

A Wine's Free Spirit

local expert



THE EXPERT:
Mark Luna

HIS EXPERTISE:
Wine

Mark Luna is a Portfolio Rep for Roanoke Valley Wine Company. He holds a WSET Level 3 (Advanced) certification through the Wine & Spirits Education Trust. He is also a certified Italian Wine Scholar, graduating with Honors, through the prestigious Wine Scholar Guild. Both certifications are industry recognized post-nominal accreditations. Through and beyond his work for RVWC, Mark writes, teaches and guest-speaks about wine in a variety of both industry and privately held events. He lives in Warrenton with his family. Mark can be reached at info@winespique.com.



BY MARK LUNA

It is certainly true that in the old-world traditions of wine there are cellars and vineyards that have been carefully maintained and operated for multiple generations, usually stemming from a family (or two) with extraordinary wine lineage. You'll also find this, albeit to a lesser extent, in wine's new world. Along with that are

what I call wine's lone souls; vintners and vigneron whose callings to the wine world came not from a family business necessarily, but from a happenstance, oftentimes based on a singular event, or bottle, that spoke to them only and directly, as if the wine knew who it was talking to.

Laely Heron is one such soul, and Heron Wines are the valves to her wine heart.

By age 10, Heron had already lived in 12

states, courtesy of her father's career as a mining engineer. The years that followed would afford her (and her family) more global living and traveling experiences, tallying all 50 states and even 6 continents. A return to the states found her at the University of Colorado, only to return to Europe her Junior year, studying in France. It was there that her young love for wine took permanent hold, as she enrolled in



TOP: An admitted Francophile, Laely honors the centuries old tradition of producing an acidity-driven, yet still mouth-filling chardonnay. LEFT: Wine writer and expert Mark Luna with Laely Heron at a tasting of Heron Wines at Red's Table in Reston.

the Institute of Enology, in Bordeaux...she would never look back.

Moving to and from both San Francisco and Denmark for various wine industry positions, including becoming the first American employee of the Australian giant Lindeman's, would set the stage for Heron Wines, launched from San Francisco in 1995. For Laely, in her winemaking philosophy and the wines themselves, what remains firm is that both be direct reflections of her spirit – pioneering, adventurous, daring, smart, adaptable, thrill seeking, irreverent, non-traditional and international.

It was my good fortune to sell Heron's wines during my retail days in Nashville and it remains my good fortune to rep them today in Northern Virginia. There's a gypsy spirit to these offerings, all the while capturing time-honored traditions of ever-classic varieties.

No singular white wine grape epitomizes the California experience better than chardonnay, and the **Heron Chardonnay Mendocino County 2018** offers the proof of truth. An intensely fragrant wine, with nectarine, tangerine blossom and subtle notes of pear, this Potter Valley classic will enthrall the palate with golden apple, stony peach accents and river rock. The vines

that produce this elegant wine average 16 years of age, bridging the gap between youthfulness and maturity. This wine is vinified in stainless steel, sees no malo-lactic fermentation nor oak, yet has extended contact on its lees. An admitted Francophile, Laely honors the centuries old tradition of producing an acidity-driven, yet still mouth-filling chardonnay. And as it does in France, chardonnay from California remains that rare grape that can cover both grounds at once. Priced around \$18, it's beyond a great value.

Equally inspired by Burgundian ancestry, the **2018 Heron Pinot Noir California** plays red wine brother to its chardonnay sister. Sourced from the diverse lands of Monterey, western Paso Robles and the famed Russian River, this 100% PN is an elegant composition of sustainably farmed grapes from several of California's cool, marine influenced microclimates. An artful combination of both Wadenswill and Pommard clones offers up a palate wheel's worth of fruit and earth, with crushed raspberries, violets and warm baking spices complementing earthy, mineral notes. Pomegranate, cherry and cranberry drive the palate to a finish line that is fresh and seductive, offering hints of exotic spice. The complexity comes from the blending

of sites and terroir, unifying the one single grape, pinot noir. Twelve months well spent in French oak barrels completes the process before bottle ageing. It's the best \$20 California pinot noir I recommend.

While on your way to cabernet, it's always good to hit the offramp for a relaxed visit with merlot, truly one of the smoothest red grapes around. Laely delivers strong here with her **2017 Heron Merlot California**. Yet another Heron bottling that is smartly sourced from the best fields -- this time Rutherford, Pope Valley and again, Mendocino – this multi-appellation beauty offers soft tannin, dark plum color and intense black and red fruit. Ripe black cherry, fragrant lavender and violet, along with black olive, rich dark chocolate, exotic spices and wild herbs all announce themselves throughout the sniffing and tasting experience, and not necessarily in that order. There's a great arc to this wine, supple at the beginning and silky at the end. Also aged for 12 months in French oak, this wine holds a very special place in Laely's heart, as merlot was the very first wine she released when she started Heron Wines twenty-five years ago, and was the first grape she learned to vinify when studying winemaking back at the Institute of Enology...there's something to be said about staying true to your first love, at least in some form or fashion.

And finally, Laely holds nothing back with her **2018 Heron Cabernet Sauvignon California**. Out of the gate, it flies into its own orbit, with spice, dried herb, deep plum, and dark cherry aromatics. A hint of warm vanilla speaks to its hint of oak. Ripe and lush black fruit, with candied red fruit and mocha reflect the cabernet's cool climate leanings, with 50% Mendocino, 30% Pope Valley, and 20% Clarksburg fruit making up its composition. Color, finesse, structure and weight are all present, in a uniformed balance that can't be beat. As Laely will tell you, "Cabernet Sauvignon is a balancing act, with the fruit, tannins, alcohol and freshness in harmony. This is not a 'huge' wine, as my goal with cabernet sauvignon is always elegance and balance, respecting the varietal for what it truly brings to the table." It's a wine worth having at your table, especially for the \$20 price tag.

So, in saying goodbye to the confines of winter, treat yourself to a wine-journey to the sunny west coast and experience the wines of Laely Heron...it'll be a trip well worth it.

Until next time, Happy Vino'ing! ❖