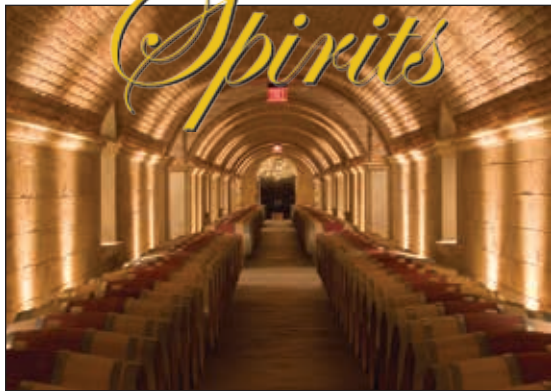


Wine & Spirits



Wines of Value

An Interview with
Kathryn Walt Hall, Proprietor, HALL Wines



HALL Wines' Rutherford Caves (left); St. Helena's ultramodern steel tank room (above); a tasting room at St. Helena (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Since 1972, Kathryn Walt Hall and her family have been grape growers in Mendocino County. In addition to managing the family vineyard from 1982 to 1992, Hall has held numerous other positions. She began her public career as Assistant City Attorney in Berkeley, California. She was President of an inner-city development company and Partner of Hall Financial Group, Inc. She co-founded the North Texas Food Bank, served on the U.S. House of Representatives Hunger Advisory Committee, and was the Director/Vice President of the Texas Mental Health Association. She has served on the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women and as a trustee of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. From 1997 to July 2001, Hall served as the U.S. Ambassador to Austria. She earned an A.B. in economics from the University of California, Berkeley, a J.D. from the University of California Hastings College of the Law, and an M.B.A. in February 2008 from the University of California, Berkeley - Columbia Business School.



Kathryn Walt Hall

WINERY BRIEF HALL Wines (hallwines.com) employs organic small-vine viticulture, precision wine-making, wild yeast fermentation, and microblock blending. The winery uses grapes from more than 500 acres of top Napa Valley vineyards producing 17 handcrafted wines, including its signature Kathryn Hall Cabernet Sauvignon.

What has made the HALL Wines brand so special?

The most important thing for any brand is knowing who you are. You can't try to be something you're not and you keep your focus on that. As you grow, there are so many more opportunities that come your way and, during those times, focus is especially critical.

We want to make high-quality wines that are affordable to many people and will be aspirational for many others. However, all the wines are priced so that they are wines of value. We currently make two brands: WALT, which is a Pinot Noir brand, and HALL, which is a Cabernet brand. The reds range from \$50 at the low end to \$350 at the high end. This is not a cheap wine for sure, but it's not crazy expensive either. You want to consider the range price-wise in the market where you want to play.

We are approachable in terms of price; also, our wines are very approachable. They are ready to drink today. When you open a bottle, it should be wonderful. We don't release a bottle until we think it's ready to drink. Will these wines be better in five, 10, or 20 years? Yes, but are they ready to drink now? Absolutely.

I like wines, whether white or red, with a lot of bright fruit in them, so they are great to drink young, but they will have different qualities with age.

We make wine, but what we are also creating are experiences, and one



way to do that is within our facilities. Many guests come from New York and two beautiful places to visit each offer a very different experience – one very old with a case built with old Habsburg-era bricks, and one state-of-the-art, the newest winery in Napa Valley, which is totally elegant and very high-tech.

When you arrive, at either location, someone is always there to welcome you and thank you for coming, and to make sure you see what you want to see. We want people to know that

we are a business that is based around our people. If someone is going to spend \$200 on a bottle of wine to serve for their daughter's wedding or for her engagement party, it's a wine that is going to mean something to them. We want our customers to know there are proud people behind that wine.

How hard is it to communicate the fact that value isn't necessarily all about price?

It's less difficult to explain to someone who is used to drinking wines that are more expensive. If I'm new to drinking wines, I'm not going to see the subtleties of a flavor or the beauty of a color – I'm going to tend to think a wine is just red or white. I'm not going to pick up on the silky quality or the texture of wine in my mouth.

The more you drink wine, the more you start to pick up on these nuances and understand how they come into play.

Is it sometimes hard to not go after opportunities that are presented to you when you have such a loyal following?

We are growing and changing within our company in the sense that we are adding new vineyards and new properties, so we are not static in any sense; we're all busy. One of the words we use a lot is "bandwidth." You only have so much.

We've never really been tempted to expand. The closest we've come to that is that we wanted to make a Pinot Noir. I love Pinot Noirs, as there is an elegance and youthful energy about a Pinot Noir that is exciting. To be able to sip a wine and have it be light on the palate and then explosively rich as you taste it is exciting to me. I love that experience, that burst of flavor – that's a Pinot Noir quality.

It would have been wrong to try to place Pinot Noir into our Cabernet lineup, but we thought about how we could make a Pinot while being true to who we are. This led to our creating a new brand, which we also gave a family name. Hall is my married name and Walt is my maiden name, so we used Walt.

WALT has the same winemaker and wine-making staff, and the same philosophy of winemaking, which goes back to value. It also speaks to how we make the wine in the sense that we are organic farmers: We don't filter and we use natural yeast fermentation. These are all things that make for low production and high quality. So we decided to keep that approach to winemaking but do it in a different brand.

It's not so much that we're different – we're still very much one family. ●