

A Biography of Megan McGrath Gates

Megan McGrath Gates is an eighth generation Californian with a heritage profoundly tied to the land, as the family's Ventura County ranch was maintained until the '70s. "My mom romanticized the farming life, and even though I grew up in suburbia, I felt it deeply," explains McGrath Gates. She also remembers having a keen sensory awareness as a young child and suggests, "I was building a catalog of tastes and smells that I now use in my winemaking." When McGrath Gates was a student at Midland School in Los Olivos, she took her first geology class from an influential teacher that inspired her to think about the world in terms of the natural sciences.

McGrath Gates graduated from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo in 2001 with a degree in Soil Sciences and earned her Certificate in Winemaking at UC Davis. Her first job after graduation was working for the Cachuma Resource Conservation District, where she was involved in promoting soil conservation for agriculture including vineyards. Before arriving at Lucas & Lewellen Vineyards, McGrath Gates made wines in Sonoma County for four years, most recently as the winemaker for Cahill Winery in Sebastopol, where she had the opportunity to work with Sonoma, Mendocino and Napa Valley grapes. She managed the winery facility and made wine under the Cahill label as well as for custom crush clients, specializing in small lot Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Bordeaux varietals, and Syrah.

Prior to that position, McGrath Gates was retained by Flowers Vineyard & Winery on the Sonoma Coast as their Enologist, crafting Burgundy-style Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays. As a soil scientist, she was an apprentice to Dr. Alfred Cass with Integrated Wine Growing Consortium, a group of consultants who are leaders in the field of vineyard development and management. McGrath Gates co-authored an article published in the journal of the American Society for Enology and Viticulture titled *Compost Benefits and Quality for Viticultural Soils*. As a passionate winemaker, McGrath Gates may adhere to centuries-old viticultural traditions, but she is also tech savvy, utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to maximize data relating to the land, displaying it visually using points, lines and polygons.

"We make many decisions during the growing, fermenting and aging stages, but ultimately the grape really expresses itself," insists McGrath Gates, who is humble about the winemaker's role in the process. She adds, "My job is to allow the grapes to showcase their natural characteristics." The young winemaker prefers not to classify her philosophy as either Old World or New World, explaining, "I believe in balanced wines with all components married together so that layers of complexity are allowed to unfold."

When McGrath Gates is not managing the state-of-the-art Lucas & Lewellen winery in Buellton, she can be found ocean free diving along the California coast, often in search of abalone. She also serves on the Board of Trustees of her alma mater, the Midland School in Los Olivos. She is a graduate of the California Agricultural Leadership Program's two year fellowships and remains an active alumna.

