



PINE RIDGE

VINEYARDS

SUSAN LASSALETTE

WINERY CHEF

SUSAN LASSALETTE'S immigrant great-grandparents introduced her early to the culinary culture of their native France. She remembers leisurely Sunday lunches of roast lamb and red wine, the latter retrieved from an oak barrel in their basement. Even as a youngster, she got a splash of wine in her water.

"I was about 10 when my great-grandmother died," recalls Susan. "I got her crêpe pan and her china, which was probably a harbinger of things to come."

But a food career didn't interest Susan initially. Her first jobs were in fashion, as a stylist for The Gap and Esprit, and even when she left that world, she had no plan to cook for a living. But a road trip with a girlfriend evolved into a zany food-truck enterprise—Juanita's Magic Burrito Bus—and planted the seed for a new career.

Susan's kitchen education followed, first at the famed Coyote Café in Santa Fe, then at Joyce Goldstein's groundbreaking Mediterranean restaurant, Square One, in San Francisco. "I learned more there than anywhere else," says Susan. "Joyce taught me that if you understand people's food, you have a better understanding of their culture."

Other California stints followed: as opening chef at Gordon's Wine Bar & Café in Yountville; chef de cuisine at Insalata's in San Anselmo (named one of the San Francisco Chronicle's Top 100 Restaurants during the four years she worked there); and chef for the Gaije House Inn in Glen Ellen and for Cindy Pawlcyn Napa Valley Catering. She joined Pine Ridge Vineyards as winery chef in 2014.

As a winery chef, Susan uses Pine Ridge Vineyards wines as the starting point of each menu, and every dish needs to enhance them—a challenge that requires close collaboration with the winemaking team and a constant focus on flavor harmonies.

In retrospect, the chef believes that her years in fashion prepared her for cooking. "The elements that come into play with fashion—the visual and tactile, the sense of proportion and balance—are all there with food," says Susan. "The medium is just different."

