

Computer career derailed by viticulture

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**
For the Capital Press

Napa winemaker Victoria Coleman planned a career in computer science but a part-time job changed her life.

"I was born and raised in Seattle and moved to Napa in 1998 with a plan to continue studying computers," she said.

Then she got a job at Stag's Leap Wine Cellars as the winery's temporary receptionist.

"After three months I moved to production assistant," she said.

That move set the scene for her future.

As production assistant she was exposed to principles and practices in the vineyard and the winery. She learned to taste grapes, to make harvest decisions

and to evaluate fining trials — in which the type and amount of various agents are tested — and blends.

This exposure created a thirst for the knowledge to understand vineyards and winemaking.

She initially took classes at Napa Valley Junior College to get a deeper understanding of viticulture and enology.

Coleman was hooked. She entered the University of California-Davis to soak up more knowledge and develop her own style of wine-making.

She began working at Lobo Wines, part of Wulff Vineyards in Napa's Atlas Peak Appellation, in 2008.

"I do as much as possible in the vineyard to balance the grape clusters with the number of leaves to reach near perfect ripeness with

lots of character," she said. "Conversely, I do as little as possible with the fruit in the cellar to allow it to give the wine a sense of time and place."

She noted that consumer tastes have changed through the years. Today more consumers prefer red wine than white.

In spite of the upsurge in the wine-drinking public, several challenges face California viticulture, Coleman said.

"I think there are two areas of concern," she said. "Number one is red blotch disease. There is not much known about this virus, other than it was first discovered from a leaf in a Sonoma vineyard in 1944."

In recent years, it was mistaken for leaf roll virus, because they both share similar visual

symptoms, she said.

"It was discovered in a lab that there are two vectors of this disease, but they've not been discovered in the vineyard, so it is not certain how it spreads in the vineyard," she said.

The disease hurts the fruit quality, including low Brix levels — a measure of sugar — and high acidity.

"We pulled out infected Cabernet Sauvignon vines in 2014 and have since replanted those vines," she said.

The lack of skilled labor in the fields ranks second among her concerns.

"A bright spot is that more women are becoming winemakers today than five years ago," she said. "I would say that is because of the legendary ones who have paved the way."



Julia Hollister/For the Capital Press

Victoria Coleman, winemaker at Lobo Wines in the Napa Valley, says more women are becoming winemakers.

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