



In America's Family-Run Wineries, the Kids Are All Right

A new generation of vintners is bringing fresh ideas and innovations

Surprising twists

Finally, a few dynasties take surprising twists. In 2012, Luisa and Anna Maria Ponzi accepted ownership of Willamette Valley's **Ponzi Vineyards** from their parents, pioneers Dick and Nancy Ponzi.

Luisa Ponzi took over the role of winemaking from her father in 1993, after returning from studies in Burgundy. "I just fell in love with white Burgundy," recalls Ponzi. "And I came home and thought, 'Oh my gosh, why aren't we doing this? Why can't we do this?' And so that program, I just completely took over."

Her Pinot Noir program evolved more slowly. "I felt like my father was making great Pinot," says Ponzi. "He had been hailed as one of the greatest winemakers in the country at that point, and so, my job with the Pinot was really just don't mess it up."

Over time, improvements like expanding vineyards, signing on new growers, and purchasing new tools and technology also altered her winemaking approach. "Of course, over time, the Pinots definitely became mine," she says. "I think in my early years, I was probably doing the young winemaker thing, where I was trying to make kind of bigger wines that were a little showy, to get people's attention. As I've gotten older, I think my wines have actually come back kind of full circle back to my father's style, looking for more elegance, looking for more complexity. A little more subtle."

Eventually, however, attitudes changed. "This business is hard, there's no question," says Ponzi. "To run this business, especially in this climate now, you'd better love it, there's no question. And there was a point where we were not having fun. That's when we said, how can we change this?"

In a surprising twist, the sisters sold their iconic winery to Champagne Bollinger in 2021. For Ponzi, who retains her winemaking role, Bollinger's acquisition brings international marketing savvy, a commitment to premium terroir and wine production and operational support. It also brings more freedom and fun. "This last vintage so fun for me because I was doing what I love again," she says. "I had the passion again, that I kind of lost for a while."

5 family dynasty wines to try:

Ponzi Vineyards Laurelwood Pinot Noir 2017 (~\$65)

A floral, red cherry, and spice stunner, with seamless structure, supple tannins, and sublime finish.

