

One of the Oldest Family Owned Wineries in Napa Valley Celebrates Release of Female Winemaker's Fingerprint

by Matthew Kaner- March 8, 2024



Larkmead is proud to release the first wines crafted solely by winemaker Avery Heelan.

[Larkmead Vineyards](#) has a long tradition of excellence in the Napa Valley—specifically Calistoga—since it was established in 1895. The property was built as a retreat for San Francisco socialite Lillie 'Firebelle Lil' Hitchcock Coit, and it grew into a 115-acre site that expands the Napa valley floor from Highway 29 to the Silverado Trail. Found on Larkmead Lane, the estate is nestled in-between the towns of St. Helena and Calistoga, with the Mayacamas and Vaca mountain ranges providing a dramatic landscape and picturesque backdrop for guests.

Known for producing 100% estate-grown wines, there was a change at the winemaker position in 2021 when Dan Petroski (winemaker since 2013, founder of [Massican](#)) passed the torch to current winemaker Avery Heelan, who had been working alongside Petroski since she was hired in 2019. Avery worked passionately but patiently the last 3 years as she was the custodian of wines forged by her predecessor. We now mark the release of wines crafted solely by Heelan: [2021 Larkmead Cabernet Sauvignon](#) & [2021 Larkmead 'Firebelle'](#), dropping to the public on March 13th.

I had the chance to interview Avery Heelan ahead of International Women's Day about taking over the legacy winemaker position at Larkmead Vineyards:

MK: How did the legacy of becoming the winemaker at a winery first established in 1895 find its way into your decisions?

AH: *Becoming the winemaker at Larkmead Vineyards, a winery with such a rich legacy, is both an honor and a responsibility that weighs heavily on every decision I make. The history and tradition of this esteemed estate serve as a guiding light, reminding me of the craftsmanship and dedication that have been passed down through generations of winemakers before me. Every decision I make is influenced by a deep respect for our vineyard's heritage and a commitment to upholding its legacy of excellence. Through precise winemaking techniques and preservation of our unique vineyard terroir, I strive to honor the past while embracing innovation for the future of our wines and community.*

MK: Can you describe the feeling of finally getting to release the wines you made three years into your tenure as winemaker at Larkmead?

AH: *Releasing the first wines that I've crafted as head winemaker at Larkmead is an incredibly fulfilling moment. It's a culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and a deep connection to the land and vines. Each bottle represents not only the skill and expertise I've honed over the years but also the unique character and terroir of our historic estate vineyard. There's a sense of pride and excitement in sharing these wines with the world, knowing that they carry the essence of our vineyard and the passion that goes into every step of the winemaking process. It's a moment of celebration.*

MK: Are there any new wines or concepts you are working on for future releases at Larkmead?

AH: *Absolutely! At Larkmead, we are always striving to push the boundaries of winemaking while staying true to our heritage and showcasing our distinct terroir. Currently, we are experimenting in the cellar with different grape varieties from our research block to see how we might be able to utilize them in the future. From our single varietal expressions to our innovative blends, we're constantly challenging ourselves to evolve, ensuring that each new release embodies the essence of Larkmead while still offering something fresh and exciting for loyal club members and wine enthusiasts alike.*

Avery's Statement on the 2021 growing season + vintage:

The 2021 vintage delivered a crop with great intensity and concentration. The plush, coating tannins are balanced by our vineyard's signature mineral brightness, creating elegant tension across the midpalate, compelling you to take a second sip.



Avery's Statement on the 2021 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon: With dense structure and complexity, this wine continues to open and expand in the glass for hours, indicating excellent cellar potential. If enjoying upon release, the 2021 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon is best served at cellar temperature after decanting for an hour or two. The 2021 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon is a beautiful expression of the potential of Cabernet Sauvignon on our vineyard, showcasing a variety of soil types and clonal selections across the entire 115-acre property. The beautiful, deep, and vibrant violet-ruby color in the glass hints at the richness and depth of this Cabernet Sauvignon. When first opened, aromas of violets, mocha, and dark blue fruits envelop the nose. With time, the wine continues to evolve, as the bramble berry notes expand and make way for exotic spices and vanilla. These flavors are balanced by notes of juniper, cedar, and winter pine forest.

Avery's Statement on the 2021 Firebelle Estate Red Blend: Historically, our Firebelle Estate Red Blend has been a marriage of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. This vintage, we are excited to include Cabernet Franc, which brings the varietal's signature vibrant ruby color, bramble berry notes, and herbal freshness to the blend. In the glass, one is first greeted by beautiful notes of crushed rose petals, morello cherries, and blackberries. The expansive bouquet builds with notes of white pepper, cedar, and mulled raspberries with beautiful, perfumed winter spices. The palate is just as compelling as the nose, with a dense, yet supple core matched by its weighted texture that glides across the palate; it lingers long after the final sip. Each of the varietals in the blend contribute to its allure. The wine is generous and complex, and the resonance of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, heightened by Cabernet Franc, creates a blend that is even greater than the sum of the parts. The 2021 Firebelle Estate Red Blend is incredibly food friendly and very approachable upon release but can be cellared for 10 or more years. If enjoying now, decant for 1-2 hours before serving.

The 2021 Firebelle Estate Red Blend and 2021 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon will be available for the public to purchase on March 13, 2024, on larkmead.com and in the tasting room. The 2021 Estate Solari Cabernet Sauvignon will be available for the public to purchase, online and in the tasting room, in early October 2024.

