



FORTUNATI

A Little Bit of Luck and a Lot of Passion

• BY FRAN MILLER | PHOTOS BY ALLAN ROSENBERG PHOTOGRAPHY

The name is apropos. Winemaker Gary Luchtel has long been known as ‘Lucky,’ a nickname derived from his surname and given to him while working in the commercial real estate business in San Francisco. Add a little Italian heritage (wife Ellen, a first generation American, is half Italian and half German), mixed with serendipitous good fortune, and it was easy for the duo to name their Oak Knoll District vineyards. Fortunati (‘lucky’ or ‘fortunate’ in Italian) is their ‘hobby gone wild.’

“We started to explore and appreciate wine together during college in the SF Bay Area,” said Ellen. “While dating, Gary often played a game where he’d disguise a wine in a brown paper bag, pour me a glass, and have me try to guess the varietal!” Their wine adventure continued during summers as they traveled and wine tasted through European backroads on a student budget. Wine eventually became a serious hobby that included home winemaking experiments. By 1999, Gary was making wine commercially in Napa Valley.

The two eventually moved on from their lives in San Francisco to pursue fulltime



their dream of hand crafting outstanding wines. In 2003, they found their slice of Napa paradise and planted their own vineyards. By 2008, Fortunati Vineyards became a commercially bonded winery, and they soon began producing their small lot wines at a nearby facility hosting custom crush clients. In 2012, a wine club was created, and within a mere four years, was fully prescribed. Today, as their wine-themed journey continues, they will soon be proud to showcase their brand-new, on property, boutique winery where wine enthusiasts can, by prior appointment, sample their diverse varietals.

Fortunati, as Ellen says, is ‘tiny.’ Typically producing anywhere from 100 to 250 cases of each wine, they are unusual in the number of varietals they create. “We produce three whites, an estate rosé, an estate viognier, and we source our chardonnay close by,” said Ellen. “We have an estate syrah, an estate malbec and Bordeaux blend with estate cab franc, estate malbec and cab sauvignon. We source zinfandel from Mt. Veeder AVA, and pinot noir from Sta Rita Hills. Our signature and reserve cabernet

sauvignon is acquired from a few different, high-end, ultra-premium Napa Valley vineyards. And finally, we handcraft an estate port-style dessert wine.”

Fortunati wines are only available direct to consumer. “We cherish the opportunity to offer wine enthusiasts across the country exceptional fine wine at an exceptional price,” said Ellen. “Our subscription program is unusual in that members have the opportunity to customize their wine shipments by selecting from very small lots of many different award-winning wines.”

Ellen acknowledges that Fortunati’s success is the result of complementary skills shared with Gary. He walks the vineyards, inspecting each vine, attentively creating each vintage, while Ellen loves her sales and marketing role.

“Our wine life is an adventure,” says Ellen. “It’s a very organic process; we love the connection to the earth, and we love that it’s a product that we grow and make ourselves. We are tickled pink (try our whole cluster pressed Rosé) to be able to follow our passion, bottle it and share with family, friends and wine aficionados alike!”



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NAPA VALLEY

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