

# Weekly Interview: Bibiana Gonzalez Rave

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Each week, as regular readers know, we pose a series of questions to a winemaker. This week, we're featuring Bibiana Gonzalez Rave, the winemaker at Wayfarer, the newly launched project from Pahlmeyer on the West Sonoma Coast.

Bibiana's first foray into wine took place when she was just 16; she put grapes in a 5-gallon jar and tried to make wine in her bedroom closet in Columbia. The effort failed, but two years later, she headed to France to learn how to make wine.

Bibiana's next few years were spent studying — first in Angoulême, where she earned a technical degree in viticulture and enology, and later at the University of Bordeaux, where she received a diploma of oenology.

Her experience landed her positions in Bordeaux (at Château Haut-Brion), Burgundy, Côte-Rôtie, Bordeaux, and Alsace. Once she came to California, though, she decided to stay. On the Central Coast, she worked at Au Bon Climat and Qupe. In Sonoma, she worked at Peay Vineyards and later Lynmar.

She joined Jayson Pahlmeyer in 2012 to help launch Wayfarer. The wines have been getting rave reviews thus far, and I can't wait to try them.

Check out our interview with Bibiana below the fold.

## What is your general winemaking philosophy?

I always approach making wine from the vineyard cycle. Being both the vineyard manager and the winemaker for Wayfarer allows me to fine-tune each block to the specific characteristics of each of the clones, which already sets my mind on a specific winemaking process.

Each block at Wayfarer has a different rootstock, sun exposure, depth of soil, and clone that challenges us to adjust our decisions during the growing season at all times. As the grapes are maturing, the taste of the fruit correlated with all the analysis we do is fundamental to the picking decisions — and all of those inputs impact the decisions we make in the fermentation and winemaking process.



While making the wines, I am looking to express the best qualities of each clone. Then, I look to build complexity starting with the grapes themselves, and use the traditional winemaking tools from there. With Pinot Noir, we start by deciding if we leave any whole cluster or not and the process begins. I interfere as little as possible, focusing on temperature and oxygen management during the fermentation. Chardonnay will be all about the press program and the racking I personally do with the cellar crew to ensure I have the desired quality on the must before it becomes wine.

Nothing is systematic in my process of making wine, so it takes quite a lot of energy and emotional involvement throughout the different steps in the life of a wine.

**What's open in your kitchen right now?**

Plenty of great rosé from California, Doisy-Daëne Bordeaux Blanc 2007 and Stéphane Ogier's Côte-Rôtie Cuvee Lancement.

**Who are your favorite winemakers in history, through personal account, or their wines?**

Jean Philippe Mascleff from Château Haut Brion, Christophe Roumier from Domaine Roumier in Côte de Nuits, and Jean Marc Roulot from Domaine Roulot in Mersault.

**What new winemakers are you most excited about, and why?**

First, Jeff Pisoni. He is my husband, so I really get excited about his work! I'd add Benjamin Dagueneau from Didier Dagueneau in the Loire Valley and Stéphane Ogier from Domaine Michele and Stéphane Ogier to that list.

They are a new exciting generation of winemakers, who all had parents who were also mentors to them in the wine industry. They all grew up in between the vines and were smelling wine since they were able to walk into the cellars.

**How do you spend your days off?**

I rarely take a day off. It sounds bad and I sometimes complain about it, but the reality is that we are in a type of work that can take 100% of your time very easily — especially if you are passionate about it, which I am. However, sometimes even a day of work can feel like a day off. That is how much I love my job.

**What's the best wine you've ever tasted? The most interesting?**

Tough question. I cannot imagine too many people in the wine business being able to choose one single wine.

There are some wines that are remarkable that become unforgettable, like a 1993 DRC La Tâche, or Château Haut-Brion 2000, or Cuvée Belle Hélène from Domaine Michel et Stéphane Ogier 1997. From California, I will always remember a Diamond Creek 1979 that I tried in France long before I started working in California. It was a pretty spectacular Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley.

**What's the oldest bottle in your cellar? The most expensive?**

Oldest bottle in my cellar is a 1917 Pedro Ximenez. The most expensive would be Haut-Brion Blanc and Rouge. All these wines are still at my cellar in France. I didn't want to risk transporting them.

**If you had to pick one red and one white to drink for the next month with every dinner, what would you choose?**

For white, I would love to drink Domaine Vacheron Sancerre Cuvee Classic 2013. For rosé, I will say Luli 2013 (made by my husband) is a great pick for everyday drinking. For red, Côte-du-Rhône from Château de St. Cosme. I was blown away by the quality of the wine for the price — a true value that I can drink every day.

**What's your biggest challenge as a winemaker?**

To farm or to have access to the best fruit possible for each wine you make. An exceptional wine will always come from exceptional fruit, that's where all starts.

**What's your favorite wine region in the world — other than your own?**

Côte-Rôtie. The vineyards are planted in such a challenging geography that you really appreciate the wines when your hands have worked on those hills.

**Is beer ever better than wine?**

I really enjoy beer — and even stood in line for hours waiting for the truly incredible Pliny the Younger from Russian River Brewing! But still, you would not find me saying that beer is better than wine.

**What would people be surprised to know about you?**

Despite growing up in Colombia and not being around wine, I wanted to make wine since I was 14 years old, and actually attempted it in a bucket when I was 16! To this day, I still don't know what initially prompted my desire to make wine.

**If you weren't making wine for a living, what would you be doing?**

I don't know. Almost my entire life has been all about becoming a winemaker. I cannot think of any other work, but I imagine it would be something that requires art and science to meet for a perfect balance, maybe architecture.

**How do you define success?**

You are successful when you are happy with the final result of your work and when people want to be a part of it.