



The Hero of Her Own Story

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She thought she'd stay in France. After Château Haut-Brion, why think of being anyplace else? Wine, she felt, was in her core.

From the age of 14, she knew she wanted to be a winemaker. She could not not make wine. And interning at a First Growth château in Bordeaux? Not bad for a young woman from South America who, when she showed up at an agricultural school in France, couldn't even speak French.

But Bibiana González Rave is not your typical winemaker. Born and raised in Colombia by parents who never drank wine, she initially studied chemical

engineering. France, however, was where the winemaking action was. Along with Château Haut-Brion, La Mission Haut-Brion, and La Dominique in Bordeaux, she worked in Côte-Rôtie at Michel & Stéphane Ogier and Domaine Clusel-Roch, and in Burgundy at Domaine du Devevey.

Bibiana eventually moved to California (where the new action was). She worked at Au Bon Climat in the Santa Maria Valley, and then eventually became the head winemaker at Lynmar (Russian River Valley) and at



Wayfarer on the Sonoma Coast. In between all this, she met her husband Jeff Pisoni (of Pisoni Wines in the Santa Lucia Highlands), himself an accomplished winemaker.

I first came to know Bibiana, not in person, but through her pure, rich Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs under her own label Cattleya (cat LAY ah), named for the national flower of Columbia, an orchid. The first of her Pinots I drank was called The Belly of the Whale. Who names a wine for the belly of a whale, I thought? As it turns out, “belly of the whale,” is an allegory created by the late scholar and writer Joseph Campbell. The phrase refers to a hero’s death and rebirth, the point when one is separated from an old self and transformed as a changed person, and ready to continue their journey as someone “new.”

It made sense, that name. In some ways, it mirrored her own journey. Besides Cattleya, she also has another wine brand—Shared Notes—which she co-owns with her husband and with whom she now, finally, shares (wine) notes. Winemakers can be notoriously secretive.

Both the Cattleya wines (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah) and the Shared Notes wines (Sauvignon Blanc) have incredible purity.

When I think about purity and precision in wine, I always think about sound as a metaphor for flavor. If flavor WAS a sound, then pure, precise wines are like the sound of church bells in the mountains. Nothing diffuse. No static. Everything exact. Every molecule lined up on the same trajectory of intensity.

Bibiana came to my office recently, and we spent nearly four hours tasting her wines. We probably could have tasted through them in

SHARED NOTES
 2024 Les Peirres Qui Décident
 Russian River Valley

The name of the wine translates from French as The Stones That Decide. “Les Pierres” belongs to a group I call the “Super Sauvignons” —extraordinary California Sauvignons from great vineyards made by top winemakers. The Super Sauvignons are modeled on the best Sauvignon Blancs from the Loire and Bordeaux. Shared Notes “Les Pierrers” is a cyclone of deliciousness. It virtually springs out of the glass in a torrent of flavors reminiscent of limes, peaches, and white pepper. It’s mouthwateringly minerally and saline, with a freshness like a mountain stream.

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SHARED NOTES
 2024 Les Leçons des Maîtres
 Russian River Valley

French for “The Lessons of the Masters,” this wine is a Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon blend and comes straight out of the Haut-Brion Blanc playbook. Sauvignon (so crisp, so wild, so linear) is blended with Semillon (so full and lanolin-esque). It’s a yin/yang of flavor. This wine is simultaneously crisp and creamy, and beautifully integrated. Its slow arc of richness is captivating.

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2024 CATTLEYA
 CHARDONNAY
 Sonoma Coast

Great California Chardonnay is not buttery, not thick, not oaky, and not heavy. And neither is it thin, tinny, nor weedy. Instead, it's like this wine: a slow-moving wave of rich, elegant flavor. Cattleya's Chardonnay is woven through with subtle orange zest, sea salt, and apple tart flavors. The refinement is off-the-charts. Many California wineries make Chardonnay, but only a small handful make Chardonnay as good as this.

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2024 CATTLEYA
 THE GODDESS
 Sonoma Coast

The Goddess is not a reference to Bibiana, but rather a reference to the elegant wine that comes from this Sonoma Coast vineyard. Tasting it, I felt as though I was walking on the rocky cliffs above the cold Pacific coast with the smells of the sea on rocks and wild resinous chaparral. The Goddess is spicy, pure, vibrant, and very fresh tasting, all while being rich and long. Sensational.

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2024 CATTLEYA
 PINOT NOIR
 Sonoma Coast

The density of flavor in the Cattleya Pinot Noirs is remarkable—especially since great Pinot Noir must walk a tightrope between concentrated flavor on the one hand, but elegance on the other. This Pinot whirls out of the glass with rich, pure, blackberry and cranberry flavor riding on a wave of aerial lightness. There's something wild and primordial in here too, plus a white pepperiness that's kinetic. The precision and length are immaculate. It's the kind of Pinot you want to keep tasting and tasting and tasting. (The "big brother" of this Sonoma Coast Pinot is Cattleya's rich "Belly of the Whale" Pinot Noir, \$85—with loads of exotic spice, damp forest floor, and earth notes.

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