

# The Girls in the Vineyard

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### 'Girls' Good for the Heart (and Soul)

By STEVE ENDERS

If ever there was any doubt that a little red wine was good for the heart, then I've found a bottle of cabernet that ought to convince you once and for all—no doctor or fancy medical studies required.

The Girls in the Vineyard is a classic single vineyard California cabernet sauvignon with an odd name. The winery's owners recently (and graciously) sent a couple of bottles to Tonic, and it's safe to say we'll be ordering more.

**The 2005 cab we tried is a lovely and juicy fruit-forward wine with hints of pepper, mint and herbs in the nose. At \$20 a bottle it's practically a steal.** The "Girls" refer to the wine's sustainably grown vines, which sit in the Red Hills AVA in Lake County, about 70 miles north of Napa near Clear Lake.

While the wine is certainly good enough to stand on its own, it's what comes with it that makes it worth an extra recommendation. If you buy a bottle, the vintners will send \$2.50 to the charity of your choice. Buy a case, and they'll send at least \$30. The prices aren't marked up to pad for the donation. It just comes, well, straight from the heart of the business.

"No man is an island," says Kat McDonald, one of the winery's three owners. "We didn't get to where we are today without the help of this community, and so we owe it to the community to structure the business in a way that gives back."

Now, it'd be easy to dismiss The Girls as a marketing stunt. It'd be too easy to write it off as a goofy attempt to be right with the times on the Left Coast. And it'd be super easy to stop this

story right here, add a link to the wine's website, and call it a day.

Easy, until you have a chance to talk to the winery's proprietors, to learn just how committed they are to the wine, and also to doing the right thing. They're also two of the nicest people with whom you'd want to chat or have a glass of wine.

Kat and her husband, Robert, know a thing or two about growing grapes—they've done it in Australia and California for years. They also know what it's like to give back—they've given and received plenty over the years.



Just last year, the couple was severely injured in a horrific car crash involving a truck carrying huge boulders. The boulders spilled out from the truck and onto the highway, smashed into their car and a couple of others, and left the couple fighting for life as they were rescued from their car. They received an outpouring of support and help from friends and neighbors, which carries over to this day as the couple continues

to recover from their injuries.

"The accident was a blessing," she says. "It forced real contact with people in ways we never would have seen before. It made us more committed to how we support our community, and that's a part of every decision we make."

Wine has a tendency to bring people together, too, and it's how the McDonalds met their business partner Matt Stone. Stone grew up on a skateboard bombing the hilly entrance to a fledgling Sterling Vineyards, now a Napa Valley institution, while his father helped the winery get on its feet. Stone was raised around the grapes and around the wine business. Seeing how it "lit up" his father, Stone decided he wanted in, but he left California for a while before coming back again to give it a try.

The three met when starting the Blue Oak School in Napa, now a K-8 private and independent school dedicated to reflecting the area's diversity and progressive ideals. The three decided to make wine and sell it as a fundraising opportunity for the school. Today, The Girls give away money to all kinds of organizations.

"The goal from the beginning was to figure out how to cut out the fluff, make a lovely wine, keep it affordable, and do some good along the way," says Stone. Kat adds that the philanthropic mission has been in place since the first taste of the wine, rather than building giving into the business after it was deemed viable.

They cut out the fluff by not having a tasting room. There's no fancy facility or tour, and no gift shop. Instead, just good wine that does some good. Look for it at your local bar or restaurant, or buy some directly from their website.

The Girls in the Vineyard Red Hills Lake County 2005 cabernet sauvignon: \$20/bottle or \$216/case. To order, visit [TheGirlsInTheVineyard.com](http://TheGirlsInTheVineyard.com).