

Synchronicity, Inspiration, And Soul

An Interview with Ellie Anest, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Eleven Eleven Winery

EDITORS' NOTE *Ellie Anest grew up in Nebraska on a working farm. At age 20, Anest moved to San Diego where she attended San Diego State University and earned a BA degree in sociology and accounting. While there, she became involved in philanthropy through the local Greek community, and soon met Carol Vassiliadis. Over time, they cultivated a deep friendship that ultimately led to their partnership and the creation of Eleven Eleven Winery. Before founding Eleven Eleven, Anest built a broad resume working with Fortune 500 companies, mid-size firms and small businesses alike. She began her career at KPMG, providing accounting and finance support for her clients, followed by numerous years at the Taco Bell Corporation on both business planning and marketing teams. Anest has always had an entrepreneurial spirit, and for approximately seven years she owned and operated Anest Financial Solutions where she provided a variety of business consulting services for small to mid-size companies. Prior to starting the winery, Anest worked at RGP, a publicly traded professional services firm, where she built a client base focusing on business solutions for various industries. When not working at the winery, Anest offers her time and resources to the Philoptochos Organization, a philanthropic extension of the Greek Orthodox Church. Anest is a supporter of the Queen of the Valley Foundation, Festival Napa Valley, Napa Valley Film Festival, V Foundation, and National Ability Center, among other nonprofit organizations.*



Ellie Anest

What was the vision for creating Eleven Eleven Winery and how do you define its mission?

In 2012, my business partner and close friend, Carol Vassiliadis, and I embarked on an exciting entrepreneurial venture within the luxury real estate realm. Our original plan was to create a high-end vacation rental portfolio, but as we surveyed various locations, we found ourselves drawn towards the stunning wine country of Napa Valley. Not only was it an area to which I personally felt connected, but it was a well-known

destination for tourists from all over the globe and at that time, it felt as though it was a place we were meant to be.

During our search, destiny led us to discover a truly remarkable property in the Oak Knoll AVA, surrounded by a breathtaking 3.5-acre vineyard. It was an unexpected surprise that filled us with excitement, inspiration, and passion, leading to the start of a journey in wine that was never part of the original plan.

Although we initially didn't aim to purchase any vineyards, the allure of this captivating property quickly changed our course. We saw a unique

opportunity to create something truly special, harnessing the full potential of this Cabernet vineyard that would lead us down a path of passion and fulfillment.

As we immersed ourselves in the beauty of the vineyard, we realized the immense potential it held, particularly for crafting exceptional Cabernet wines, and that potential was confirmed and put to great use when we had the privilege of meeting Kirk Venge. Kirk encapsulates the spirit of an extraordinary winemaker, bringing his immense talent and expertise to our endeavor. From that consequential meeting, we were welcomed into the vibrant community of dedicated growers and passionate wine enthusiasts that make Napa Valley so remarkable and helped grow Eleven Eleven to what it is all these years later.

Eleven Eleven represents those special moments in life that feel like fate, where everything aligns perfectly. It symbolizes synchronicity, inspiration, and soul. Our wine and the journey we've embarked on embody these elements, honoring the everyday moments that make life extraordinary. We are truly grateful for the serendipitous discovery that led us to this place, and the remarkable people who have become an integral part of our journey and community of inspiration and friendship.

WINERY BRIEF *The name Eleven Eleven (elevenelevenwines.com) represents meant-to-be moments that embody synchronicity, inspiration, and soul. Eleven Eleven wines and its journey embody these elements that celebrate the everyday moments that make life extraordinary. The time 11:11 symbolizes a perfectly balanced moment on the clock, making the winery's name a positively perfect choice. Whether a single-vineyard and single-varietal wine, or a Bordeaux blend, there is never a lack of attention to detail to bottle an artful expression and deliver upon Eleven Eleven's promise. The modern design of the winery's space is inspired by art, culture, music, and community. This is reflected throughout the winery's private indoor/outdoor areas with sweeping vineyard views. The winery's unique location near downtown Napa provides both an urban oasis and traditional vineyard experience.*



Eleven Eleven Winery



Eleven Eleven Winery's tasting room

Will you provide an overview of Eleven Eleven's offerings?

While it's common for small producers to have limited variety offerings, Eleven Eleven breaks this norm through its uniquely expansive portfolio of 14 total varieties. All of our wines are single-vineyard, single-varietal wines, focusing on the quality and nuances of our distinct vineyards. The limited production winery's various estate vineyards in Oak Knoll District AVA and select vineyard designates in Sonoma Coast feature diverse microclimates that provide ideal conditions for the cultivation of many types of grapes, thereby yielding multiple different varieties for the winemaking team to expertly craft into their own.

What can guests expect to experience when visiting Eleven Eleven Winery?

Eleven Eleven was built on the foundation of the Greek term "Parea," which represents the collective strength of friends coming together. This concept, inspired by my Greek heritage, has truly come to life at Eleven Eleven, and it has been an incredible honor to build. Fueled by this belief, guests can expect to discover and be a part of a bigger piece of a community when they visit Eleven Eleven. We wanted to create a space where visitors could gather and exchange philosophies, values, and ideas.

We do this through shared experiences and bringing high-quality wines directly to consumers, driving their discovery, exploration, and enjoyment of Eleven Eleven's diverse portfolio. Open daily from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM by appointment only, Eleven Eleven offers privately hosted tastings of current Signature and Estate wine portfolios. Tastings are offered in the winery's sophisticated tasting room, outside on its zen patio, or in one of its more intimate spaces located throughout the winery estate.

What have been the keys to the strength and leadership of Eleven Eleven in the industry?

Keys to the strength and leadership of Eleven Eleven in the industry are multifaceted. My business and corporate background has played a vital

role in my success in helping me understand how to effectively build and manage teams by ensuring their talents are in the right positions. I have also learned the importance of letting go when faced with challenges, whether it be a flawed process, underperforming individuals, or a project that isn't going as planned. Additionally, I have developed resilience by learning from my mistakes and picking myself up after setbacks.

Another important key to the leadership of Eleven Eleven is the skill, expertise, and kindness of the legendary Kirk Venge. Working alongside Kirk is like attending a masterclass in winemaking, as his undeniable and eloquent passion for sharing his knowledge is truly inspiring. Kirk introduced me to different winemaking techniques and taught me the importance of sourcing grapes from Napa Valley and Sonoma County's finest vineyards, which has been essential in the leadership and success of Eleven Eleven. Kirk's passion and knowledge among the vines combined with my business expertise has resulted in an excellent leadership team excelling Eleven Eleven within the industry.

Eleven Eleven wouldn't be what it is without our experienced and passionate team – from the tasting room to the vines, all of whom have been active participants in the Napa Valley wine community for years now. Each member has been vital to our growth as a winery and valued members of our "Parea."

Will you discuss Eleven Eleven Winery's commitments to sustainability?

The wine industry can have a significant environmental footprint due to factors like water usage, chemical inputs, and carbon emissions. Climate change also poses risks to vineyards, affecting grape quality and production. These are all factors that Eleven Eleven is aware of and actively looking to combat.

Eleven Eleven is committed to following organic viticulture practices, to ensure its wines are the purest reflection of each unique property they come from, and is currently working towards its Napa Green Certification. We also source from vineyards following the same philosophy of using responsible farming practices.

Did you always know you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?

Growing up, my family and I lived in a small town where we owned a farm in Nebraska. My mother, who was an immigrant from Corinth, Greece, and my father, a first-generation Greek American, taught me the value of hard work, integrity, and resilience. We grew crops and tended to cattle on our farm, and I vividly remember observing my father's unwavering commitment to the land throughout various seasons. Seeing first-hand the rewards of hands-on labor and persistence instilled in me a profound appreciation for hard work and dedication. These experiences played a significant role in shaping my work ethic and my commitment to excellence.

After university, I entered into the corporate finance world with companies including KPMG, YUM Brands – Taco Bell Corporate, and RGP. From there, I went on to start my own consulting practice. Due to my family's innate hardworking nature and my constant curiosity to learn and grow, I naturally fell into the category of "entrepreneur."

As a consultant and business owner, I learned so much by doing. I didn't always have the industry experience, but I had solid business expertise from working with many clients. I used logic and resources to provide value. This is the basis of an entrepreneurial ethic, and it's why starting a winery – something else I knew nothing about – didn't scare me. I knew I could learn it and create something successful that highlights and celebrates my values and ethos.

Where did your passion for wine develop and what has made the industry special for you?

I had a rather unconventional entry into wine. Due to my corporate background and entrepreneurial spirit, I was always looking for other ways to enhance my business and personal branding through a variety of business ventures.

My yearning for a new entrepreneurial opportunity has led me to one of the greatest journeys of my life thus far, opening and operating Eleven Eleven Winery. Although it seems like I fell into the industry, the planning and understanding of the property and vineyard was nothing short of hard work and passion.

This unexpected turn of events – from the property, to the vineyard, to Kirk – ignited our enthusiasm and sealed our commitment to crafting exceptional wines. The beauty of the land, the richness of the vineyard, and the camaraderie within the Napa Valley wine community inspired us to bring forth wines that would stand as a testament to our shared passion.

More than a decade later, Eleven Eleven has indeed succeeded and is recognized as a modern treasure of an urban winery, bringing a fresh approach to the culture of luxury wine among the more traditional Napa Valley estates. As we continue on this journey, we remain devoted to nurturing the potential of this vineyard, embodying the spirit of the vine and bringing forth wines that evoke joy and awe which has been the most special experience within the industry.

And it doesn't hurt to love the product that you make. ●