

Letter from Sonoma Valley

Dear CCOVI friends,

For the last two years, I have been the Assistant Winemaker at Simi Winery in the beautiful Sonoma Valley. Founded in 1876, Simi is one of the oldest wineries in California. It specializes in Bordeaux varietals and Chardonnays. But I also get to work with many other varietals such as Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Petite Syrah, Zinfandel, Tannat and even a little bit of late harvest Riesling (this is where the icewine experience really comes in handy).

Working at Simi these last few years have been very exciting and challenging. Simi has a long history of making great wines and being a pioneer in the Sonoma and Alexander Valley. It was the first winery to bottle an "Alexander Valley" designated Cabernet in 1974. It also has made significant contributions to winemaking and viticulture through its years of research and collaboration with academia. For instance, a strain of yeast for Chardonnay was isolated here and is called "Simi White".



The facility where most of our wines are made was constructed between 1890 and 1910. It is constructed of stone walls that were quarried from the surrounding hillsides and wooden floors spanning three levels (think no drains and lots of wood!). It is a very beautiful setting but one that is logistically very challenging. Our state-of-the-art technology such as stainless steel tanks and open tops, pneumatic punchdown devices and computer-controlled glycol jacketed tanks is housed in a 120-year old building featuring wooded catwalks that wind around old support beams and low wooden ceilings.

What I like most about my job is the diversity. Everyday is something different and challenging. As the Assistant Winemaker, I visit vineyards and deal with fermentation, blending and bottling but I'm also involved in PR and sales. I'm responsible to host meals for distributors, salespeople, media and the odd celebrity who visit the winery. It's probably no surprise that this is one of my favorite parts of the job where I get to meet very interesting people from all over the world and have amazing meals prepared by our winery chef.

I am constantly learning and acquiring new skills and it never gets boring. One day I can put together blends with the other winemakers, while the next day I can be heading off to do market work in Las Vegas or Texas. I truly get to do it all.

One of the most challenging things I've encountered during my career in California has been the adjustment to warm climate grape growing and winemaking. Viticulture is so different from what I had learned in Niagara, from pest and disease pressure to how and what vines are

cultivated and when they are harvested. It took some time to “re-learn” my brain to these warm climate philosophies.

I think of CCOVI often and have very fond memories. I miss all of the amazing people I met there from the faculty members to students. I miss the wealth of knowledge that was right at my fingertips and the eagerness of the professors to always help a curious student. I loved the fact that everyone was so enthusiastic about being a part of the program and the collaboration that was being developed with the local industry.

At this stage of my life and career, I feel so lucky to be able to live and work in one of the most beautiful areas of North America, if not the world! I love that I can be snowboarding in Tahoe and swimming at a beach in San Francisco all in the same day. I love the mild weather and the fact that I can go cycling year round. I love the redwoods, San Francisco, the amazing cuisine of Napa and Sonoma and the people of northern California.

Outside of my career, I have become active in triathlons, cycling and running. Last August, I completed my first Ironman triathlon in Louisville, Kentucky and I have been hired as a triathlon coach for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Team In Training (TNT) program. I've been involved with TNT for over 7 years as a participant, completing several events from Olympic triathlons, half and full marathons to the Ironman last year.

My advice to current students at CCOVI is to really take advantage of the co-op program at CCOVI and to work in as many wineries/vineyards and wine regions of the world as possible. There are so many things to see and learn in this industry. The more you see early in your career, the better winemaker/winegrower you will ultimately become.

I wish all the students and graduates success in their careers. CCOVI certainly provides one of the best and most solid foundations from which you can build a very successful career.

Cheers!

Megan Schofield, Class of 2000