

James Molesworth

- [About Me](#)
- [My Main Blog Page](#)
- [Archive](#)

See Also

- [Featured Blogs](#)
- [Complete Blog Index](#)

## Old Heritage, New Blood at Heitz Cellar

Youthful energy infuses a California legend



Photo by: Courtesy of Heitz Cellar

Heitz has been making a Trailside Vineyard cuvée for decades.

Posted: Aug 16, 2018 2:00pm ET

Senior editor James Molesworth [will become Wine Spectator's lead taster for California Cabernet Sauvignon](#) at the end of this year. He recently made a trip to Napa Valley and is posting dispatches from some of the region's top wineries. And [don't miss our Q&A with James](#) on his Napa Cab eureka moments, his scoring philosophy, and what he's up to when he's not tasting wine.

"I'm really excited about that," says Brittany Sherwood, often. She tags the expression onto the end of more than a few sentences as she speaks about her work at [Heitz Cellar](#).

The 28-year-old winemaker has been appointed to helm production at one of Napa's most storied labels, part of the changes underway here since the [Heitz family sold the winery](#) earlier this year to the Memphis, Tenn.-based Lawrence family, the family's first winery acquisition. Sherwood has been on the winemaking team since 2012. (They've also dropped the "s" off the formerly plural Heitz Cellars.)

"I would say, with our family loving agriculture so much, [buying Heitz] seemed to be an obvious fit," says Westin Lawrence, daughter of new owner Gaylon Lawrence Jr. "Vineyards are pretty much the pinnacle of farming, and ours are absolutely amazing. This really is how we feel about why we bought Heitz."

Obviously at a winery such as Heitz, preserving tradition is important. But is that exciting? Well, Sherwood isn't merely here to keep things as they were. The winery is getting an infusion of investment and the 427 acres of vineyards provide ample opportunity to play. Among the tweaks in the cellar are a gradual changing out of the older, tall American oak storage vats for

new French oak (they make up a small percentage of production capacity, so don't expect a dramatic shift in the wine's profile), as well as separating the production facilities for the single-vineyard wines and the larger-volume bottlings, allowing for more attention to detail. There's also new crush equipment on the way, as the Lawrence family is committed to giving Sherwood and new CEO and former [Joseph Phelps](#) president Robert Boyd, 48, the infrastructure and tools they need to not only maintain, but improve.

While the portfolio of wines is large, Cabernet is the name of the game here, as it comprises three-quarters of the 40,000-plus-case annual production. Some parcels are being replanted, and there are new bottlings coming. Among them is the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Linda Falls, from a parcel on Howell Mountain. The 7-acre spot was planted in 2002 and had been going to the straight Napa bottling. But as it began to show its own character, it was pulled out as a single-vineyard wine, and replaces the Bella Oaks bottling, which was discontinued after 2007. (The Bella Oaks vineyard was purchased by [Suzanne Deal Booth](#) in 2010.)

Another of the single-vineyard cuvées here comes from Trailside Vineyard, where Sherwood took me to explain the site's extremely wide row spacing and a tall trellis system. With the canopy spilling out on both sides, Sherwood explained that it helps to keep the fruit in cooler shade, offsetting the effects of warm days too early in the growing season.



After tasting through the 2013s here, there's a purity that stands out for me. The wines are brighter and more detailed than previous vintages. Sherwood explains that it's the result of a program to eliminate [brettanomyces](#) in the cellars, the spoilage yeast that in small doses [can add aromatic elements](#) that some people like, but [is nonetheless a flaw](#).

"Purity is the way you get a true sense of place," says Sherwood. And she says she's really excited about that, too. As should you be ...

*WineSpectator.com members: Stay tuned for James Molesworth's tasting notes on the 2013 Heitz Cabernets, including the Martha's Vineyard, coming soon.*

Follow James Molesworth on Instagram at [@jmolesworth1](#), and on Twitter at [@jmolesworth1](#).

<https://www.winespectator.com/blogs/show/id/Heitz-Cellar-California-Cabernet-New-Blood>