

# Business Traveler

## Taste Maker

With a new restaurant, wine and product line, Martha Stewart continues to influence how we live

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## Family Affair

Combining tradition and innovation, Samantha Rudd builds upon her parents' success at Napa Valley's acclaimed Rudd Estate vineyard

**FROM TOP:** Rudd Estate on Napa's Mount Veeder; Rudd Mt. Veeder Estate Susan's Blanc; Leslie and Susan Rudd  
**OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP:** Samantha Rudd; barrel room

**> AT 5:30 A.M.**, I was touring Rudd Estate's vineyard on Mount Veeder, watching the sun rise over Napa. There, some 1,500 feet above sea level, the acclaimed winery grows the grapes that comprise the Rudd Mt. Veeder Estate wines: the sauvignon blanc, Susan's Blanc—a blend of sauvignon blanc, Sémillon and sauvignon gris—the Bordeaux-style Leslie's Blend and the Crossroads by Rudd sauvignon blanc.

Back in the late '90s, Leslie Rudd decided to ignore the conventional wisdom that—due to the property being an ancient seabed with Napa's longest growing season and latest harvest—only red-wine grapes would flourish on Mount Veeder. This was disproven with the release of the 2002 Rudd Mt. Veeder Estate sauvignon blanc, which almost overnight became one of the highest-rated white wines in the country.

Each year, 80 percent of the wines produced by Rudd

Estate are sold directly to collectors, with the remaining 20 percent carefully distributed through long-term national and international partners. Over the past quarter of a century, Rudd Estate has become renowned for biodynamic farming, as well as for concrete fermentation. These are but a few of the reasons why Rudd Estate is a favorite of such chefs as Thomas Keller, Daniel Boulud, Michael White and Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

In 2003, the Rudd Foundation—established in 1998 to influence how food and wine are viewed in America—became the primary benefactor of the Rudd Center for Professional Wine Studies at the Culinary Institute of America's St. Helena campus. There, two nationally recognized certification programs are offered, in addition to a comprehensive portfolio of wine study classes. The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health at the University of Connecticut was created in 2005 to fund research and

education in the fight against obesity and weight discrimination, receiving widespread recognition for its work.

Meanwhile, the accolades kept coming. Of the 2008 Rudd Oakville Estate Red (a blend of 59 percent cabernet sauvignon, 23 percent cabernet franc, nine percent Petite Verdot and nine percent Malbec), *Robert Parker's Wine Advocate* mentioned the “fabulous concentration” and “brilliant texture” of what it called a “potentially legendary proprietary red,” awarding it 99 points out of 100. And the first vintage of the Rudd Oakville Estate Samantha's Cabernet Sauvignon—described by *Wine Spectator* as “plush and extracted...before ending with fine-grained tannins”—was released in 2008.

That cabernet was named for Susan and Leslie's daughter, Samantha, who grew up on the Rudd Estate and is now its vintner. She says, “At age





for the Rudd Estate that had been woven into her DNA. Samantha praises her parents' "lessons about stewardship and dedication to excellence that remain my guiding principles."

Following Leslie Rudd's passing, Samantha dove headfirst into implementing her long-term vision for the estate, beginning with the Crossroads label. Taking its name from the property's location, Crossroads by Rudd is a companion label that is 100-percent estate-grown and biodynamically farmed, pushing the winery into the next generation by utilizing the terroir's full potential. Intended for those just discovering fine wines, or perhaps beginning to start a cellar but who might not yet have the disposable income to purchase the Rudd Estate wines, Crossroads by Rudd has become a go-to among collectors who turn to it as their "daily drinker."

Building on her commitment to creating an environment that rewards creativity and

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craftsmanship, Samantha instituted the Unlikely Collaborators Residency Program, a multidisciplinary initiative wherein individuals from the arts, sciences or business who share the values of Rudd Estate are invited to explore new ideas and expressions in the Napa Valley. Most recently, that invitation was extended to L.A.-based photographer John Troxell, who spent a couple of weeks capturing the estate through the lens of his camera, resulting in some particularly stunning images.



eight, I made a promise to my father to improve the land, the wine and the lives of the people in the Napa Valley who make it all possible."

And while it might seem that Samantha's ascension to the helm of Rudd Estate was inevitable, it wasn't quite that simple. As she explains, "I was working in hospitality at the winery after I graduated from college. During one of our discussions about my future, my dad told me that I needed to go cut my teeth in the wine industry, outside of our estate."

Having already interned at Spottswoode Estate in St. Helena, Samantha ventured out into the wider world of wines: first at Clos Pegase in Calistoga, California, where for two years she served as general manager, then at Château Margaux, in Médoc, France, where she observed many of the operations of one of the most revered châteaux in the world. In 2016 she returned to California to work in the family business, merging what she had learned elsewhere with the incredible enthusiasm

BOTTOM RIGHT: JOHN TROXELL; ALL OTHER PHOTOS: COURTESY OF RUDD ESTATE

### An Ideal Pairing



● Opened by Leslie Rudd in 2005 in St. Helena, California, **Press** began as a steak house, which makes sense, considering Rudd's original passion was cabernet sauvignon (the Rudd Oakville Estate Red remains

the winery's *grand vin* to this day). And while it quickly became a beloved fixture on the Napa Valley dining circuit, as Rudd Estate's repertoire expanded, so too did the focus of the kitchen at Press, where Leslie's daughter, Samantha, savvily installed chef Philip Tessier at the helm in 2019.

Having worked in kitchens including Éric Ripert's Le Bernardin, Tessier became the first American to medal at the Bocuse d'Or, known as "the Olympics of the food world." At Press, Tessier presents clever takes on Modern American

cuisine, such as the Northern halibut with squash ribbons, seen here. Lest you find yourself overwhelmed by the pairing possibilities in a restaurant with the world's most expansive collection of Napa wines, wine director Vincent Morrow is on hand to recommend the ideal accompaniment.

Recently, Press received *Wine Spectator's* 2022 Grand Award, "given to restaurants that show a passionate devotion to their wine programs." Press is now one of only 97 restaurants in the world to have been so recognized.