

In Napa, tradition and ingenuity are constantly engaged in a dance. These five professionals taking over longstanding properties are ready to roll.

# HISTORIC WINERIES THROUGH NEW EYES



## JAIMEE MOTLEY Winemaker, Stony Hill Vineyard

Motley was an aspiring painter from Maryland who came to San Francisco. She became enamored with wine while working at restaurant RN74 under Rajat Parr, who gave her the chance to taste Napa Cabernet Sauvignons from the 1960s and 1970s, which led her to journey up to the Napa Valley.

She first visited Stony Hill on Spring Mountain in 2011.

"I fell in love with the beautiful road up there, with the mysterious location," says Motley. "Tasting the wines, they resonated with me. You can see a real signature with Stony Hill, there's salinity and restraint, they showcase the vineyards."

Fred and Eleanor McCrea founded Stony Hill in 1943, planting Chardonnay in its volcanic soils and building a winery in 1951. Mike Chelini served as winemaker for 40 years, fermenting the wines in neutral oak with no malolactic fermentation.

In 2020, Motley was named winemaker after serving as assistant winemaker at Pax Wine Cellars and building her own brand, Jaimee Motley Wines.

"Being offered the position was a huge honor and intimidating at first; there are big shoes to fill," she says. "The biggest draw and one of my main tasks is rehabilitating a lot of this vineyard. The vines are aging, and there's erosion, there need to be replants and there are fallow parcels we inherited."

Motley says they've added on to existing varieties and introduced new varieties to Stony Hill and nearly doubled the amount of Cabernet Sauvignon.

"My first vintage, 2021, I realized how truly special Cabernet is on this mountain estate," she says. "It was planted at the top parcel, but we've added Cabernet throughout. It feels like I'm working with 10 different vineyards in one."

New to the property are Malbec, Petit Verdot and Gamay, with plans to produce a red blend. There are also five acres of Cabernet Franc spread across the property and a bit of Syrah.

"There are a lot of handwritten records, but I don't want to know all the details and I don't want to mimic," says Motley. "People will see that the wine that ends up in the bottle will not be a big departure. I want to keep the longevity, the heritage and legacy in place."

BY  
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For a young winemaker, taking over a historical property can be terrifying, transformative or both, depending on a lot of variables. Some older wineries might need to be blown up and rebuilt again to regain their glory; others may just need a steady hand that won't screw things up. In most cases, the truth lies somewhere in between.

What isn't in doubt is that, whenever there is a winemaker change, it offers the chance for a fresh perspective. Here we explore five top wineries in the Napa Valley that have recently named a new winemaker, investigate the new directions they are exploring and the delicate balance between respecting a legacy and making something one's own.





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## ANDREW HOLVE

Head of Winemaking, Newton Vineyard

**A** native of Sonoma County, Holve went to University of California, Davis, to earn a master's in viticulture and enology.

A class there provided his first exposure to Newton, when John Kongsgaard came to speak. The fifth-generation Napan worked at the winery from 1983 to 1996. Kongsgaard spoke about starting the winery's unfiltered Chardonnay program, using a minimum of sulfur and aging the wine two years in barrel. Holve was hooked.

But it would be a while before he ended up there. Holve worked in New Zealand before deepening his California winemaking skills at MacRostie Winery and Ridge Vineyards. In 2015, he joined Newton and was named head of winemaking six years later.

"I started looking into the history of Newton," he says. "There were so many notable people who had put their mark on this brand. I heard about an assistant winemaking position and was blown away by the site itself."

Newton was founded on Spring Mountain in 1977 by English businessman

Peter Newton, who had previously founded Sterling Vineyards on the valley floor.

Drawn to the site's volcanic soils and steep hillsides, he created a terraced estate that became famous for mountain Cabernet Sauvignon. In addition to Kongsgaard, Ric Forman, Luc Morlet, Andy Erickson and Jean Hoefliger have all been winemakers at Newton.

"Understanding a house style and focusing on the nuances takes time, especially at an estate," says Holve. "I want to deliver wines that speak and enliven the senses and deliver pleasure, that are the best example of Spring Mountain."

Newton's biggest current challenge is the reconstruction and replanting of the estate, which was damaged extensively in the 2020 Glass Fire.

"We have the opportunity and a blank canvas 44 years later to reimagine Spring Mountain," says Holve. "The guiding principle from the beginning was nature by design, but we have a better set of tools to work in a better way to confront issues of climate change and build something stunning."



# RYAN RECH

Chief Winemaker/General Manager, Beringer Vineyards

**N**ot a lot of wineries in the Napa Valley boast heritage that dates to 1876, but Beringer does; it remains the oldest continuously operating winery in California, founded by brothers Jacob and Frederick Beringer.

Rech (pronounced Rich) can trace his own Beringer beginnings to 2016. In July 2021, he was named head of the winemaking team devoted to 32 of the brand's luxury wines, including the iconic Private Reserve tier and Knights Valley wines, following in the footsteps of such folks as Myron Nightingale, Ed Sbragia and Laurie Hook.

"It's a challenge I enjoy and struggle with; there's a long legacy," says Rech. "One of the appealing things about taking the job is we're in the midst of a redevelopment of many of the vineyard sites. That's an opportunity you don't often get. The vineyards are performing better than they ever have."

Prior to Beringer, Rech helped make the wines for a few other historical wineries, namely Souverain and Chateau St. Jean.

"A huge thing...is the focus on site, instead of style or ripeness," says Rech.

The maturity in many of his vines allows site expression to come to the fore. Some of these 40-year-old vines, for example, are not giving off as much ripeness as they did in their youth, helping Rech to make more balanced wines. He also takes a balanced approach to the oak he uses.


Just as important to Rech are issues around sustainability in the era of climate change and labor issues.

"It's important to be open-minded," he says. "We've been making wine for 140 years; I want to set us up for another 140 years. You have to have an eye to the long term."

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## AVERY HEELAN Winemaker, Larkmead Vineyards

**H**eelan studied agricultural and environmental chemistry, with a specialization in viticulture and enology, at University of California, Davis, then went on to work in France and Australia before becoming the cellar master at Screaming Eagle in the Napa Valley.

In July 2019, she joined Larkmead as associate winemaker to Dan Petroski. Two years later, when he left to focus on Massican, she got the top job.

“Getting this opportunity is the dream job, beyond the history, the acreage and the original female ownership of Lillie Coit,” says Heelan.

Larkmead is a contiguous 110-acre estate in Calistoga at the junction of the Mayacamas and Vaca Range and the intersection of the Napa River. Planted primarily to Cabernet Sauvignon, it has seven soil profiles, a convergence of colluvial and alluvial fans that contribute astonishing diversity. It was founded in 1895, making it one of the oldest family-owned properties in

the Napa Valley. A modern winery was built on site in 2006.

“We are essentially benchlands at the most narrow part of the Napa Valley,” says Heelan. “It’s one mile across from mountain to mountain.”

Heelan plans to focus on organic farming, including the completion of organic certification; making wines from the Hillside Vineyard, a new seven-acre vineyard development; and climate-change research. For the latter, Heelan is working with the three-acre Larkmead Research Block, which has thick-skinned, heat-tolerant varieties like Tempranillo and Touriga Nacional to be assessed for the future.

“I want to take Larkmead to the next level internally and externally,” says Heelan. “I want to represent the estate to the best of its ability and make wines that are arguably delicious. We’re 99% there—I just want us to get in front of more people, potentially grow production and focus on the legacy we have.”



# TED HENRY

Director of Winegrowing, Groth Vineyards & Winery

**H**enry joined the historical Groth Vineyards & Winery in 2021, after working at Trinchero Family Estates, Jarvis Estate and Clos du Val, all in the Napa Valley.

In the heart of Oakville, Groth was founded by Dennis and Judy Groth in 1981, starting with a 121-acre vineyard parcel. Another 44 acres south of Yountville were added the following year.

"I always found Groth to be a positive legacy in the Napa Valley, a blue chip," says Henry. "They are a leader in Oakville and a family I had respect for and wines I had respect for, too. The stability drew me."

The family has lived on the property since those early days and remains fiercely estate-driven, known for Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. The Groths' daughter, Suzanne, is president and CEO.

She cites Henry's knowledge of single-vineyard and estate

wines as part of the inspiration for his hire, as well as his expertise in organic farming.

Henry grew up on a ranch in the San Francisco Bay Area and went to Davis for fermentation science, working in the labs of both sensory chemist Dr. Ann Noble and plant biochemist Dr. Douglas Adams.

"Groth is about elegant wines consumers seek out that are balanced," says Henry. "That's on board with what I like to do."

With ownership and wine style on solid footing, Henry is focused on doing a deep dive block by block, digging soil pits and taking Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI) photos to measure vigor. In 2021, he was able to pick the grapes based on these measurements, identifying 14 different zones within the blocks.

"I want to get more out of what we already have, squeak out another 2 to 3% of quality," he adds.



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