

Letter from Sonoma Valley



Megan Schofield with 'Cortez the papillon' in a wine cave at Buena Vista

Dear CCOVI friends,

For the last three years I have been the Assistant Winemaker at Buena Vista Carneros in the beautiful Sonoma Valley of California. Buena Vista is the oldest winery in California, founded in 1857 and specializes in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, producing smaller amounts of Syrah, Merlot and Pinot Gris.

Working at Buena Vista these last few years has been very exciting. I joined the winemaking team as a major change in direction was being undertaken at the winery. Buena Vista was being transformed from a high volume, lower price point focused producer to concentrating on small lots of estate grown Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. We have replanted a great portion of our vineyards and invested a lot of capital in the facility to make it suitable for production of world class Pinot Noir. It has been wonderful to work at the winery during this transition and to see the accolades rolling in.

As the Assistant Winemaker, I am very lucky to be able to do a little bit of everything. I am responsible for planning all barrel work, and assisting with the creation of short and long term work planning. I help to oversee all wine operations, from grape receiving to putting the wine in the bottle. I take part in putting together all of our blends I am also the lab manager so I am able to split my time between production oriented tasks and more technical operations. Finally, I am responsible for the quality control program for winemaking and bottling within our winery and at sister wineries.

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I think the thing I like most about my job is the diversity. Everyday is something different and challenging. One day I could be putting together blends with the other winemakers, the next I could be researching a new piece of lab equipment, walking the vineyards or meeting with a bottling materials supplier. I truly get to do it all!

One of the most challenging things I've encountered during my career in California has been the adjustment to warm climate grape growing and winemaking. Viticulture is so different from what I had learned in Niagara, from pest and disease pressure to how and what vines are cultivated and when they are harvested. It took some time to "re-learn" my brain to these warm climate philosophies.

I think of CCOVI often and have very fond memories. I miss all of the amazing people I met there from the faculty members to students. I miss the wealth of knowledge that was always right at my fingertips and the eagerness of the professors to always help a curious student! I always loved the fact that everyone was always so enthusiastic about being a part of the program and the collaboration that was developing with the local industry.

At this stage of my life and career, I feel so lucky to be able to live and work in one of the most beautiful areas of North America, if not the world! I love that I can be skiing in Tahoe and surfing at a beach in San Francisco all in the same day. I love the mild weather and the fact that I am going cycling this weekend (and it's February!!) . I love the redwoods, San Francisco, the amazing cuisine of Napa and Sonoma and the people of northern California!

Outside of my career, I have become active in triathlons and running. I completed my first marathon at Walt Disney World in January and I have just been hired as a triathlon coach for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Team In Training program. I've been involved with TNT for over 5 years as a participant, completing several Olympic and half-ironman triathlons. I have also been looking to take advantage of this mortgage crisis down here and buy a home. The prices are astounding down here...but I think I will find myself a nice 2 bedroom condo or small home for under a half a million (no joke)!

My advice to current students at CCOVI is to really take advantage of the co-op program at CCOVI and to work in as many wineries/vineyards and wine regions of the world. There are so many things to see and learn in this industry. The more you see early in your career, the better winemaker/winegrower you will ultimately become.

I wish all the students and graduates success in their careers, CCOVI certainly provides one of the best and most solid foundations from which you can build a very successful career!

Cheers!

Megan Schofield, Class of 2000