

The Winemaker's Guide to Napa Valley Harvest Season

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Crocker & Starr: Pam Starr (co-owner and winemaker)

Pam, formerly the winemaker at [Spottswode](#), makes Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Franc, and a Malbec blend at Crocker & Starr winery in St. Helena. The vineyards date back to 1875 when Irish immigrant James Dowdell planted Zinfandel and Riesling, and now the property—fronting Dowdell Lane—has been brought back to life by Pam and her partner, Charlie Crocker. Funnily enough, the venture had its roots in a misunderstanding over a grape purchase made when Pam was still at Spottswode.

Crocker & Starr's emphasis is on combining sustainable farming techniques and cutting-edge winemaking to produce wines of power—but also balance—and ones that express the terroir of their respective vineyard plots.

THE 2017 VINTAGE

"I think 2017 is the year to expect the unexpected. It rained so much in the winter that Lake Berryessa overflowed for the first time in 25 years. During bloom, it hailed in some places, then it got super hot."

But her bet is that this vintage will turn out to be classic. "Some of Napa's best vintages have had the hottest days and the coolest nights."

FIVE-YEAR PERSPECTIVE

"2012 was textbook. 2013 had such long hang-time that you could have gone golfing and come back in three days. 2014 was a smaller crop, but super-high quality and structure. 2015 was easy-peasy, a no-rush vintage and one of the earliest finishes ever. I actually got to celebrate Halloween. 2016 was early, abundant, and generous, and all about tradition and community."

BIGGEST HARVEST CHALLENGE

"Getting the grapes in is pretty easy. It's the logistics of getting the bins back. What if the scale breaks?"

FAVORITE PLACES

Pam is big on the town of Napa, where she lives. "[BANK](#) at the Westin Hotel makes a beautiful botanical gin martini, has a terrific casual menu, and lets me bring our dog, Griffin." Her tip: Order off the wine list from [La Toque](#) (stocked with Napa Cabernet, she says), the hotel's formal restaurant.

She's also big on the new [Andaz](#): "Great, dog-friendly rooms, fresh, clean look, a room with a gas-lighted fireplace, and a big bathroom. It's not a Napa Valley historical property, but it's a great base within walking distance of everything."

Finally, she loves the [Poetry Inn](#) ("I can have everything delivered there") and the [Napa River Inn](#) ("Get the new rooms facing the Napa River"). She also recommends [TORC](#) for "pork and mushrooms like nobody's business."

The logo for Crocker & Starr features the brand name in a gold, serif font. The ampersand is stylized with elegant, swirling flourishes.

Photo credit: Joe Hendricks

