

LIFESTYLE & CULTURE

Dana Volk Is a “Happy Mommy” New Label Aims to Connect with Moms

BY GABE SAGLIE | JULY 11, 2023

Dana Volk trademarked the “Happy Mommy” wine back in 2018, when she launched her venture as an independent winemaker.

“I always wanted to make a local wine under \$20, as a way to connect with fellow moms,” she recalls. “And I thought, ‘Maybe someday!’”

Five years later, as the repute of her original, fine wine label, Dana V. Wines, continues to blossom, that trademark’s finally been dusted off, and Volk’s second label, playfully dubbed “Happy Mommy,” has just hit the market. They are approachable, easy, fun, high-acid, food-friendly wines by design, and all priced to move. The initial release of four wines, all from the 2021 and 2022 vintages and made from blends of Central Coast fruit, are priced between \$15 and \$24.

“The goal is to appeal to a large audience,” says Volk, a divorced mother of two, “all while celebrating all aspects of motherhood. Each wine has a personality, and each one’s created to match an idea.”

The labels feature lighthearted names, and they’re inspired by moods and experiences Volk feels can create a connection with other consumers, mothers especially. “Date Night White” (\$20) is a light and splashy chardonnay; the “Kids in Bed Red” (\$24), a Rhône-inspired blend of grenache, syrah, and counoise, is balanced and textured; and the “Take Me Away Rosé” (\$15) is flinty and floral and “will always be made with grenache,” Volk says.

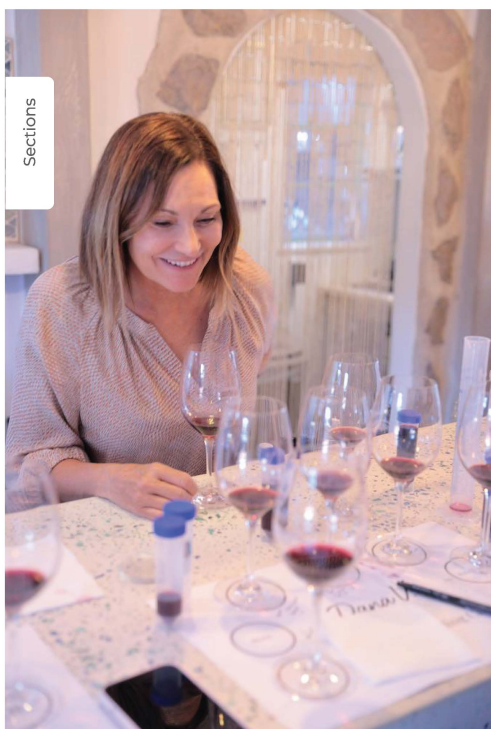
This past weekend, I shared a bottle of the “Girl’s Night White” (\$18) with my wife, **Renée** (herself, a proud mother of three), and we loved this sauvignon blanc’s spicy aromatics, refreshing minerality, and splashy personality. Perfect on a warm, sunny afternoon by the water.

Volk’s path to winemaking has been both unique and circuitous. The Santa Ynez Valley native graduated Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with degrees in nutrition and food science – expertise that landed her a job in the labs at Edna Valley Vineyards. A stint with Kendall-Jackson took her to vineyards in Argentina, Chile, and Italy, and led to a brief sales stint in New York City. All the while, her adventures as a new mom, and the balancing act that inevitably ensues between parenthood and profession colliding, fostered an appreciation for working moms that would, eventually, inspire a wine brand.

Five years in Hong Kong, driven by her husband’s job, would end in divorce and a return home with her two girls to Santa Barbara wine country. Volk worked at two local wineries, Bridlewood and Byron, before she decided to launch her own label. The sale of her wedding



The Girl's Night White from winemaker Dana Volk's new Happy Mommy Wines label is a refreshing Central Coast sauvignon blanc that's priced at just \$18 (photo by Gabe Saglie)



Winemaker Dana Volk worked for wineries like Kendall-Jackson and Byron before launching her own eponymous brand (Courtesy photo)

ring would help finance the birth of Dana V. Wines in 2018.

“My friends kept asking me, ‘What can you grow in the Santa Ynez Valley?’” recalls Volk, “and I’d tell them, ‘Everything!’” The region’s many microclimates, and how that allows a wide range of wine grapes to flourish, is something Volk loved. “I wanted to make a little bit of everything.”

Indeed, the Dana V. line of wines spotlights the area’s premium potential, with various pinot noir and chardonnay wines from AVAs like Sta. Rita Hills and Alisos Canyon. She also makes a Santa Barbara County syrah. And what’s really piquing her interest these days are Bordeaux wines – the potential of the Happy Canyon AVA in the eastern stretches of the SYV for world-class cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and malbec, and the bold blends they can create. Volk makes one such blend each year dubbed “Hope,” which earmarks proceeds for pancreatic cancer research, in honor of her later mother. The Dana V. Wines range in cost from about \$40 to \$65.

The Dana V. Wines tasting room in downtown Solvang is a happening spot, set right along the main drag there, Mission Drive, and featuring a breezy outdoor patio that inspires many visitors to stick around, sit down, and buy Volk’s wines by the glass. “When we first opened [in 2018], I’d say 85 percent of people who stopped by had never done an actual wine tasting,” says the winemaker, who quickly came to consider her tasting room as a chance for educating a steady stream of tourists. These days, with an influx of new tasting rooms and new, upscale dining options calling the Danish village home, the clientele has become savvy. “Now it’s more like 60-40,” says Volk, with the majority of visitors displaying a pretty keen understanding of wine.

As for the Happy Mommy wines, which are only available for purchase online, with the option of being picked up at the Dana V. tasting room, education is a priority, too. Or at least a concerted effort to connect with clients by going beyond wine. The winemaker offers suggestions around movies and books she likes, and game night ideas. “Happy Mommy is a chance to encourage self-care,” says Volk, “and to create a lifestyle vibe.”

Volk is adding a wine she’s calling “School Night White,” a low-alcohol white blend, next spring.

Find out more at happymommywines.com and danavwines.com.