

TRAVEL

Baldacci Family Vineyards Is A Steward Of True Napa Hospitality

Kim Westerman Senior Contributor ☉

Luxury and family travel, food destinations, wine and coffee trends.

Dec 17, 2022, 04:34pm EST

These days, it seems like there's a new corporate winery acquisition in Napa almost every week. Sometimes, these deals don't do much to change the wines themselves, and other times, the wine gets taken hostage by new management. In either case, the culture of the traditional winemaking community has changed forever. Luckily, there are still some stewards of the family model that give us hope that the famous Cab-producing region will retain its inviting charm, and Baldacci Family Vineyards is one of the truest to the family values it was built on.



The tasting lineup at Baldacci Family Winery. KIM WESTERMAN

Set in what is among the most coveted AVAs in the Valley, the Stags Leap District, Baldacci is quietly producing consistently excellent wines, primarily but not limited to Cabernet Sauvignon, from the estate vineyard as well as from parcels in Calistoga and Carneros. (Secret: They even produce a juicy, opulent Pinot Noir from the latter locale.)

Michael Baldacci, still young and energetic, has been the Head Winemaker at his family's estate for the last decade, a job he says "is a balancing act." He explains that he wants to honor the rich history of the vineyards and his family's winemaking legacy while also innovating as he feels necessary, hence the 19,000-square-foot cave with 22-foot cathedral ceilings that was finished just last year. The space is part production facility and part storage for the estate's lush, balanced Cabs that express both complexity and finesse.



Michael Baldacci, second-generation winemaker at Baldacci Family Vineyards, leading a cave tour. KIM WESTERMAN

Baldacci works in tandem with General Manager Kellie Duckhorn to create the pitch-perfect experience for guests: Not glitzy like "new Napa," and not pretentious like "old Napa," Baldacci offers a range of experiences that are suited to different styles. I recommend the *All-Cabernet Tasting With Cave Tour*, which starts with a glass of Baldacci's aptly named "Pops" sparkling wine, and a 30-minute exploration of the new cave (and even a taste of a barrel sample), followed by a seated tasting of four 100% Cabernet Sauvignons from three AVAs (Calistoga, Oakville, and Stags Leap District). This hour-long immersion includes a lovely cheese and charcuterie plate.



Ready for a wine tasting at Baldacci Family Vineyards. KIM WESTERMAN

The Baldacci land has been farmed since 1888, and Michael's parents, Thomas and Brenda, bought the property in 1998. In the beginning, they sold grapes to the likes of Rombauer, Shafer Vineyards, and Clos du Val, and then they decided to build a winery and bottle their own label. After a few years of getting their bearings, they bottled their first commercial release in 2000, which was released in 2003.

What's remarkable is that, despite its rarified address, the most expensive wine Baldacci makes that is available to non-club members — the Black Label Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon — is priced at \$110, which is the mere starting point for many of this winery's neighbors. And it stands up to the best of them with its balanced structure, deep berry fruit, and silky tannins that ease the way for drinking the wine now or putting it down for a decade, or more. (There is an exquisite Brenda's Vineyard bottling, named after Brenda Baldacci, that club members can purchase for \$200. Compare that to \$300-\$350 for the most highly allocated wines of other Stags Leap AVA wineries.)

It's heartening to see a real family winery with a vision of progress that doesn't obfuscate the past.