

NASHVILLE

An aerial photograph of a lush, green landscape in Napa Valley. The scene features rolling hills with a mix of vibrant green grass and dense, dark green forest. A winding road or path is visible, cutting through the terrain. The lighting suggests a bright, sunny day, with shadows cast across the hillsides.

Nashville native Bettina Bryant found a piece of home in the rolling hills of Napa.

WORDS BY CHRISTIANA ROUSSEL / PHOTOS BY GENTL & HYERS 2020

TO NAPA



■ Bryant Estate Winery uses no pre-emergent herbicides and embraces the biodiversity of their cover crops, relying wholly on elemental forces, such as fire, to coordinate the vegetative growth.



beloved *Heidi* stories. Bettina notes that viticulture just might run through her veins, as this particular Swiss region is famous for its pinot noir production. One can imagine her as a child, forehead pressed against the cool glass windowpane of a chugging train, taking in the vista painted with rich grape arbors before her. These are the memories given to children that inform their later choices, charting an indelible course. In Bettina's case, other markers also pointed her westward, toward the seasonal climate of California's rich agricultural heartland.

Her ballet career blossoming in earnest, Bettina moved to New York City to join the American Ballet Theatre company where none other than Mikhail Baryshnikov served as artistic director. She danced with the company for seven years, traveling the world, taking in art and music in every corner of the globe. "But I always went back to Nashville, to the idyllic neighborhoods and rolling hills of home," Bettina adds. Her affection for this particular topography settled itself in her soul, just waiting to be stirred up later in life.

Hanging up her pointe shoes, Bettina returned to New York to complete her studies at Columbia University. "My father was an academic, and education was always of paramount importance to him. I certainly went into school with an eye toward law school." But eventually, art again stirred her spirit, and she majored in art history. "I loved the study of history through the lens of art, tracing the human story through Greco-Roman antiquities and beyond." Bettina turned this passion into a business, advising private clients on their collections and acquisitions.

This venture took her traveling again to the Venice Biennale, the arts organization where she met the love of her life, Don Bryant. A St. Louis-based businessman with a passion for wine, Don was soon insistent upon Bettina seeing Napa and experiencing it for herself, with him by her side. Wistfully, Bettina adds, "You know, as soon as

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Any great Southern story starts with grit, and grit, along with phenomenal soil, a temperate climate, and acres of luscious grapes, is at the very heart of Bettina Bryant's story. But to understand the journey to this unique Napa Valley location, you have to start in the heart of the South—Nashville—where Bettina was born and raised. The daughter of Swiss-born parents, Bettina grew up in the Forest Hills suburb and attended Hillsboro High School where she played music and fell in love with dancing. It was at The Parthenon museum in Centennial Park where ballet rooted itself in her soul and launched her on the path that would eventually lead her to love and to crafting award-winning wines.

Bettina fondly recalls a childhood in which her father, a professor at Vanderbilt University, filled their home with art and music and culture. There were summer vacations back to Europe to visit family, complete with train trips through Switzerland's Maienfeld municipality, the lush setting of Johanna Spyri's

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I arrived, it immediately felt like home. The Napa landscape is not unlike the rolling hills of east Tennessee, and the farming community just felt so familiar.”

That Napa landscape, altogether new, yet familiar and embracing, became so much more to Bettina. Each of these aspects underscores the inestimable value of the land itself and its very contribution to Bryant Estate Winery. And there it is: terroir. The very word that describes the precise environmental conditions—climate and soil—that inform the flavor and aromas of everything grown here. Their particular corner of this area, Pritchard Hill, is close to being viticulturally perfect. It is worth noting that scientists have traced the origins of Napa Valley back almost 150 million years, through millennia where sandstone and shale rose and shifted according to the whims of moving tectonic plates. Wind and rain, erosion and deposits, cumulatively contributing to the perfect terroir for

the acres of cabernet sauvignon grapes that Don planted more than thirty years ago.

The Bryant Estate Winery has since expanded to include adjacent parcels and is nothing short of breathtaking. With views of Lake Hennessey from the western slope of Pritchard Hill, the family has crafted a coveted moment in time. The many microclimates of the area meld to foster dynamic growing conditions that are bottled, labeled, wrapped, and packed by hand on site before being shipped to lucky customers.

And it is in this moment that we are brought back to Bettina’s Southern roots. The care with which these grapes are grown, harvested, and turned into phenomenal wine is the embodiment of life in the South—caring for the land where we are raised, preserving a way of life that, when shared with others, is the very essence of that hospitality we are drawn to and called to pass on. □

