

## Amista Vineyards

NV Sparkling Grenache, Dry Creek Valley, CA

### Touting the Joys of Celebrating Non-Occasions with Bubbles

Sparkling wine isn't just for celebrations anymore.

That's not to say we shouldn't be drinking sparkling on a momentous occasion or for holidays—if you ask **Vicky Farrow** and **Ashley Herzberg**, we should be drinking it every day of the year. Maybe they're a little biased—they're in charge of the sparkling wine program at **Amista Vineyards**, tucked away along Sonoma County's famed Dry Creek Road—but it does sound like they're onto something big.



Though they produce a number of still wines made with some of the best grape varieties the Dry Creek Valley has to offer, Amista has made a name for themselves among locals for their sparkling wines.

When **Michael** and Vicky Farrow first purchased 20 acres planted to Chardonnay in the Dry Creek Valley back in 1999, sparkling wine was not at the top of their minds. They replanted 8 acres to Syrah, but it wasn't until 2008 that they made their first sparkling wine from the variety, thanks to a request from the consulting winemaker at the time.

Thanks to this "experiment," Amista devoted a barrel of 2007 and 2008 Rosé of Syrah and turned it into a sparkler. This flagship sparkling was just the start of a decade of experimentation with other varieties and new methods.

A few years later, Ashley Herzberg joined the team as winemaker. She and Farrow share the same passion for sparkling, but it wasn't in her training. Herzberg earned a degree in chemical engineering with the intent to pursue medical school. It only took one year as a lab manager for **Owl Ridge Wine Services** for her to fall in love with wine, and she spent some time with **Mauritson Wines** learning more. When the Farrow's hired and approached her about sparkling wine, she was up to the task anyway.

"It is a challenge in a completely different way than making still wines. And using the different varieties, getting the right color...I mean I kind of joked about it, like, 'Oh that's not winemaking,' but it really is. It is an important part of it, dialing it in and knowing how much skin contact it needs in that vintage. It's been fun and challenging on a whole different level and I like that. I feel like I am constantly learning and trying to evolve, and Mike and Vicky have been so supportive. Especially if it's bubbles—then Vicky's in."

Since Herzberg joined in 2011, Amista has launched a Blanc de Blanc from the Chardonnay

grapes on the property and in 2015 released *Wine Business Monthly's* favorite bubbly offering: Sparkling Grenache, made from 1 acre of grapes budded over Syrah in 2011. In the last two years, Amista Vineyards has launched *Fusión*, a sparkling cuvée and a vintage Blanc de Blanc.

They aren't alone in their love for sparkling; **Nielsen** reports have shown strong gains for all sparkling sales—Prosecco, Cava and Champagne—over the last few years. In the 52 weeks ending Dec. 2, 2017, total sparkling wine sales value was up 5 percent in Niel-

sen-tracked off-premise sales—equating to more than \$638.5 million in sales. Once relegated to the New Year's Eve or celebratory glass, sparkling wine has made a comeback, with national publications picking up stories about its food-friendliness, mixing potential and easy drinking.

Amista Vineyards is doing its part to spread the word that sparkling can be an everyday drink.



"We're trying to show people that sparkling wines go really well with spicy foods—a lot of foods that are harder to pair, like Thai foods, Indian foods, things like that," said Farrow. For the **Wine Road's Annual Wine and Food Affair**, she paired the sparkling Syrah with a lamb curry. In the past, there have also been popcorn pairings, and she's now working on a chocolate pairing.

And with a popular bubbles-only wine club offering, Amista has certainly cemented itself as a quality producer of sparkling wines in Sonoma County.

