

FORTUNATI VINEYARDS

Well-Rounded, Multi-Layered, Food-Friendly Wines

BY LAYNE RANDOLPH



Photo by Joel Weiss



Photo by Sara Sanger

Just a mile north of downtown Napa in the Oak Knoll District AVA, Fortunati Vineyards stands on ten-plus acres of prime Napa Valley soil. And behind the winery’s “barn,” visitors are treated to a truly spectacular sight—A to-die-for view looking up the valley at Mount Saint Helena, a part of the Mayacamas mountain range and the highest point in Napa Valley. This panorama is one of the benefits of being at the widest part of the valley floor in the southernmost part of Napa Valley.

But that is far from all that Fortunati has to offer. Beyond a stunning valley floor view, an outdoor tasting area they call “the little plaza” provides small, intimate visitor spaces surrounded by vineyards and gardens. Wine enthusiasts enjoy private tastings of several highly acclaimed wines: two white varieties, two medium-bodied red varieties, and two heavier red varieties, followed by a port-style dessert wine. On occasion, Fortunati hosts farm-to-table, curated lunches, and small private dinners in the plaza.

From the expansive views of vineyards and Mount St. Helena to the wide selection of wine varieties they offer, owners Gary and Ellen Luchtel make the most of their Oak Knoll District property. “Oak Knoll is the most diverse growing region

in Napa Valley,” Ellen explained. “We capitalize on that with our diverse wine selection including Reserve and Signature Cabernet Sauvignon, Estate Syrah, a Bordeaux blend, Estate Malbec, Zinfandel, Estate Rosé, Chardonnay, Estate Viognier, and Pinot Noir.” These small-production wines—most are made in lots of only 150 to 350 cases each—are only available at the estate and directly from the winery, affording Fortunati the ability to offer them at exceptional values.

Yet, winemaking and grape-growing are at the heart of Fortunati’s success. Gary, also Fortunati’s winemaker, explained his winemaking philosophy. “One of our most revered goals is to grow the best grapes possible. I press them somewhat earlier in the fermentation cycle depending upon the taste and tannin level. This helps in making a more rounded wine with multi-layers. They will age well, yet they can be enjoyed today. We aim for well-balanced, food-friendly wines.”

When it comes to growing premium grapes, Gary is dedicated and hands-on. “If vines begin to weaken, we replace them immediately instead of waiting until they are completely lifeless and non-producing to be replanted. This way, our vineyard contains grapevines of all different ages and maturity which provides steadier, more even quality control. When I do source grapes from other premium growers, I always buy the same rows/blocks every year for wine consistency from vintage to vintage.”

Having made wine professionally since 1999, Gary has acquired a wealth of experience on his own through experimentation, and he has also gained valuable tips and insight from fellow Napa Valley winemakers. “No matter where you are, every room you walk into in Napa, there is someone better or smarter to from whom to learn something. And Napa winemakers are open to sharing information, so you can ask questions, listen, absorb, comment, and determine what works best for your personal vision and wine style.”

Fortunati

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