

Kenzo Estate Announces Helen Keplinger as Consulting Winemaker

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Napa, California Today, Kenzo Estate named Helen Keplinger as its new Consulting Winemaker. She immediately joins the Napa Valley estate's winemaking team in the lab to taste, assess and blend 2023 vintage red wines, including ai Cabernet, murasaki prestige Merlot blend, asuka Cabernet Franc and rindo Flagship Bordeaux-style blend. Keplinger rejoins the team at the direction of owners/vintners Kenzo and Natsuko Tsujimoto, alongside Vineyard Manager David Abreu, the architect of the estate's 160+ planted acres.

This is a return to Kenzo Estate for Keplinger, who joined the winemaking team under Heidi Barrett in 2005. Keplinger left the estate in 2011 to become the winemaker at Bryant Family Vineyard, having hired winemaker Marc Nanes. In her early years, Keplinger remarks, "Our focus was to uncover and elevate the unique expression of the extraordinary terroir at Kenzo Estate. We worked closely with David Abreu, and the DAVM team, including Santiago Avina to begin to understand the soils, microclimates, and farming."

Kenzo Estate founder Kenzo Tsujimoto, also the founder and CEO of Capcom video game company, remarked on the hire from his attendance at the World Expo conference in Japan: "I still vividly remember sensing Helen's graceful and extraordinary talent as a winemaker when we first began making wine together 20 years ago. I can't hide my joy knowing that she, now acclaimed with unparalleled prestige, is once again dedicating herself to crafting wines that reflect the pure terroir of this land of vineyards."

"I am confident that, under her hand, the wines of Kenzo Estate will rise to an even greater level," says Kenzo.

As well, vintner Natsuko Tsujimoto comments that it is an honor to bring Keplinger back: "Helen has been the most warm and friendly person since the opening of Kenzo Estate. I was captivated by her elegant sensibility even back then. I'm truly delighted that we've been able to reconnect like this. Now that she is among Napa's leading winemakers, I feel a new and unprecedented sense of excitement, knowing that she will help open a new chapter for Kenzo Estate."

Keplinger indeed brings to Kenzo Estate an incredible depth of knowledge in winemaking, and her accolades include the 2023 "Winemaker of the Year" award from critic Antonio Galloni's *Vinous*, which brought to light her attention to sustainability, terroir, the diversity in her wine programs and excellence in winemaking.

When Keplinger joined Kenzo Estate, there were only 60 acres planted. Now, approximately 160+ acres are planted across the miles-long estate, each vineyard plotted and planted by renowned viticulturist David Abreu. Abreu, a successful vintner in his own right, also maintains the vines under DAVM and oversees harvest activities each year.

KENZO ESTATE

Says Keplinger: “It is both an honor and a pleasure to once again collaborate with the team at Kenzo Estate. I look forward to deepening my understanding of this singular property and building on the work that has been done to further refine and elevate its wines.”

From David Abreu Vineyard Management: “The team would like to congratulate Helen Keplinger in her new role. Keplinger has demonstrated a level of professionalism in the wine industry that matches our strategies and goals; we look forward to once again be working by her side.”

ABOUT KENZO ESTATE

Kenzo Estate is a 3800-acre estate atop Mt George, located in the southeast corner of Napa Valley. Its size may qualify it as the largest in the county, and was founded in 2002 by Kenzo Tsujimoto, also the founder and CEO of Capcom video game company.

Nestled in the hills above California’s Napa Valley at 1,550 feet, Kenzo Estate encompasses 3,800 acres, five times the size of New York’s Central Park. Only about 160 acres of the unspoiled, wild woodlands have been planted to vine. Protected within this preserve are spring-fed reservoirs, vernal pools, streams and diverse forests of conifer, oak and manzanita. Wild boar, coyote, mountain lion, deer, turkey, and bobcat linger in the wilderness and are occasionally observed by guests and those attending to the estate. The land is truly a welcome escape from the outside world.

The estate produces 10+ wine labels sourced solely from the estate’s vineyards, and has a unique and exclusive distribution network that includes 5 Japanese tasting-room restaurants in Japan (3 in Tokyo, one in Osaka, and one in Kyoto), the winery estate tasting room located on the vineyard property on Monticello Road in Napa, and the Kenzo Napa Michelin star kaiseki restaurant in Napa’s downtown, which serves the portfolio of Kenzo wines. In addition, the wines are selectively available to restaurants with minimal nationwide distribution. The bulk of Kenzo Estate’s wines are sold directly to consumers at the winery and via onsite concierge or their website, www.kenzoestate.com (in Japan: www.kenzoestate.co.jp). Visits to the winery tasting room are by appointment only.

Kenzo Estate Consulting Winemaker, Helen Keplinger – brief history



Keplinger completed a formal wine education at the University of California - Davis with a Masters in Enology. She then worked with Heidi Barrett as an apprentice at Paradigm (Napa Valley). Her winemaking is heavily influenced by working in the Priorat in Spain (Cellers Melis) with consultant Claude Gros; her own label, Keplinger Wines.

Helen came on at Kenzo Estate in 2005, and continued through 2010 as the estate winemaker, working with both Heidi Barrett and David Abreu.

In her own words: “It is in the Priorat where I gained an enormous appreciation for minute changes in terroir and the results they imprint on the wines made from a particular site. That experience granted me a deep appreciation for terroir and terroir-focused wines. I find wines are more unique, nuanced, and captivating when they have a clear connection to a vineyard, sense of place, and hallmark of a vintage. Thoughtful work in the vineyard and winery translates to a pure expression of

KENZO ESTATE

place in the wines. I continue to fine tune my winemaking practices, and better my understanding of each vineyard and its complexities, intending to best harness its true character each vintage. The craft of winemaking is a life-long journey of continual evolution and learning.”

Principal Bios:

Kenzo Tsujimoto – Founder, Proprietor, CEO



In 1990, Kenzo acquired 3,800 acres of undeveloped land in the southeastern mountains of Napa Valley. He had first become enchanted with Napa Valley after the historic 1976 Judgment of Paris, which launched Napa wines onto the world stage. Setting out with the objective of creating world-class wines of distinction, artistry and tradition, Kenzo retained some of Napa Valley’s most prominent advisors to assist with planning and development of the winery. Kenzo’s unwavering passion and vision brought his dream of establishing Kenzo Estate to fruition. Kenzo is currently the CEO of both Capcom and Kenzo Estate’s ventures in the U.S. and Japan.

Natsuko Tsujimoto, Vintner, Proprietor, COO



Natsuko Tsujimoto is the wife of Kenzo Estate Founder and Owner, Kenzo Tsujimoto. She couples as his business partner, assuming the role of Kenzo Estate President and Chief Operating Officer, as well as the Producer and Designer of Kenzo Napa. Since 2010, Natsuko has played a key role in opening five Kenzo Estate restaurants in her native Japan, sharing an elegant style which weaves a traditional Japanese aesthetic with sophisticated, modern sensibility. In 2016, Natsuko and Kenzo opened the doors to Kenzo Napa, their signature dining establishment sharing upscale, authentic Japanese cuisine in the heart of the Napa Valley.

At Kenzo Napa, Natsuko has procured every element of the restaurant’s décor, including the selection of wood, stone and tile imported from Japan, to the arrangement of dishware, exquisite lighting, custom shoji screens and the sushi counter. At both Kenzo Estate in the Napa Valley, and in Japan, Natsuko helps drive the marketing and hospitality efforts and oversees creative branding such as the winery’s distinctive Japanese-influenced wine names and labels.



Together, Natsuko and Kenzo Tsujimoto share their passion and commitment to excellence in their work. A renowned couple in their native Japan, they also share a love of food, wine and travel.

KENZO ESTATE

David Abreu - Viticulturist



A third-generation rancher raised in Napa Valley, David Abreu graduated from the Viticulture and Enology Program at UC Davis and founded Abreu Vineyard Management in 1980. By the late 1990's, he was considered one of the premier viticulturists in Napa Valley, growing grapes for wineries such as Screaming Eagle, Staglin Family Vineyard, Colgin Cellars, Harlan Estate, Bryant Family Vineyard, Araujo Estate Wines and Grace Family Vineyards, among others.

Upon joining Kenzo Estate in 2002, David made a stark departure from the northern Napa Valley vineyards he typically managed, where the climate is considerably warmer. He recognized the potential of Kenzo Estate's elevation and proximity to the San Pablo Bay and was confident that the location would yield grapes of extraordinary quality and a uniquely refined style within Napa Valley. David's ongoing precision farming and long-range vision is evidenced in Kenzo Estate's consistently outstanding grape harvests.

Helen Keplinger photo credit: Blaze Williams

David Abreu photo credit: Blaze Williams