said, "I want my wines to be elegant, pure, powerful—both sensorially and emotionally, with much depth."

"When making wines," she added, "I always approach the process from a grower's perspective, where [vineyards are], who [grows them] and how [they're farmed]."

Where the vineyard is located is the focal point, but there is also the viticulturist's drive: "How much blood and sweat you are willing to give in the pursuit of the perfect fruit," she said. "How much you will sacrifice in order to achieve greatness."

As a winemaker who purchases her grapes, vineyard sources are essential to the success of her wines. "I therefore believe in only working with people that share my philosophy, that I feel proud of to promote and work with."

To that end, she said, "I thoughtfully get to know the sites, the people, the past vintages produced from there. I relentlessly pursue the idea that I can create wines that are simply a manifestation of my deep connection with the vines and can simultaneously carry pure elegance, great depth and power."

Under her Cattleya label, Rave made a vibrant 2012 Russian River Chardonnay from Pratt Vineyard (90 points, \$70), a rich, layered 2011 Syrah from Santa Lucia Highlands' Soberanes Vineyard (92, \$70), and a delicate, detailed 2012 Pinot Noir from Donum Estate in Carneros.

With Shared Notes, she and her husband, Jeff Pisoni, are aiming for two styles of Sauvignon Blanc—a richer, Bordeaux-inspired version (whole-cluster fermentation; 25 percent Sémillon), and a crisper 100 percent Sauvignon Blanc expression suitable for pairing with oysters.

When talking about her wines, she gushes with enthusiasm. "I want breathtaking complexity in the aromatics and texture on the mouthfeel. I look to craft wines with a long finish but that develop in the midpalate with ample generosity. I don't care about the numbers, so alcohol levels are not a goal to achieve [neither low nor high]. I believe that each vintage should bring something new, so I allow myself to be surprised every year."



Rachel Balunsat

Bibiana Gonzáles Rave demands passionate work from her vineyard sources.