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Herb Lamb Vineyards

Napa Valley

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Feminine and Masculine Flair

And just like that, an ordinary wine tasting day turned extraordinary.

Jennifer Lamb, owner of Herb Lamb Vineyards, walked through the door with a captivating smile and skip in her step. She was thrilled to showcase her iconic Napa Valley wines and spoke about them as if they were her children (which they are). And she spoke with such reverence about the land she owns in the foothills of Howell Mountain

in St. Helena. After all, this land produces some of the finest Cabernet Sauvignon fruit in the Valley.

With limited cases produced each year from its northeast-facing estate vineyard, Herb Lamb wines are coveted. Why? Because they offer avant-garde balance and complexity, especially for Napa wines. While there is still plenty of fruit dancing in your glass, Herb Lamb wines aim to balance this fruit by gently pulling in its reins, offering layers of floral, spice, and earthy tones that unfold with charm and lure. With so many Napa Valley Cabernets tasting the same, Herb Lamb offers powerful wines of unique character and enchantment. Yes, I am a big fan. Can you tell?

Jennifer started us off with the Two Old Dogs Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. The nostalgic label of these wines feature her late husband relaxing on the porch, smoking a cigar, sipping a glass of wine, and enjoying the company of his black Labrador Retrievers, Maggie and Camo. As a four-legged furry fan myself with two English Cream Golden Retrievers (with one also named Maggie), I understand this scene very well (minus the cigar). Both wines delivered; they were perfect all-year-round deck-sippers.

The highlight of our tasting with Jennifer was a flight of the HL Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, comparing the 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2015 vintages. Each one of her children expressed themselves very differently yet were made of the same cloth—elegance and soul. While it was hard to pick favorites, the 2011 and 2015 tugged on my emotions the most.

The 2011 HL Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon offered primary aromas

and flavors of dried red cherry, blackplum, cracked black pepper, mint leaves, and orange zest. Secondary notes opened to French vanilla and roasted coffee bean. Tertiary notes balanced the freshness of fruit, unfolding to forest floor and colorful bruised leaves. This wine was dry, with medium acidity, high alcohol, medium (+) aroma and flavor intensity, medium (+) body, and medium (+) tannins that were velvety smooth. The finish was also medium (+).

In contrast, the 2015 HL Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon offered primary aromas and flavors of ripe red cherry, cassis, Black Mission fig, golden raisin, rose petals, and a dash of black pepper. Secondary notes opened to vanilla and smoke. Tertiary notes were just starting to emerge, laying in notes of tobacco. This wine was dry, with medium (+) acidity, high alcohol, pronounced aroma and flavor intensity, medium (+) body, and medium (+) ripe tannins. The finish was long.

Marilee Bostic, Jennifer Lamb, and Joe Printz

Comparing the two vintages, the 2011 was more feminine, elegant, and pretty, offering restrained ripeness and alcohol. It was like a classy, refined woman (with hips) gliding to smooth jazz on the dance floor in a colorful wrap dress and high heels. The 2015, on the other hand, was more masculine, offering power, prestige, and opulence. This wine was the debonair (and bald) man in a black three-piece suit, purple tie and pocket square, and cap-toe oxford shoes who asked her to dance. Both were harmonious yet entirely distinctive.

Cheers to Jennifer and winemaker Michael Trujillo! And cheers to the late Herb Lamb who is no doubt smoking a cigar and sipping wine next to Maggie and Camo in heaven. We will join you soon enough and raise a glass.

