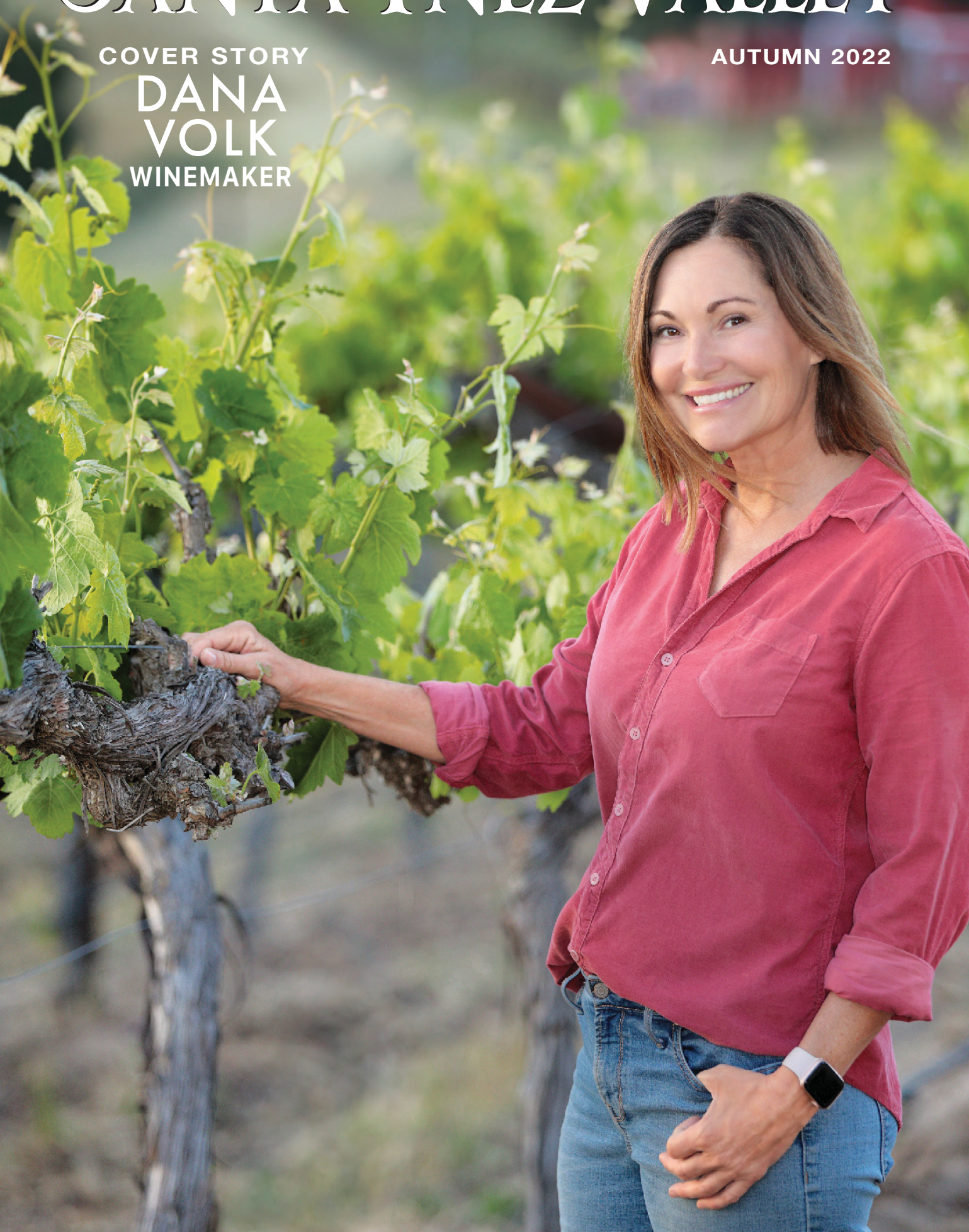


# INSIDE THE SANTA YNEZ VALLEY MAGAZINE

COVER STORY

DANA  
VOLK  
WINEMAKER

AUTUMN 2022





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As wine grapes near harvest, vintners like Dana Volk spend more time amid the vines checking on the progress of the grapes.



The tasting room at Dana V. has an open, beachy vibe.

*Dana V.*  
wines

1588 Mission Drive (Atterdag & Mission) Solvang  
805.688.3488 danavwines.com

Dana Volk, a native of the Santa Ynez Valley, makes her award-winning wines available at **Dana V. Wines** in the heart of Solvang. Emphasizing conviviality, the tasting room—a bright blend of modern Danish design meets beach vibe—spills over onto the front and back patios, making the setting family- and dog-friendly.

Dana’s more than 20 years of experience in the wine industry show in the quality of her offerings. A small-production winery, Dana V. bottles a full range of those varietals that excel on the Central Coast: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Grenache, and Sauvignon Blanc, as well as a selection of custom blends. “Verre de Mer” is an evocatively named fusion of Marsanne, Grenache, and Viognier that’s ideal for casual summer sipping. Be sure to check out the ceramic wine-chillers ornamented with the gentle waves of Dana’s logo. You may also want to sign up with her wine club to keep the lovely bottles flowing in your direction. The tasting room and patio may be reserved for private parties.

The **Bit O’ Denmark Restaurant** at 473 Alisal Road is a Danish-American owned and operated family restaurant that boasts a 55-year-long history of serving quality cuisine to locals and visitors alike. The oldest restaurant in Solvang, it’s also located in one of the first buildings erected when the Danish settlers established Solvang in 1911. With two inside dining rooms and a spacious enclosed outdoor patio (the windows removed for COVID-style ventilation), this landmark eatery offers classy yet casual dining on custom made copper-clad tables. Newly remodeled enjoy the different dining areas —each is distinct. There is a full bar and on certain days the spot becomes an early evening celebration hub. Victor is the Bit’s talented and friendly bartender, and his speciality these days is crafting hand-made cocktails. "



Happiness is contagious



# You *Can* Go Home Again

*Dana Volk wins the Valley over with her wines*

BY GEORGE YATCHISIN



Dana Volk got her hands-on start with her own wine with Pinot Noir in 2014. “It was my first vintage, and this was the very first load of grapes I received,” she said.



**W**hen Dana Volk's family moved to the Santa Ynez Valley in 1975, there were a mere eight wineries in the region. The family probably had no idea that their daughter, then entering kindergarten, would one day be the winemaker-owner of a burgeoning boutique enterprise featuring wines produced from selected grapes across the Valley.

Of course, today there are 275 wineries, and the County is particularly a hotbed for women winemakers. According to one recent study, of the 4200+ wineries in California, approximately 14% of them reported a woman as their lead winemaker—while in Santa Barbara County that figure is 17%.

But those numbers don't begin to hint at what it takes to make a winemaker. Which gets us to the story of Dana V. Wines. Travel, travail, taste, and a hankering for home adds up to a story that's really just at its beginning.

Visiting the buzzy, inviting tasting room for Dana V. Wines in the heart of Solvang—right on Mission Drive—a visitor might never guess what it took to pull this enterprise together.

“It's been tough being a single mom with a couple of kids,” Dana Volk says about her efforts, “but so many people have helped and encouraged me along the way. I credit fifty percent to the awesome industry and fifty percent to the Valley mentality.”

That Valley mentality came from her childhood, doing all of her schooling in Santa Ynez while her parents owned a gas station that has since been torn down.

She remembers how small-town her happy childhood was then, saying, “We had a hard time finding a place to roller skate, there weren't even sidewalks where we lived.”

A animal lover, Dana took full advantage of 4-H and the ability to “do things you can't do today, like



contributed photos

**Daughter, Scarlett, at age 10, found the vineyard an interesting place to be, especially finding a blond tarantula in the vineyard!**



**Dana had a jack-of- all-trades job with Kendall Jackson Winery, including rising early to help out at harvest.**



ride a little Kawasaki 100 motorcycle wherever you wanted.”

Her refined taste was also clearly building even then, as her favorite restaurant memories revolve around winter dinners by the fire at Cold Springs Tavern and at age 10, insisting her birthday dinners had to be at the Hitching Post II.

Her early love for food, and wine once she was old enough to drink it, grew as she put herself through college at Cal Poly bartending and waitressing.

Earning a degree in Food Science and Nutrition, she had planned to be a registered dietician. Needing a job, she learned that Edna Valley Vineyards were hiring in their lab, and with her chemistry background, she landed the position.

The friendly atmosphere there led to her getting to work in the cellar, which she points out, “was not very typical



Dana and her new wine barrels.



Checking new growth at Camp 4, one of the vineyards where she has her own block of grapes. At the heart of winemaking is finding the best grapes. The Valley vineyards produce spectacular grapes.

for a girl in 1996. If they hadn’t allowed that, I don’t know if I would have gone further in the wine world.”

She got further traveling the world, too—a bug she admits is driven by her love of learning about people and their cultures, about food and language.

Landing a job with Kendall Jackson turned her into a jack-of-all-trades, working at properties in northern California, Argentina, and Chile. As an enologist she worked in Sonoma blending all the brand’s

wines.

Her world travels expanded to Asia when she moved to Hong Kong with her then husband and two young children. Not having a work visa, she immersed herself in non-profit volunteering—and private charity work, helping establish and build an orphanage in Myanmar—and her wine studies, working through the difficult levels of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET).

But 2011 was a whirlwind that brought her back to the Valley.

Her marriage fell apart and her mother had pancreatic cancer, so in a week she moved back to the States, found a housing rental, and landed a harvest job at Bridlewood Winery.

Eventually that led to work with Byron, but in a brief downtime, Volk decided to take a viticulture class at Allan Hancock College.

Fearing she would be by far the oldest person in the class, she was surprised to meet up with old friend Brook Williams, who had recently purchased the Duvarita Vineyard outside Lompoc with his family.



That connection, rooted in her own Valley history, led to Williams offering her some Pinot Noir grapes.

Thus, began what was then D Volk Wines, then changed to Dana V. because of confusion with Kenneth Volk Vineyards in Santa Maria.

“It was just two barrels, and I had no labels, even,” Volk recalls. “It was just a fun little project.”

Still, her day job commuting to Byron was time-consuming, and kept her from her children more than she wanted.

“I had to drop them off early in the morning,” she says, “and then have them stay in after care after school.”

So her hope was to slowly build up her own brand, and at least get to work from home when not checking in on vines, harvesting, or working at the winemaking facility.



contributed photos

Dana enjoys Mora Vineyards Tempranillo grapes in the course of a day's work.



The glamorous life of a winemaker. (Dana spraying foam while cleaning grape bin.) Independent small production winemakers succeed as the wines they produce reflect the winemaker's attention, loving care, and attention to detail. The independent is busy taking care of their grapes, working through harvest and all the important early steps involved in the wine making process. The Santa Ynez Valley has birthed many small production wineries, and their wines won gold medals, was highly rated by judges in USA and Europe.



The project went into overdrive thanks to her old connections, once again. She grew up with the Petersen family, having gone to high school with one of the daughters, so when a space next to Mortensen's Danish Bakery opened, they offered it to her.

At the time she only had 200 cases of wine to sell, so the idea of a tasting room seemed beyond her capacity. "But then I walked into the space," she remembers, "and looked out the window and saw that patio. I wasn't going to let the space go to anyone else."

She quickly bought as many white grapes as she could to make wine to quickly sell the coming year—her first white wines. Luckily permits slowed the process down, so she couldn't open until January 2018. Less fortunately, she opened the week of the Montecito debris flow, and no one from points south could make it up the 101 to Solvang.

The tasting room business grew bit-by-bit, especially when Volk realized staying open even a bit later on weekends made her popular with Los Angeles visitors looking for a destination in an early-close village.

That large patio became a life saver during the COVID shutdowns, and its charm is augmented with firepits for cold evenings. "The whole town was so crazy busy that summer (of 2021)," she points out, "the three of us worked our butts off." Yes, Volk is also staffing the tasting room frequently, too.

The winemaking just keeps growing, with that single vineyard, rich and impressive Duvarita Pinot still her flagship.

Realizing tourists like a range of varietals, she jokes she now makes a bit of everything. "Burgundian wines will always be my first love," she says, "but I've since discovered Happy Canyon, so now am making Cabernets, and even a Cab blend called Hope that is a fundraiser for pancreatic research."

Next year Volk will make 2000 cases of wine, which she calls, "A lot to manage all by myself—I'm a one-woman show." Still, her success gives her the flexible schedule to make her family life work, too.

She's also thrilled to be part of the growth in Solvang, claiming, "We all kind of feed off each other, I love the energy here. But it still has a taste of the old days when I grew up—it's just a lovely place to raise my kids."



After the harvested grapes complete fermentation, the wine is moved into its first barrel. Dana's using a barrel transfer tool to transfer the new wine.



Sooner or later everyone working in a winery learns how to drive a forklift.





**Budding future winemaker Scarlett, helps mom by doing punch downs for the pinot.**



**Dana in 2017 with the first bottle of her wine- she pulled the first bottle out of the bottling line. A photo glare obscures the vintage. This wine is her 2017 Grenache Rosé.**



**After Dana's mother died from pancreatic cancer in 2018, Dana made a wine in her mother's honor and named it Hope, and all proceeds from sale of Hope went to research pancreatic cancer. In photo Dana, her brother and sister celebrate the first vintage of Hope in ceremony at Mortensen's bakery. The vintage sold out in eight months. The second release of the new vintage (2020) is in November, and with all proceeds to pancreatic cancer research.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
 Visit the Dana V. Wines tasting room and enjoy the wine and welcoming patio. Music on weekends. 1588 Mission Dr. Solvang  
 Phone: 805-688-3488