

# WINE COUNTRY *This Week*



## Raymond Vineyards & Cellar STEPHANIE PLUM

*By: Josh Stein*

### ***“Improving What Is Already There”***

Stephanie Putnam is the Director of Winemaking at Raymond Vineyards and Cellar, where she has oversight over all facets of the winemaking and significant input into vineyard care and replanting strategies as this renowned Napa winery undergoes a renewal after having been recently acquired by Boisset Family Estates. Stephanie’s decade-plus career is one of contemporizing the winemaking styles for well-known and well-regarded wineries in the Napa Valley, including Far Niente and Hess Collection. Her appointment as Director of Winemaking

at Raymond continues the trajectory of her career to date, having been hired with the expressed goal “to make every grape farmed on our estate vineyards in Rutherford and St. Helena be worthy of Generations.”

Her philosophy as a winemaker is a discreet approach, with as little alteration as possible to what has come from the vineyards, which allows for a balancing of the components in the wine: “I have a minimalist philosophy. The best wine starts in the vineyard, not in the winery. Everything that I do in the winery is to support and lift the fruit, not hide it or overwhelm it.” Stephanie’s business practices mirror that of philosophy as a winemaker; she pointedly acknowledges that “when you have the support of the team, amazing things can happen.” This impressive sense of balance in wine and people is why she was selected to head the regeneration of Raymond’s wines.

The wines she loves to make are those she grew up with, those which are bigger but balanced: “My parents were wine and food aficionados long before it became popular, so I was able to drink wine at a young age with dinner if I wanted. Cabernet and Chardonnay were my first wines, and I’ve always loved them.” Her goal every day since becoming a winemaker has been to try to put that same experience into the wines she produces. As with most winemakers, it really is others’ enjoyment of the wines which matters most to her. As she says, “Every glass of wine is a reflection of myself and our team. I put my heart and soul into every wine produced and take it very personally if people enjoy or don’t enjoy the wine. I want people to love the wine as much as I loved making it.”

And that really is the essence of what Stephanie Putnam is doing for Raymond Vineyards and Cellar. She says it best when she recognizes that the current transformation is simply amplifying what the vineyard and winery have been doing for forty years, that her role is to see where improvement can be made without disturbing what is already working well. With Raymond’s vineyards and wines, she avows that the key to success is to “look at the little nuances, the details of what makes a great wine, and by understanding how everything inter-relates, see how best to simply improve what is already there.” If early signs are indications of success, Raymond Vineyards and Cellar is well on its way to successful transformation under Stephanie Putnam’s careful and knowledgeable guidance. Bravo!

Raymond Vineyards and Cellar is located at 849 Zinfandel Lane (on the south side of town, visible from Highway 29), St. Helena. Check the web at [RaymondVineyards.com](http://RaymondVineyards.com).