

Matthiasson

2012 Napa Valley Chardonnay, Napa Valley, California

Viticulturist Helping Foster a Movement Toward Low-Alcohol California Wines



For Matthiasson proprietors Steve and Jill Klein Matthiasson, owning a winery was at its essence a personal endeavor. “We’ve always, since day one, focused on making wines that we want to drink and we feel proud of,” said Steve. “We make to our palate and our sense of what we want to do. I really want to stress that because I want people who are thinking about starting in the wine business to make wines they want. Get away from this idea of making wines to satisfy some expectation out there, the critics or markets or what have you. Then we’ll have a richer community of eccentric winemakers. We’re getting there. It’s really exciting right now.”

Matthiasson’s style is born of his history in the vineyards. He began as a consultant with Four Seasons Ag Consulting then moved to Premier Viticulture Services, a company he co-founded in 2002 and where he still works today. His focus has been on sustainable agriculture from the beginning. The same can be said for his wife, Jill, who began her career at the nonprofit Community Alliance for Family Farmers and today is on the Napa Farmer’s Market Board.

Among Steve's first duties at Four Seasons Ag Consulting was developing and implementing what is now known as the Lodi Rules for Sustainable Winegrowing. The experience gave him deep insight into the California wine industry.

When he began making his own wines in 2003, he centered on the styles of wine that he felt were right as a vineyard manager. He said that being out tasting the fruit among the vines and judging the grapes' readiness is different than what a winemaker wants. He believes that the fresh, fruit-driven components have faded by the time most winemakers are interested in picking because they are looking for tannins and textural components.

"The key thing with our wine is that my whole career has been in the vineyards," Steve said. "I got started just in time to witness the big shifts in style, from the early 1990s to the late 1990s to the early 2000s. I witnessed it from the vineyard side. Most grape growers weren't very happy about hang times getting extended longer and longer. They started to feel like they were losing control, and they had no idea what the winemakers were thinking anymore. They were feeling like it's not representing their terroir because the fruits are over-ripe. You can argue lots of sides to that, but that's how growers felt during that transition. That's how I felt, so with our own wine, we were going to pick it when we thought it was ripe as a vineyard person. That's a lot earlier."