



NEED TO KNOW

## 9 Things You Should Know About Matthiasson

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When Steve and Jill Matthiasson opened their eponymous winery in 2003, its offerings immediately stood out from the typical Napa Valley style with their balance and elegance. Rather than replicating the bold, in-your-face style of their California peers, the duo set out to craft wines in Napa that reflected the prized characteristics of wines from renowned European regions. This meant focusing on making low-alcohol, refreshing wines that pair well with food. Matthiasson's originality and fresh take on winemaking in a region that had become synonymous with a single variety put the winery on the map, and its wines are now featured on prestigious restaurant lists around the world. Beyond spicing up Napa Valley's reputation, the winery has also dabbled in the digestif space and set a new standard for sustainable farming.

Now that you know the basics, here are nine more things you should know about Matthiasson.

## **1. Both Steve and Jill have a long relationship with farming.**

As far as callings go, Steve dreamed of being a farmer his entire life. He took up gardening and cooking as a hobby while studying philosophy and horticulture, and eventually found a job working for a small sustainable agriculture consulting firm for vineyards and orchards. In 1999, Steve co-authored the California manual on sustainable vineyard practices. Similarly, Jill studied botany at University of Pennsylvania, researched ancient farming techniques in Israel, and went on to analyze soil health in graduate school at UC Davis. She was also a leading force in many local nonprofits benefiting family farmers, CSAs, and farmers markets. The future couple met in a program for International Agricultural Development at UC Davis, and initially had no intention of starting a winery. But now, the husband-and-wife team apply their shared knowledge of organic farming and sustainable practices to their vineyards and winery.

## **2. Steve continues to work as a vineyard consultant.**

Steve's main focus has been on the Matthiasson winery since 2003, but he still works as a freelance vineyard consultant on the side to help other winemakers solve vineyard challenges and guide farmers in their conversion to organic agriculture. Steve has worked with several renowned wineries including Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, Spottswoode Winery, and Dalla Valle Vineyards. He's also a consultant and winemaker for Napa winery Ashes & Diamonds.

## **3. He was even a vineyard consultant for Brad Pitt.**

When Pitt first bought Château Miraval, he hired Steve as a vineyard consultant and brought him along to France to go check out the Provence vineyard together, according to Matthiasson. On the trip, Pitt and Matthiasson drank together at a dinner where Matthiasson confessed that he had never seen any of Pitt's movies. Pitt suggested he try "Moneyball."

#### **4. This year, Matthiasson made wine from 31 different grape varieties.**

In addition to working with well-known varieties like Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, Matthiasson started experimenting with unconventional grapes like Ribolla Gialla and Refosco right off the bat, taking inspiration from Italy's Friuli region. As the winery has evolved, it has added more off-the-beaten-path varieties to its roster including Gamay, Chenin Blanc, Scheurebe, Schioppettino, Vermentino, Falanghina, and Pinot Meunier. This year, the winery hit a total of 31 different varieties, and it hopes to keep expanding and experimenting each year.

#### **5. Matthiasson doesn't only make wine.**

As farmers, the Matthiasson family's interests and skills go beyond just grapes. They grow several other crops on their estate including olives and around 12 different peach and plum varieties. They make several different jams out of their stone fruit because, according to the winery's Instagram, "peaches are as different as grape varieties." The pair also produces olive oil from the olive trees they farm organically next to their home. They work specifically with Tuscan olive varieties, particularly Frantoio, because they're well-suited to the Napa climate. The artisanal jams are included in some of the wine club packages, and you can buy their home-grown olive oil online.



## **6. The winery has also dipped its toe in vermouth production.**

In addition to wine and provisions, Matthiasson has begun making small batches of sweet vermouth over the past few years. Although Steve had always wanted to make the attempt, it wasn't until a friend suggested he repurpose a high-ABV, slightly out-of-balance wine he had on his hands into an aromatized vermouth that he went all in. Steve deemed it an opportunity for him to showcase his farm's natural botanicals in a truly farm-to-table beverage.

The vermouth's base wine is made from a rare variety created at UC Davis in the 1950s called Flora, which is a natural cross between Sémillon and Gewürztraminer. The grapes are picked late to allow natural sugar accumulation and some botrytis at harvest, and each batch is blended with previous vintages to add more dried fruit and spicy, nutty flavors. The vermouth is infused with a mixture of botanicals and spices, including many of the plants they grow on their estate like blood oranges, sour cherries, and wormwood.

## **7. Matthiasson's iconic wine labels have a deeper meaning.**

The label on every bottle of Matthiasson wine incorporates farmers shears, which are meant to represent the craft of viticulture. Each of the star wines of Matthiasson's lineup also has its own distinct label that shares a little insight into the bottle. The Cabernet Sauvignon label is centered and classic, the rosé's label is more playful and informal, and the varying colors of the labels' shears help offer a sense of what's to come in the wine. Some bottles boast a simple single shear, which indicates a prototype for experimental or small-batch wines that aren't made every year.

## **8. Matthiasson started using an electric tractor this year.**

Both Steve and Jill started their careers working in sustainable agriculture and the local food movement, so the couple sees winemaking as a natural extension of farming. In line with these values, the winery has been a leader in the movement toward organic agriculture in wine.

This means the team has been big proponents of changing as many of their daily practices as possible to reduce their impact on the environment. One major investment in that initiative was put into action recently: While the winery has been farming organically for decades and is run entirely on 100 percent renewable power, the couple was still forced to rely on diesel tractors to destroy weeds to avoid weed killers. So this year, the winery invested in an electric Monarch tractor to further optimize their farming.

## **9. Both Steve and Jill continue to get involved in educating the community about sustainable agriculture.**

In addition to leading by example at their winery, Steve and Jill have ingrained themselves in the community to educate farmers and students alike about environmentally friendly practices. Steve has spent the past three years working on the Two Eighty Project Apprenticeship Program, a hands-on program that teaches “everything from the vine up.” The program is open to all, but is specifically focused on providing resources, experience, and opportunities to marginalized, underrepresented communities often excluded from the wine industry. Steve has also spent time teaching organic viticulture at UC Davis for the past two years. Jill also taught cooking classes from their garden to the local Spanish Immersion school for many years, showing kids where their food comes from and garnering excitement about healthy seasonal food.