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highlights

INTERVIEWS WITH:

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**MELISSA MAROTTA-PAOLICELLI
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CO-PROPRIETORS OF TWO SISTERS VINEYARDS

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Your journey began with the first vineyard planting in 2007. Can you share some of your most memorable moments from those early days?

We started Two Sisters in a very grassroots way. From going to wine shows in Ottawa and visiting licensees with our winemaker to curating our tasting program with what we would want to experience if we were our own guests. We truly started from scratch and went through a journey of self-discovery along the way. Being sisters and going through this process together, we were able to see what our individual strengths were and move forward together in unison.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when starting Two Sisters Vineyards, and how did you overcome them?

When visiting potential licensees, it was a very male dominated environment. There were times where we felt we weren't being taken seriously. We kept persevering and the wines just spoke for themselves. We understood the importance of customer service, so we always made sure that from the beginning, our guests always came first. We made sure all our staff knew that and shared in our vision of what a Two Sisters experience entailed.

How did your family background and values influence your decision to enter the wine industry?

We grew up in a very entrepreneurial family as our father has always owned and managed his own business which experienced substantial growth and allowed us to diversify with Two Sisters Vineyards and Kitchen76; the start of our family's entry to the hospitality and wine production industry. We have another premium winery slated to open in Niagara-on-the-Lake in 2025/26 together with its own F&B operation and another restaurant that just celebrated its one year anniversary in the heart of Niagara-on-the-Lake called 11th POST on Queen. We have grown up with a strong foundation and core principals. This has allowed us to recognize opportunities and better assess risks which is always a consideration with any business, especially if family owned and operated. Our philosophy has always been to start something that we recognize the value in before anyone else. Our father raised us to believe in all the ways that WE

CAN and not the ways that we shouldn't! He has been a great advocate for women in business and we are an example of this. At the core, family is always our main priority and we celebrate each other's successes.

Looking ahead, what are your long-term goals for Two Sisters Vineyards?

We have a love for wine, experiences, and hospitality. We also understand the economics of business, along with the wants and needs of the consumer. Having started off with 76 acres and are now up to over 130 acres, we are naturally evolving to expanding with a secondary winery, Stone Eagle. We also have an additional restaurant called 11th POST on Queen located in the heart of town and we are in the planning stages of a boutique hotel, just a short walk from the Estate.

Are there any new projects or initiatives that you're particularly excited about for the future?

We are currently in the process of constructing a secondary winery that will focus on ultra-premium wines and elevated experiences called Stone Eagle. Wines for this Estate have already been in production for a few years now and the planning on the experiences and hospitality offerings are already in the planning stages (see above).

How do you see the wine industry evolving in the next decade, and how do you plan to stay ahead of the curve?

We are seeing first-hand that Canadian wines are continuing to become more recognized on an international level and that will only grow into the next decade. We have also seen an increase of international visitors. The public realizes and have recognized that Canadian wines can be superior to wines from around the world. We also see that consumers are doing their research and understand quality. We will always look to innovate and be creative with our Estate experiences, taking inspiration from our own personal travels, especially to Europe. We also make sure to get feedback from our visitors, as we feel that is such valuable information so that we are never staying stagnant. Feedback from our staff is invaluable to us as well, they have first-hand knowledge of what our guests are looking for in a winery experience. It allows us



to always keep things interesting and exciting with a focus on the importance of the details, delivered with unparalleled service and grace.

The wine industry here in Niagara will only get better. With a strong focus on responsible farming and quality wine production we will continue to make our mark on the National and International wine industry. We are continuing to invest in the area with a secondary winery Stone Eagle Winery currently under construction and anticipated to open by end of 2026. We are confident that tourism in NOTL will continue to prosper and grow given the beautiful landscape here and focus quality in wine and culinary experiences! We are happy to help navigate this path and provide options for upper tier wines and experiences to all!

What innovations or changes are you considering to enhance the wine and culinary experience at your estate?

We recently have completed a number of expansions and changes regarding our outdoor experiences, as we know our guests love to be within the vines and in nature. Being in Niagara, we have the advantage incorporating our full Estate as part of a visitor's journey, especially in the warmer months. We have created a beautiful wooden pergola by our pond that is located within the vines, and we have extended our Kitchen76 patio and constructed a covered terrace for private events. We are always developing events, special tastings, offerings and experiences within these new spaces with our team so our guests are able to enjoy a variety of things, and not the same thing twice.

What has your experience been like as women in the wine industry? Have you noticed any significant changes over the years?

It has been a journey of growth for both my sister and I and the women here at the corporation. We have seen many women on our team at Two Sisters move up to higher positions due to their passion and dedication. They have evolved and grown with us, accomplishing many milestones in their career which is wonderful for my sister and I to watch. They have become great leaders who have made a significant impact and we are confident they will continue to do so across all our hospitality ventures. Our assistant wine

maker Emily is so valuable to the wine production team together with other female wine and cellar assistants. Our GM and department heads and managers are 95% women. We are very proud of this. There are many women who have filled top tier executive roles at the LCBO who are hopefully going to bring more awareness to local producers here. Well known wineries here in Niagara have female wine makers and proprietors. Female representation in the industry is growing and we look forward to continuing to celebrate this amazing shift.

Have you faced any unique challenges as female entrepreneurs in this field, and how have you navigated them?

We have faced preconceptions at the beginning. Many people assumed that we were not as hands on or assumed there were limitations to what we could accomplish because we were women. We have proven them wrong as we are proud of the consistency in the quality of farming and production of wine to date together with the highest standards in customer service and attention to detail with every aspect of the business. We feel we have successfully set roots in the industry and are focused on the growth of our footprint here and look forward to what more we can offer our guests and TSV wine lovers! The priority has and will always be the consumer which allows us to navigate through any challenges with a feeling of strong purpose.

What advice would you give to other women looking to enter the wine industry?

Focus on the vision and the business. Believe in yourself and your value. It is an advantage to be a woman in any industry given the naturally strong traits we have to connect with people, multitask and the attention to detail we all share. Surround yourself with people who share in your vision and can provide the support you need. We can all learn from each other, and we have found many mentors who have been sounding boards for us and showed leadership qualities that we too have learned from. The biggest power anyone in business can have is the power to say NO. Never feel pressured to agree or commit to something that just doesn't feel right in your gut. You have the power to negotiate and reach a comfort level with any decision that allows you to properly measure risk.



How has your approach to winemaking and business evolved as you've grown older?

From the very beginning, every decision we make is based around ensuring the production of wine at its highest level. We understand the importance of maintaining our brand without ever compromising on quality and what we promise to deliver and never waver from that. In addition to that, it is incredibly important for us to be sure that our staff understands our vision and what we are wanting to achieve here in Niagara. It is a collective effort from everyone under our roof to be sure all is aligned.

What personal milestones have you celebrated during your journey with Two Sisters Vineyards?

For both of us, being recognized within the Canadian wine industry as an upper tier producer of premium wine and receiving the award for 'Best Performing Small Winery in Canada' in 2018. We feel it is a great accomplishment to be recognized for everything we as a team have sought out to do. It has given us the confidence to continue with our vision and seek opportunities to grow within our industry.

Celebrating milestones can sometimes feel like pausing or being content with where we are, but we're always looking ahead to the next challenge or opportunity for growth. That's where we find fulfillment and motivation... knowing that there's always more to learn and achieve.

How do you balance the demands of running a successful winery with your personal life and well-being?

Being mothers and running a business, it sometimes does get overwhelming so balancing it all is very important for us. Time with our family is paramount as they are the reason we do what we do every day so we value our personal time with them immensely. We also LOVE to cook. It is a great outlet for us both and a great way to enjoy our wines while discover new and interesting pairings to share with our team. We have also learned the importance of delegating properly and to prioritize so we aren't handling

too many things at one time and can focus on the responsibilities at hand. Between the both of us and being mothers, we also understand each other's challenges as we struggle to balance it all. We are there for each other when we need it most so we are each other's best supporter and cheerleader.

What lessons have you learned about leadership and teamwork through your experiences?

We are very proud to say that we have the most amazing staff. All members of our team truly understand our vision and work very hard every day making sure all our guests have a truly memorable experience from beginning to end. We have created a working environment that is warm and inviting, with the understanding that we are open to their suggestions or ideas. It is very collaborative.

What legacy do you hope to leave through Two Sisters Vineyards?

Being a producer of award-winning wines that have competed successfully with international wines has helped raise awareness for the exceptional wine landscape we have here in NOTL and the continued growth it will have in the wine industry as a whole. Creating a destination that many people have shared memorable experiences at together with wine education that has given them an appreciation to the dedication in wine making at Two Sisters is very rewarding.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your journey with Two Sisters Vineyards?

Knowing how well received our wines have been in the industry and with our consumers. We know that many people are appreciative of the effort that goes into each bottle of wine. Seeing people happy and joyful at the winery brings us all so much satisfaction and pride. Everything we do is to ensure each guest and consumer has a memorable experience and a connection with TSV.