

Commitment to Excellence

MATERRA/CUNAT

FAMILY VINEYARDS

BY FRAN MILLER



Photos by Neena Cunat Heitz

It's a family affair at Materra/Cunat Family Vineyards, located in Napa's Oak Knoll AVA. Proprietors Brian and Miki Cunat's youngest daughter Amie designs the wine labels and curates the winery's art and décor. Older daughter Neena was instrumental in Materra's initial operations and sustainability efforts, and her husband Harry handles marketing. Brian's brother John is a lead investor, and the duo's dad Dean gets a nod via the playfully dubbed 'Dean's List' wine club – a title that not only honors their father's life and influence, but also conveys the Cunat family's commitment to excellence.

The Oak Knoll location has been Materra's home since 2007 when Brian Cunat purchased the lush property where he cultivates 52 prime acres of Merlot, Petit Verdot, Malbec, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Viognier vines that are transformed into award-winning wines. The farm-raised, mid-west native had built a successful Chicago-based international real estate business and was ready for a new challenge when a love of travel and wine led him to Napa. Through hard work and a commitment to land stewardship, he and Miki quickly earned the trust of their neighbors and the wine making community.

"We are here because of great wine," said Cunat. "We've long loved beautiful wines, and we decided to pool our family resources to produce the absolute best wines we could, while also providing the best customer experience possible. Each family member contributes to the excellent customer service and hospitality that Materra provides each and every visitor."

By-appointment-only tastings are intimate and personalized. Guest are asked their favored flavor profiles. Are they wine novices,

or experts? Are they seeking to gain knowledge, or simply relax and enjoy the winery's beautiful atmosphere? "Either way, our team provides a very satisfying tasting experience that caters to each and every preference," said Cunat. "From the minute we greet you at your car with a glass of chilled sauvignon blanc, to the last nibble of the artisan cheeses that accompany each tasting."

The name Materra is derived from the Latin words 'mother' and 'earth,' and is illustrative of the Cunat's commitment to nurturing their land. The consistent quality of the French varietals derived from the rich soils are a perfect expression of this sun-soaked Oak Knoll AVA. Michael Trujillo, whose mentors include the great Andre Tchelistcheff, provides consultation, while winemaker Bruce Regalia (formerly of Duckhorn Wines, Calistoga's Madrigal Wines, and Anderson Valley's Goldeneye) oversees the dry-farmed vines using sustainable methods. Production and storage facilities also demonstrate an environmental commitment, as does the minimalist tasting room with its reclaimed wood tables, polished concrete floors, and iron fixtures.

Materra wines can now be found in sixteen states as well as high-end hotels in Japan, China, and Canada. But the best place to experience Materra wines is within the winery's welcoming lavender and flower-filled garden.

"I want people to leave our winery with an experience they will remember," said Cunat.

MATERRA
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