

Bink Wines: “Dream Big, Act Now....”

Wine Notes by Heidi Cusick Dickerson

Two miles up the mountain northwest of Yorkville a magnificent Douglas fir tree shades a couple of lawn chairs. Hawk’s Butte rises behind. Seven acres of merlot and syrah vines green the golden hillside and encircle a pond below. The fir trees are nesting grounds for red tail hawks. This one is a granary tree. Thousands of holes run up the bark storing acorns for the birds’ and other critters’ winter feasting.

The pristine setting is the home of Bink Wines where the motto “Dream Big, Act Now, Love Life” written on the home page of their website is the *modus operandi* of owners Deborah Schatzlein, winemaker, and Cindy Paulson, winegrower.

Schatzlein and Paulson both worked for an environmental engineering company in Colorado for more than 20 years. But they had this dream to move back to California and do something agricultural. Paulson is a fourth generation Californian who grew up in Washington when her dad moved the family and farmed table grapes, peaches, and asparagus.

They bought a 40 acre property and named it Hawks Butte vineyard in Yorkville Highlands in 1998. In 2001, Schatzlein left her job and Paulson transferred to the Walnut Creek headquarters of her company.

For now, Paulson is the one who has the day job “so we can buy things like French oak barrels,” she laughs. Paulson manages both her full time job and taking care of their vineyard along with fifteen fruit trees. “We have a good vineyard manager,” she adds. Tyler Click, viticulturist with Redwood Empire Vineyard Management, works with Paulson,

Gazing out at the view and vineyard, Schatzlein describes her transition from environmental engineer to winemaker. “It was surreal in hindsight,” she says, her silvery pony tail blowing in the breeze from the back of her baseball cap. “Stepping out of a career was really stressful. Doing something totally different meant I started at the bottom, in my 40s.”

She immersed herself in winemaking. She took classes at U.C. Davis. She apprenticed with respected winemaker Jill Davis at the 200,000 case William Hill winery for a year, where she did everything from lab work to harvest and cellar jobs. She then spent three years at Cliff Lede Vineyard, a small winery in Yountville. The transition wasn’t always easy. Going to work

at the crack of dawn and working until the stars were out, she would be shoveling out tanks in the middle of the day and have to say to herself, “I’m a big strong woman and I can do this!”

Both Paulson and Schatzlein connect their environmental expertise with their winegrowing and winemaking. “We think carefully about how we farm, it has to be sustainable,” says Paulson, noting that their steep sloping site is challenging. “Farming is science and art, but you also have to have. . . a sense of humor,” she says.

With degrees in chemistry and biology, Schatzlein knows her way around a lab, where acid levels, yeast count and alcohol are measured, but you don’t just depend on a number for good wine. You have to make sure there are no bad microbes, she says. The rest is sensory evaluation. “I have to use my nose and my intuition.”

Now she feels they are starting to see the light. Bink is receiving accolades and awards. “We have begun to make a name for ourselves with pinot noir,” she tells me. They purchase pinot noir grapes from Bill and Suki Weir, also in Yorkville Highlands. Schatzlein likes their dark black pinot noir with the full body because it “fits in with the way we make red wine.” It won a silver medal at the San Francisco Chronicle competition.

Wondering about the name Bink? Black ink is a nickname for syrah, a varietal from their vineyard that Bink wants to showcase. Coincidentally they had feisty, inky black Manx cat named Bink. The original Bink label featured a black cat in the middle of a gold sparkling sun, but is being replaced with a more streamlined label fitting the sophistication and elegance of Bink’s wines.

Bink’s 2003 syrah was chosen as one of the top 100 wines by *California Wine News* magazine. Their 2004 syrah received a gold medal at the Mendocino County Fair Wine Competition. They also make an award-winning sauvignon blanc, “the red wine drinkers’ white wine,” from grapes grown at Randle Hill, also in Yorkville Highlands appellation.

Schatzlein makes about 1200 cases of Bink wines at Bin to Bottle, a custom crush facility in Napa. She and Paulson live in Benicia during the week, which is roughly half way between the vineyard and Paulson’s workplace. Currently, they have a trailer at Hawks Butte and plan to build a home here. They are off the grid and use solar and gravity to get the vines watered.

Bink wines are found at some of the best restaurants in the Bay Area, at Sip!Mendocino in Hopland and on their website, which includes a gallery of photos of Hawks Butte, technical information on the wines, and more about their winemaking. Living their motto, Schatzlein gazes

out at their magical place and sighs, “It’s been quite a ride, a lot of hard work.” Paulson agrees saying, “it’s worth it.”

*Tasting Notes: Bink’s 2004 Weir Vineyard Pinot Noir, with its deep color, black cherry aroma, and pleasing balance of oak and fruit, was a perfect partner with rare slices of grilled tri-tip and tossed greens with crumbled Roquefort.*

*For more information on Bink Wines, contact [www.Binkwines.com](http://www.Binkwines.com) To learn more about what to do and where to stay in Mendocino County, visit [www.gomendo.com](http://www.gomendo.com). For more information about Mendocino County wineries and wine regions, visit [www.mendowine.com](http://www.mendowine.com).*