



Dana Volk Talks Happy Mommy Wines

The name came to her while taking a wine break from the kids. It's a moniker that resonates with mothers everywhere.

Happy Mommy Wines is the brainchild of veteran Central Coast winemaker Dana Volk. Longtime readers may recall our previous [interview \[https://www.thewinewrite.com/2019/07/meet-dana-volk-of-dana-v-wines.html\]](https://www.thewinewrite.com/2019/07/meet-dana-volk-of-dana-v-wines.html) with her about her label Dana V. Those bottles are sourced from premium Santa Barbara County vineyards, and are crafted to speak of those special places. The Happy Mommy roster is a more approachable, brighter, fresher take on the region's fruit. These are bottles to crack open after a hard day of parenting. The names reflect that: "Kids In Bed Red", "Date Night White", and "Take Me Away Rose" put one in a mood, don't they?

While "Happy Mommy" is everything cute and catchy, resist the knee-jerk to toss this wine brand aside as a pure marketing play. Yes, the wines are fun. Their names connect with themes that all moms appreciate. The bottles, however, can stand on their own. Dana Volk purchases quality Santa Barbara County fruit with an intent to fit Happy Mommy's price points. Her winemaking is willful, thoughtful, and professional. These are quality wines, reasonably priced, that deliver smiles to her customers. We caught up with the delightful Ms. Volk recently to hear more.



Dana Volk

The Wine Write: What a brilliant marketing concept!

Dana: I had that name tucked away for awhile. My mom, my sister, and I were all sitting around one night having a glass of wine in the kitchen. I was coming up with the Dana V. brand at the time, choosing labels, and trying to pick out names for those wines. It was kind of a joke. All of the kids were running around like crazy while we're sitting there with our wine. That's when the thought of "Happy Mommy" came to me. I thought that name was so cute, but it would not work for a fifty dollar bottle of wine, my price point for Dana V.

I trademarked the name, and held on to it. When the time was right, I pulled it out, and decided to do this. I saw it as a wholesale only brand. I wouldn't have to deal with running a tasting room for it, which has its challenges. I thought this would be a perfect wine for Costco, Target, and Trader Joe's.

***The Wine Write: So a well made, affordable wine with easy access is the goal?***

Dana: It is. We're trying to keep everything around twenty dollars. I was just speaking with my distributor. They're starting to put me in front of a lot of people. They tell me that this concept is great, it's super cute, and it will sell, but the key to it is that I'm a legit winemaker.

This isn't a homogenized product. There is a story here. I'm a woman winemaker. I do everything for Happy Mommy myself, just like I do for Dana V.

And I'm about to go crazy! I've spent all day today cleaning up the labels just a bit. As I was doing that, I was thinking that some companies have whole marketing teams doing these tasks. So my distributor would like to get me out front telling the story.

We're about to commence a lot of cause marketing. I have two children, both of whom are on the autism spectrum. I would like to raise money for autism charities through this brand. My distributor will match what I decide to give. I'll choose some level on a per bottle or per case sale. I think we have a good national charity picked out. That's another part of the story behind the brand, really.



The Wine Write: Is the winemaking any different than what you do for the Dana V. lineup?

Dana: A little bit. I buy fruit from multiple vineyards across Santa Barbara County for Happy Mommy. The grapes I'm getting are a better deal. They're not as fancy in terms of appellation or vineyard. That's really the main difference. I also don't use new French oak barrels for Happy Mommy. That helps keep the cost down, too. Other than that, I do the

same things I do for the Dana V. wines. It's just at a larger scale. I'm making about five thousand cases of Happy Mommy now.

Matt Kettman of Wine Enthusiast came up with a phrase that I like when he did an article on Happy Mommy. He said these are "personality driven" wines. I like that term, because they really fit that descriptor. I'm looking at my target market, and I'm making a wine for them. They have my personality all over them. With my Dana V. wines, they speak for themselves. I get those grapes in from those fine vineyards, and I let that all evolve. The wines speak of where and when they were grown.

It's a whole different model in terms of what I'm doing with Dana V.



The Wine Write: Where are the wines to be found?

Dana: We are in seven states at the moment. The wines are all over California, distributed through Regal Wine Company. RNDC and Southern are conducting test markets in other states. I've also landed some pretty big accounts recently. Raley's is a big supermarket chain in Northern California. They took the wines for two hundred stores. So when we get the results and feedback from all these placements, production could ramp up in the future.

We're in Whole Foods in Southern California. Raley's has us in Northern California. Outside of those, several independent retailers carry Happy Mommy. We're hoping to sell to big chains in the states we're looking into. There are a bunch of grocery store options in Colorado, Maryland, and other places. It's getting out there. I can ramp up production pretty quickly. I bought a lot of grapes this year. I'm sort of in a holding pattern while we wait on feedback. I can bottle those wines at anytime. In the alternative, I could sell it as bulk wine. I'm just waiting to see.

The Wine Write: Are you in the old Bridlewood facility for production?

Dana: I am. We call it Milestone Winery now. It's not open to the public. The man who bought it uses the site as a second home. He does events out there. He really doesn't do anything with wine. Alisa Jacobson leases out the winery. She has people under her license, including me and a few other people who make wine there. We get along great in there. AJ has a good team. I used to work at Bridlewood back in the day. Some of the people who worked there when it was Bridlewood and Gallo are still there. It's nice to see them.



The Wine Write: Tell me about the wine roster.

Dana: I came up with some cute little names for each wine that really resonate with the moms. The first one I made is called "Girls Night White". It's a Sauvignon Blanc. That grape grows great in the Santa Ynez Valley. "Date Night White" is a Chardonnay. I have access to some pretty good vineyards for Chardonnay. I get those grapes at a reasonable price for their quality. We did put about ten percent new French oak on that wine. I happened to have a couple of new barrels. I experimented with them to see if it was something I wanted to do on a larger scale. I think I will. The new oak does add a touch of complexity to that wine.

"Take Me Away Rose" is the third wine. It's one hundred percent Grenache. It will always be totally Grenache. I don't like any other style of Rose'. It's a light, fun wine. All of these wines are pretty bright. I like a lot of acid in my wines, even the wines of Dana V. That makes them very food friendly and refreshing.

"Kids in Bed Red" is the flagship red wine. All the moms can relate to it. Once the kids are in bed, they can relax and pour themselves a glass of wine. It's a Syrah and Grenache blend. Those varieties do well here. There's usually enough around that I can find some pretty good deals. It's an easy drinking blend. I don't know too many people who don't like that combination.

I also have a Viognier/Riesling blend called "School Night White". Have you heard about the trend of "damp drinking"? It's about drinking in moderation, and the movement is picking up momentum with Generation Z members and others who are very health conscious. This is a wine with only 8.5 percent alcohol. My inspiration was to give moms a chance to have a glass of wine on a school night or any other time when they don't want to or can't have much to drink. This wine is super flavorful. It's selling really well.

I'm making a no alcohol wine for next year, but I don't have a clever name for that one yet!



The Wine Write: You mentioned Matt Kettman. The wines have gotten good critical reviews along with positive consumer response. You've done all sides of the spectrum in your winemaking career. Is it harder to make a good, lower priced wine?

Dana: Yes, absolutely. I think the best winemakers do. Not to toot my own horn! When I was working for Kendall-Jackson, we had several projects that would come along. Marketing might say that we need this or that type of wine. Or that they need a wine in a specific price point. As winemakers we all had to scramble and blend wines together to get to that result. That requires a lot more effort and know-how.

For Dana V. I buy very expensive grapes from very well farmed vineyards in great appellations, and I really don't have to do much from there. Those wines almost make themselves! The Happy Mommy grapes are bought for less money. They're still farmed very well. I've had no problems with the fruit that's come in. It's really a matter of blending. That's the key. It has to be done in just the right way. That requires a bit more work for me.



The Wine Write: Your prior experiences at Kendall-Jackson and other stops has to have helped you there. You've done it all before.

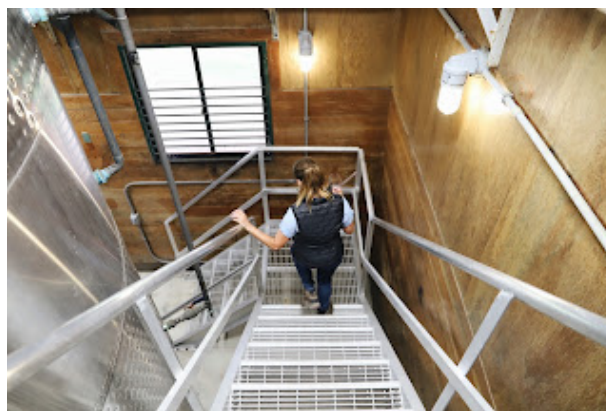
Dana: I have. To be honest, it's my comfort zone. Making wines in larger quantities is a comfortable spot for me. Doing one ton of Cabernet for Dana V. really stresses me out! I've only got that one shot to make it right. So far, so good on the Dana V. side, but I'm way more comfortable bringing in large quantities of grapes, keeping them all separate, and blending at the end.



The Wine Write: Where would you like to take Happy Mommy?

Dana: I would like to see the wines on the shelves at Costco and Target. I want to get it in the most hands that I can. Right now we are in independent stores. We're just getting out in some chains. I definitely want to grow this nationally. I really do think I've got a good market for it. Every tasting I've done, and we've done a bunch of wine festivals in the last year, has gotten overwhelming response. Everyone comes to my booth. Passersby all comment on how cute the concept is. They all want to buy the wines as gifts. I've had dads walking around with my Happy Mommy hats on. I did a little tasting at our El Rancho Market in Santa Ynez recently. Two different people who weren't looking for wine, and didn't drink wine, bought wine for gifting. The idea was that cute.

I was smart to trademark the name. I can tell you that. There's a seltzer company out there called Happy Dad. I need to reach out to them when I find time. That would be a fun collaboration, I bet.



Don't take any bets against Dana Volk. She's done most everything that can be done in the wine industry. Uber skilled in production, Happy Mommy Wines is testament to her supreme level of marketing savvy.

Sure, the label carries good vibes about appreciating motherhood. It sends a message that the hard work involved in raising a family earns one a glass of wine at the end of the day. That marketing spin isn't all there is to Happy Mommy. The wines themselves are seriously good. No

less a wine critic than Matt Kettman of *Wine Enthusiast* gave the 2021 "Kids In Bed Red" a ninety-two point score. That's quite a bang for twenty-four bones. The 2021 "Date Night White" also garnered a ninety-two at a twenty buck price tag. All of the wines have been very favorably reviewed.

Robert Mondavi once commented that nothing was more important than the quality of the wine...except for the quality of the image. Happy Mommy Wines carries both elements in spades. The brand has it all. And supports a cause. We can see this growing into a phenomenon. Couldn't happen to a more deserving lady.

[Happy Mommy Wines \[http://www.happymommywines.com\]](http://www.happymommywines.com)

[Dana V. Wines \[http://www.danavwines.com\]](http://www.danavwines.com)