

ALL YOU NEED IS

Love

The recently launched LOVE Wine collaboration between Healdsburg's J Vineyards & Winery and Los Angeles-based artist-philanthropist Alexandra Grant's grantLOVE project celebrates women and creativity across the wine and art worlds.

by Keri Bridgewater



Matt Conner

“ FROM THE BEGINNING,

it felt obvious that this would be a perfect partnership,” says Nicole Hitchcock, estate director and head winemaker at Healdsburg’s J Vineyards & Winery (www.jwine.com) of the notable new LOVE Wine Brut Cuvée. “Alexandra told us she had searched for a wine partner for over a decade, but nothing felt like quite the right fit.”

Alexandra Grant, an accomplished visual artist whose namesake grantLOVE (www.grantlove.com) project creates limited-edition artworks based on her trademarked LOVE symbol (a rendering of the word “love” that originated from her 2008 sculpture *A Love That Should Have Lasted*) and helps generate funds for arts nonprofits, was looking for a woman-led winery that shared her vision for creating an inclusive and thought-provoking community through art. In homage to Grant’s mother — a California native who sparked her interest in wine — the winery also needed to be located in the Golden State. “And then she found us,” adds Hitchcock.

“J Vineyards has a special history connecting winemaking and female leadership,” Grant says. “Founded by Judy Jordan and now headed by Hitchcock, it’s also part of the Gallo family, so we were lucky to work with Stephanie Gallo on this, too.” The project was a year in the making. “What an honor for me and grantLOVE to build a team and create a wine that reflects these shared values around the importance of art and agriculture, while including women from diverse backgrounds,” she adds.

As a 20-year wine industry veteran, Hitchcock places high value on seeing women gain more visibility in traditionally male-dominated fields. “Women have much stronger representation in the cellars and vineyards than they did decades ago, which has created a more inclusive culture,” she says. “Part of a shared commitment to cultivating a more dynamic and diverse world, the genesis of this collaboration between LOVE Wine, grantLOVE and J is about supporting and amplifying powerful women artists and artists of color while also magnifying wine’s cultural and artistic identity.”

With her vibrant and thought-provoking work capturing the essence of the project, interdisciplinary artist Genevieve Gagnard (genevievegagnard.com) immediately sprang to mind in the search for someone to design a label for the inaugural bottling. “Her ability to understand the nuances of



social, artistic and economic exchanges made her the ideal artist to make the first LOVE label. And she made something so beautiful, beyond expectation,” Grant says. “The best art invites you in without the need to understand what it is and then continues to unfold as you learn more, which is sort of like tasting a wine.”

As an artist who explores themes of identity and self-discovery in her work, Gagnard sought to design something that reflected her creative style that a broader audience would also connect with — and Grant’s iconic LOVE symbol allowed her to do just that. “Winemaking is an art form with a long history, and I often work with images and materials from the past to create something new,” she explains. “Specifically, in my collage work, I’ll use vintage wallpaper and cutouts from old magazines, so my initial vision for the label started there — I got in the studio, played with the materials, and began to make something that felt nostalgic.” Hitchcock reveals a cool “Easter egg” moment from the creation process: during Gagnard’s visit to the winery last spring, Sonoma County’s wildflowers inspired her to photograph the landscape and some of those floral photos were later incorporated into the LOVE Wine label artwork.

Hitchcock describes LOVE Wine’s debut release as a “lively, delicate and expressive” brut cuvée. True to the house style and made with a classic blend of 64 percent chardonnay, 32 percent pinot noir and 4 percent pinot meunier, it offers hints of red fruit and creaminess, balanced by citrus notes and a crisp, lingering finish.

From top: Matt Canalis; courtesy of J Vineyards



Alexandra Grant (left) and Nicole Hitchcock enjoying LOVE Wine (top); the east-side knoll at J Vineyards (bottom)

A local launch was held in the heart of the Russian River Valley to celebrate the first limited-edition bottling and emphasize the LOVE Wine project’s message that wine and wine country are for everyone. It opened at the tasting room on February 3 and runs through March; the pop-up features Gagnard’s label artwork alongside pieces of her current work, plus select pieces from grantLOVE and other collaborators, including The Rad Black Kids and designer Amber Sakai. Hitchcock says it’s a unique and inspiring way for guests to connect with the wine, the art and the project.

“LOVE wine isn’t just about the wine, although there’s an undeniable magic when great sparkling wines are paired with good food and company; it’s about how people experience creativity and art through the pop-up in our tasting room,” Hitchcock says. “It’s meant to create conversations and fuel curiosity. Like art, wine has the power to unite people, spark conversation and inspire change — which we all feel is something worth raising a glass to.”

Bottles from the limited-edition LOVE Wine release retail for \$50 (or \$600 for a case) and can be purchased from the tasting room in Healdsburg (11447 Old Redwood Highway) and online at www.jwine.com. J Vineyards supports women in the arts and arts education by donating to the grantLOVE project.