



Remaining Relevant



A selection of Windsor Wines

An Interview with Joy Finn, Senior Marketing Manager, Vintage Wine Estates

EDITORS' NOTE Joy Finn has been in the hospitality and beverage business for over a decade, with experience at some of the most well-established wineries in Northern California. The Sonoma State University graduate has spent time in marketing, business development and event planning for wineries such as Kosta Browne and La Crema, each of which has informed her time as the Senior Marketing Manager at the rapidly growing Vintage Wine Estates.



Joy Finn

WINERY BRIEF Founded in 1959 in Tiburon, California by winemaker Rodney Strong, Windsor Vineyards (windsorvineyards.com) has been referred to as a pioneer in the direct-to-consumer wine business. It remains one of the largest direct-to-consumer wineries in the United States.

What is the history behind Windsor Wines?

Windsor Vineyards started out as a winery founded by Rodney Strong and has been around for 50 years. In the original tasting room, they would let customers put a special message on their bottles.

That was the start of the custom-label tradition with Windsor. It evolved over the years to a concierge wine country experience. We have wine experts on our team that help guide customers and clients. Some of our salespeople have been around for upwards of 30 years. We have a long-term tradition of hands-on customer service, and guide clients through our current vintages and new appellations – we have our first ever Columbia Valley Cab and Walla Walla Cab coming soon.

They also help clients with the personalization process. Over time, not only do we help our customers personalize their wine cellars, but we also help businesses customize promotional wines or gifts for clients.

We offer gift sets as well as customized olive oils and wine vinegars sourced locally from California.

What have been the keys to the strength and consistency of the business?

It's about remaining relevant. We are constantly working toward being top of mind for our customers. One of the things we've done is upgraded our label maker technology. It's a tool we use online that helps our customers customize their own labels. We have put a lot of time and effort into that, and we're still working on improving that experience.

Also, we're stepping up our customer service and finding new ways to learn more about our customers. Our sales team is not only working with their clients, but they're also working with new customers and new demographics to meet their needs.

We are looking for new places to source award-winning wines. Because Vintage Wine Estates has grown, we can source even better fruit. Nancy Walker, our head winemaker, just gets better with time.

When the industry is so crowded today with many new brands, is it challenging to tell your story?

It's incredibly difficult to tell our story when we don't have a brick-and-mortar tasting room. What Windsor has going for it as a brand is that we source our own wines and many of our competitors don't make their own wines. We have a unique and special product that has been around for a really long time, so that is one thing that helps our brand stand on its own and see longevity.

Additionally, the hands-on customer service and the hands-on artisanal quality of what we produce are important. Our bottles are hand-etched and labels are applied by a select laser graphics department with an attention to detail that we hold the monopoly on in this industry.

What is the vineyard's strongest varietal and how broad is the product offering?

The offerings are incredibly broad – we make everything from Moscato to White Zin, which are extremely popular with customers in the Midwest and back East. We ran out of Moscato over the holidays.

We also produce beautiful Napa Valley Oakville appellation Cabernets and Russian River Valley Pinot and Chardonnay.

It's difficult to say what the best wines from our portfolio are because it depends on what our customers like. We try to provide varieties that keep our wines fascinating and covetable. People want to cellar these wines and complete their wine libraries with them.

We try to produce a portfolio of wines that people want to hold onto, as well as everyday drinking wines.

People who create custom cellars or are giving wine as a gift want the option to give an unpretentious bottle of something nice. We try to provide the entire spectrum for our wine drinkers.

How has distribution evolved for the brand?

We don't sell our wines in bottle shops and our tasting room is wine experts that try to provide a wine country experience when they reach out to their customers over the phone. We also have our online store and it's where we can touch our customers.

Any direct to consumer winery would want to see themselves shipping to more states. The endgame is to get the wine to the customer in any way possible and to make it as easy as possible.

Because our parent company, Vintage Wine Estates, has that goal in mind, we have a special position where we can ship to these states. We won't be satisfied until we're able to ship to every state, but we're working towards that through whatever legal means we can.

How have you provided such a quality product at a manageable price?

We have long-standing relationships with growers and our winemaker has been in the industry for many years. She knows where to source wines from the best areas. She knows what varietals are good from which regions and she can make wines in a consistent way.

Was the wine industry something you were attracted to early on?

I grew up in this area during my school years living in Sonoma County – for some people, it just calls to them. It is a romantic industry. There is something to be said about working for an industry that not only has agriculture that is driven by Mother Nature but wine, which is a luxury item. It's something that we give to people that enriches their lives, be it something they buy for themselves or something they buy for someone else.

At day's end, things can get busy, but we're selling wine so it shouldn't be that tough.

What are your key priorities when it comes to continuing to grow Windsor?

The top priority is improving our customer experience. We can never stop looking to improve the customer experience. We never reach the summit on that.

We want to constantly improve our online bottle shop and our customer service and how we help our customers choose their wines. We also want to improve how we get our wines to our customers and how we communicate with them. ●