

WINE ENTHUSIAST

6 QUESTIONS FOR A MALIBU WINEMAKER



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When Béatrice Cointreau—granddaughter of the founder of Rémy Martin and noted wine expert—beat cancer, she hadn’t thought about the next step in her career. She moved to Los Angeles to live near her sons, discovering Malibu’s Provence-like terroir. She began planting grapes, as other vintners fought for Malibu’s recognition as an American Viticultural Area (AVA) in 2014. More recently, the Malibu AVA has made headlines as Los Angeles County supervisors first completely banned new vine plantings and then lessened the restrictions in late July. Cointreau’s first release of three AVA-designated Admirable Family Vineyards wines—blends of Viognier and Chardonnay; Syrah, Petite Sirah and Viognier; and Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot—hits the market this fall.

When did you discover your love for wine?
The first glass I had was Port wine that I remember of. My father was smoking cigars. It was a very chocolaty type of nose and I loved it.

Why Malibu?

When they told me after two and a half years that I was in remission for the first time, I didn’t know what I wanted to do anymore. The only thing I knew was that I didn’t want to be away from my children. So I decided to move here...And then I found Malibu and I thought, “Malibu is really about 40 miles from downtown. It’s really comfortable and it’s a significant marketing name. I will invest for the children.”

How is the terroir expressed in the wines?

It’s very powerful and flavorful and I thought it was very interesting. My aim has been to maintain these white, flowery fragrances that you get from the Viognier, so to make sure that it wasn’t overpowered by the sun and the soil. That’s why I added four percent of the Chardonnay, which is naturally more acidic.

You’ve compared Malibu to Provence. What are the similarities?

I think the soils are close. The climate is very close. The native plants are similar.

What’s the acreage?

So far we have 5.5 [acres], which is very small compared to what I used to do. I want to do a boutique wine. My grandfather used to say, “You have to be rich to make wine. Don’t try to earn money anyway.” I always say, “If I don’t sell it, I’ll drink it.”

Did you help to get the AVA established?

I was in the backseat. You have some people...who had been pushing for a long time. I do believe in teamwork and I told them that if I could do anything to [drum] up awareness about [the] AVA I will, and I will internationally. That’s the reason why I am sent to export our wine. We decided that in any tasting nowadays... we should have a wine—whoever it is—from Malibu AVA to be there as a testimony.

—Christina Pellegrini