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Liz Bokisch

The Art of Wine and Tapas



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Liz Bokisch knew her undergraduate degree and minor in Spanish from the University of California Davis would be valuable, and the teaching credentials she earned later would be her first career, but she might not have guessed that the man she met on a blind date as a freshman would end up being her husband and business partner.

These days Liz and her husband, Markus, are making and mar-

keting Spanish wines, visiting Spain on a regular basis and sharing a passion for cooking, all while raising a family on their vineyards. "Our business is our lifestyle. When you combine the seasonality of the vineyards with the wine, cooking and food, it can make for a very enchanting business, and I wouldn't have it any other way," shared Liz.

The wine journey began at a very early age for Liz's husband Markus, who carries a Spanish family heritage and a great affection for Spanish wine. Although Markus was raised in California, he spent childhood

summers in Spain. Most meals included a serving of wine (even for the younger generation), and as Markus aged the wines became richer, and his love for Spanish wine became more pronounced. Later, Markus would earn his degree in plant pathology and the stage was set for farming and winemaking.

Liz's childhood was spent in the States but also included a brush with wine. "I grew up making trips to Napa and Sonoma and picking grapes with my mom and dad." Liz's family began making wines at

home using their garage as the factory, and soon the family hobby ignited a passion within Liz. "We had so much fun with it, and we started investigating different varieties."

After college, Liz and Markus spent about eight years in Napa, during which Liz was teaching and Markus was learning the trade at a local winery. They then took a sabbatical from their jobs and moved to Spain, where Liz taught English and Markus worked in the Spanish wine industry.

Upon their return to California, they purchased their initial property on the eastern side of Lodi and planted their first grapes on 40 acres in the Clements Hills. Markus loved the fertile soil and had a hunch their crop could thrive in the rolling hills. He was right. The business has grown steadily over the last 13 years, and now Bokisch Ranches, Inc. farms more than 2,000 acres and produces nine varieties of wine, including several award winners.

But with success come a few sacrifices as well. "We have been able to build a fantastic company, hire staff and expand," smiled Liz. "But I grew up in a family of teachers, and there is a part of me that misses that world of learning and high school students."

Liz does get a chance to get back to her roots of teaching as she gives cooking demonstrations and leads cooking classes at both her vineyard and a local tasting bar. Bokisch Vineyards partners with two other local wineries in a tasting room called CellarDoor. CellarDoor offers wine flights and selections by the glass or bottle, as well as gourmet appetizers. Live music is presented on Friday and Saturday evenings.



Bokisch Vineyards also invites customers to become members of their wine club. Patrons can discover exotic new wines like Albariño, Garnacha and Graciano and enjoy delicious Spanish cuisine just by joining. Because their wines are made in limited quantities and are often difficult to find, membership is the best way to taste and order their Spanish varietal wines at preferred discounts.

In addition, the Bokisch wine club hosts several events throughout the year, including two private wine club parties at Liz and

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Markus’ home. For the spring party, everything is correlated to Spanish food and wine and Liz gets a chance to show off her cooking skills. Several tapas dishes as well as

traditional Spanish paella take center stage at this 200-to 300-person extravaganza. “The party has grown so much over the last few years that we now gather volunteers and

throw a tapas-making party before the actual party to help get ready,” laughed Liz.

Liz also teaches cooking classes in downtown Lodi at Cheese Central. “We have a class coming up in a couple of weeks as well as a class for the holidays,” explained Liz. Appropriately named Easy, Fast and Beautiful Holiday Tapas, Liz is particularly excited to share her expertise for something as extravagant as the holidays. “When it comes to food, the presentation is just as important as the taste. Spanish cuisine is in such an



everything changes. All the leaves fall, the vines are pruned, and every year it is a new adventure.”

Spain holds a special place in the couple’s heart as well as in the products of their winery. “Just the everyday culture of drinking wine with meals and enjoying and savoring the food is special,” said Liz. “We love traveling throughout Europe and understanding the land and the people. We want to share that through our wines and vineyard.”

But the winemaking business isn’t easy, and that first crop takes time. “It is a long process from planting,” noted Liz. “It takes two to three years

exciting moment and the presentation is just like a piece of art.”

Liz has a bit of art in her background as well. Her dad was a high school art teacher and Markus’ mother owned her own interior design store in La Jolla. “Art is just part of everyday life when it comes to wine,” she noted. The artwork for their wine labels is carefully chosen for each Bokisch bottle. “It has to connect Spain and our lives. The artwork reflects and represents the wine, and it also serves as a distinction between the different wines we carry.”

The Bokisches have raised two boys on their beautiful vineyards. Anton, 18, and Stefan, 16, help on the vineyards and with summer events. The two lead a group of 12 to 15 high school students each June to work in the vineyards, tying and trimming vines and helping with planting. Liz hinted that her sons may begin to help with the winery in the future but at the moment are doing their own self discovery. “I absolutely love what we do and the vineyards offer seasonality. Harvest is a crazy time, but in the winter ev-

to get a vineyard into production. Now we are harvesting 2013 grapes. The white wines will be ready in 2014, but the reds won’t be ready for release until 2015, after barrel aging.”

As far as traveling to their favorite part of the world, the Bokisches still take time to enjoy themselves in Spain. “Now, we are lucky enough to be able to go every July. Markus’s family lives on the coast so we can enjoy the water, summer evenings, family and friends.”

Would this grape-producing couple ever consider starting a vineyard in Spain? “That sounds like an exciting dream for us,” says Liz. “Part of me would love it, but part of me wants to keep Spain as a place to relax on vacation and not work.”

Perhaps that dream will be lived by the next generation. ■

For more information about Bokisch Vineyards, call their office at 209-334-4338, visit their website at bokischvineyards.com, or stop by their tasting room at 21 North School Street in Lodi.