

FROM THE GRAPES TO THE BARREL, THESE WINEMAKERS SET THE PACE

Starr Shines With Bordeaux

by Kim Severson
November 1, 2000

There was little doubt Pam Starr would end up doing something that involved taste and smell.

As a child, she assembled a taste panel to judge the spices in her mother's kitchen cabinet. During her years at the University of California at Davis, she worked as a flavor technician for a spice company.

But it took a few more years before she would connect a winemaking career with her fascination with flavor profiles. In fact, most of the wine she tasted in college was the sort of mediocre stuff affordable on a college student's budget. Starr, who was headed to dental school, knew there had to be more to wine than that and took a summer job at Sonoma-Cutrer.

"I finally tasted wines that excited me," she says. Even though her job was turning and stacking barrels, she was hooked. Starr dropped her dental school plans and concentrated on wine.

Much of her early experience in the wine industry involved "slumming in the cellars," which gave her the experience she needed to run her own winery. Some additional schooling and a series of jobs, notably a long stint with what would eventually become the Chalone group and winemaker for Spottswoode, cemented her expertise.

Now Starr is partners with San Francisco businessman and St. Helena grape-grower Charles Crocker and makes wine under the Crocker & Starr label. She also is consulting winemaker for Adastra and makes estate Cabernet Sauvignon for Brunno Ristow under the label that bears his name.

Starr is known for her attention to site-specific wines and her exciting Bordeaux-style blends. Her passion is for terroir -- she wants drinkers to taste the earth and the sun in a wine and connect it to a particular place.

"When you do get it right, it's very exciting," she says.

Wine she would serve to an important guest: The 1997 and the soon-to-be-released 1998 Stone Place Cuvee.