

Chateau Ste Michelle



Katie Nelson

*Vice President of Winemaking
Chateau Ste. Michelle*

Katie Nelson became interested in wine starting at a young age, sitting around her Italian grandparent's kitchen table on Sunday afternoons.

"I noticed how wine brought people together with plenty of laughter and good food to go around for everyone. I loved how vibrant life felt in those moments."

Growing up in Illinois and later moving to California as a teenager, Katie enjoyed trips with her family to Napa and Sonoma. She found it fascinating to observe the winemaking dynamic and loved spending time in the vineyards.

During her time at Sonoma State University, Katie signed up for an Enology class on a whim. She was struck by the ability to merge agriculture, chemistry, art, hard work, and luck of the vintage into a bottle of wine. She quickly changed her major to Chemistry with an Enology emphasis within the week.

She landed her first winery job as a crush intern in Healdsburg, California shortly after her 21st birthday. Upon graduation, she worked as a Lab Supervisor for Associated Vintners in Sunnyside, Washington before moving to Oregon to work as an Enologist at Eola Hills Winery.

In 1999, Katie moved back to Washington where she began her career as an Enologist at Ste. Michelle Wines Estates. She left briefly in 2015 only to return in 2018 as Senior Director of Winemaking for Innovation and Head Winemaker of Columbia Crest and H3. She now serves as the Vice President of Winemaking for Chateau Ste. Michelle.

Regarding her personal winemaking philosophy, Katie says it's evolved over the years.

"In the beginning, I was focused on precision and what I deemed as correct winemaking. After nearly 30 years of experience, I'm inspired to be bold and take chances. I have leaned into my knowledge and enjoy challenging convention. I want to create exciting wines for people to enjoy. Science is a wonderful tool, but wine is ultimately judged by the palate, nose and emotions of the consumer. That is the art of winemaking."

For Katie, there is no better place to make wine than Washington state. In the summer, Washington enjoys extended daylight during the peak growing season and cool summer nights to preserve the natural acidity in the grape and extends hang time for bold and smooth tannin development.

"Nowhere else in the world is there as much diversity in varietals as Washington state," says Katie. "We have it all in just a few hours in every direction. It's a winemaker's dream. It's an honor to help build the momentum for Washington wines and find their place on the world stage."

When asked what Katie loves most about her job, she says mentoring future winemakers. "No day or vintage is ever the same. I get to keep growing and innovating with an amazing team, year after year. I also love partnering with family farmers to craft exciting, food-friendly and accessible wines for people to enjoy of all backgrounds."

Katie holds a bachelor's in chemistry and pre-enology focus from Sonoma State University and earned her WSET Level III certificate in 2016. She lives in Prosser with her husband Flint, who is also a winemaker, and their two children.