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In Her Own Words: At Merry Edwards, Heidi von der Mehden's best wine is still ahead



Image: Merry Edwards Winery and Vineyards

Heidi von der Mehden Winemaker, Merry Edwards Winery and Vineyards Sonoma County CA
MERRY EDWARDS WINERY AND VINEYARDS



By [Ellen Sherberg](#) – Bizwomen Contributor, The Business Journals
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While winemaking is considered an art and a science, it's the science – specifically chemistry – that led [Heidi von der Mehden](#) to the labs behind the vineyards and, ultimately, to her role at noted Sonoma winery Merry Edwards.

Despite growing up in Santa Rosa, in the middle of wine country, I never imagined I'd be a winemaker someday. After graduating from Santa Clara University with a bachelor's in chemistry, I spent time in Tanzania with the Peace Corps teaching science. When I returned home, I was ready for a new challenge. My father suggested I apply my science background to wine, and it turned into a fulfilling career.

My journey began in 2000 as a lab technician at Kenwood Vineyards. There, I could be in the lab, blending wines, working in the cellar, and walking vine rows all in the same day. I loved that my work didn't require me to be chained to a desk. Instead, my days were centered on an agricultural product completely subject to Mother Nature's whims, and I liked that challenge.

In 2007, I received the opportunity to work with renowned winemaker Richard Arrowood as an associate winemaker, making Cabernet and Rhône-style wines. When he departed in 2010, I was promoted to winemaker. The confidence they placed in me, trusting me to step into the role of someone with over a half-century of experience in North Coast winemaking, confirmed I was on the right path.

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Then came my partnership with Merry Edwards. When Merry began searching for a successor, she sought out somebody with no preconceived notions and who had a genuine desire to learn. I knew I wanted to learn how to make world-class Pinot Noir from one of the best, which made us a perfect match. Over five years working together, she taught me the importance of attention to detail, the vigilance red wine demands, and above all, to always search for the next great thing. The best wines are made in the vineyard, and I cherish the lessons she shared walking vine rows alongside me.

Merry lent me another gem, too; she refused to stop experimenting with her craft. She never stopped exploring, evolving, and searching for ways to make the wines even better. If I wasn't innovating, I wouldn't be honoring what she stood for. I'm proud that since becoming winemaker, our flagship Meredith Estate vineyard has been certified organic, our soil health practices have advanced significantly, and our wines continue to evolve to meet the modern wine drinker's palate.

Today, the biggest challenges don't come from the cellar. To no one's surprise, it's climate change. Navigating wildfires, untimely rains, and heat spikes has become a regular part of the job. This year, an unusual warm stretch in March triggered the earliest budbreak I've ever seen. But it's a challenge I relish, persevering, solving complex problems, and adapting to whatever Mother Nature throws at us.

I still believe my best wine hasn't been made yet, and that belief keeps this work invigorating. Every vintage is a new classroom, and the vineyard is always the teacher. Merry used to say the same thing. As long as that feeling stays with me, I know I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be.

In Her Own Words is a daily Bizwomen feature edited and curated by Ellen Sherberg and written by individual contributors. If you would like to contribute to this ongoing narrative, please send an email to ESherberg@bizjournals.com. Sherberg is a longtime reporter, editor and publisher at American City Business Journals, Bizwomen's parent company.