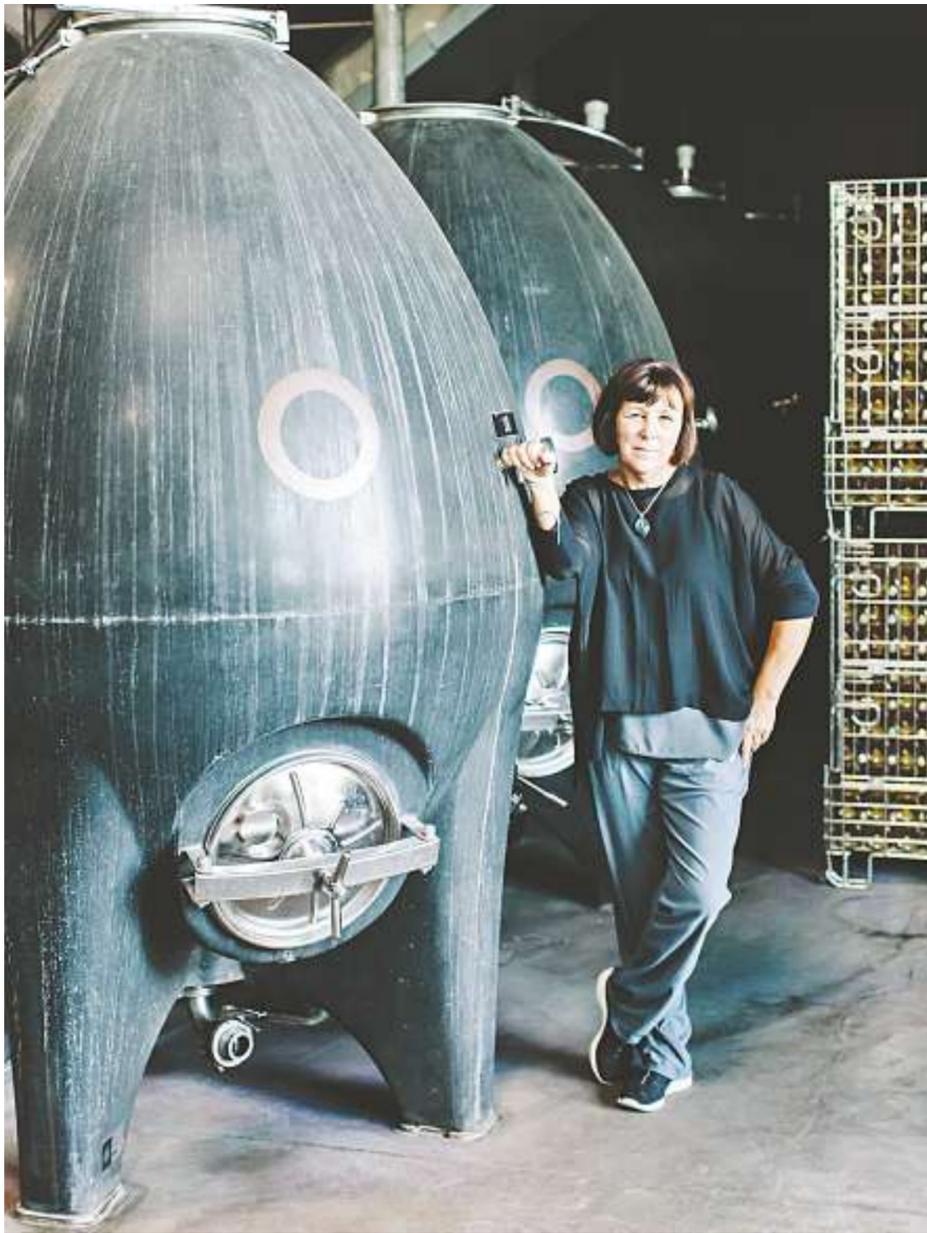


WINE, WOMEN & SUCCESS

Meet some B.C. entrepreneurs making influential inroads in an evolving industry



Christine Coletta, owner of Okanagan Crush Pad, graduated from server to buyer, then became a consultant and, eventually, vintner. She was founding executive director of the B.C. Wine Institute. *JON ADRIAN*

JOANNE SASVARI

When Christine Coletta started working in British Columbia's wine industry as a server back in the 1970s and '80s, there was barely any industry to speak of, let alone other women in it.

"It was very much a man's world," says Coletta, the owner of Okanagan Crush Pad in Summerland and one of the most influential leaders in B.C. wine. "It's changed significantly."

Today, women work in every aspect of wine, often in positions of influence, although as Sandra Oldfield, president and CEO of Elysian Projects points out, they tend to be in "what people see as the softer side of the business," that is, sales, hospitality and production, rather than the powerful, big-money roles.

And it really is big money. British Columbians spend some \$1.2 billion a year on wine, according to 2016-'17 figures, which amounts to about \$284 per capita per year, 20 per cent higher than the rest of Canada. At the same time, the province's 17 grape wineries in 1990 have grown to more than 275 today, contributing an estimated \$2.8 billion to our economy.

"Women were always interested in wine," says Mya Brown, wine director at Botanist at the Fairmont Pacific Rim. "It's just recently that women have been making a profession in wine."

Here's how they do it.

TAKING THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Few women in B.C. wine have followed a traditional career path.

Coletta began her career in restaurants at a time "when all of a sudden, Vancouver got turned on to wine." She graduated from server to buyer, then became a consultant and, eventually, vintner. She was founding executive director of the B.C. Wine Institute, creator of the VQA and co-founder of Wines of Canada. In 2011, she launched

Canada's first purpose-built custom crush winemaking facility, Okanagan Crush Pad, which produces her Haywire label.

She credits her "little wine family," the pioneers of the wine industry, whom she met while volunteering at the Vancouver International Wine Festival. "We were all supporting each other," Coletta says.

Like Coletta, Dana Lee Harris started her career in hospitality, but migrated to sales and, in 2001, was headhunted to become Western Canada manager for Robert Mondavi. "Then they were bought by Constellation and let their whole international division go. I had to reinvent myself and wanted to be in charge of my own destiny," Harris says.

She started her own company, Dana Lee Consulting Ltd., and now promotes local wineries and international wine regions like Argentina and South Africa. "Anything to result in a lift in sales," she says.

Oldfield, too, has reinvented herself. In 1994, she moved to the Okanagan to become winemaker and co-owner of Tinhorn Creek Winery. Then, in 2011, Peller Estates bought Tinhorn Creek and suddenly Oldfield was without a job. So she created Elysian Projects, which advises people in the wine, beer and spirits industries on everything from succession planning to finding properties to buy. "It's pretty much what anyone wants me to do," she says.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

Just as new agencies and wineries popped up in the 1980s, the role of the sommelier — traditionally snobby, intimidating and male — was ready for reinvention.

The timing was perfect for sake sommelier Iori Katakao, who came to Vancouver from Osaka in 1988. "When I arrived here, I had no choices, it was just big-box sake," the owner of Yuwa Japanese Cuisine (formerly Zest) recalls.

SEE WOMEN WINE CULTURE ON 18

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

SPONSORED BY STITTGEN FINE JEWELRY

Ladak passionate about creating unique jewelry that tells a story

Stittgen Fine Jewelry founder and entrepreneur leads all-female team in West Vancouver

BY G. MARION JOHNSON
POSTMEDIA CONTENT WORKS

If you enjoy what you do, you'll never work a day in your life, the saying goes. That phrase rings true for Selina Ladak, founder of Stittgen Fine Jewelry. The West Vancouver entrepreneur and mother of two has built an extraordinary business with an all-female team—a rarity among jewellers—and she loves every moment.

Visiting the seaside jewelry store is like exploring a contemporary museum, the bright space displaying so many exquisite pieces of original, wearable art that were hand-crafted right on-site. The gems are as unique as its master goldsmith's designs: there are diamonds and pearls of course, but also smoky quartz, black diamonds, cognac diamonds, tourmaline, sapphire, rose quartz, labradorite and more.

Ladak's passion for her work goes much deeper than an appreciation for fine custom pieces made of 19-karat gold and other precious materials, however. She values customer service in a business that demands trust. Perhaps what is most rewarding is that Stittgen Fine Jewelry's one-of-a-kind works are not only beautiful but also designed straight from the heart.

"This is a dream job, as we are chosen to commemorate happy occasions by creating unique pieces

that tell a story and have deep meaning for the client," Ladak says.

Ladak got her start in the business after graduating from Simon Fraser University and joining well-respected Swedish Jeweller, where she became a top sales consultant. Then, almost 20 years ago, with acclaimed designer Karl Stittgen having retired and Swedish Jeweller closing, Ladak recognized a gap in the market: there were no high-end jewelry stores left on the North Shore.

Wishing to keep Stittgen's legacy of uncompromising design and quality alive, Ladak, with help from her husband, opened Stittgen Fine Jewelry, just a block away from where Karl Stittgen had opened his original studio in the late 1950s. Since opening in 2003, Ladak has assembled a team of dedicated women, from gemologists to sales consultants, who work together in a collaborative and congenial environment to offer clients a product and experience that is second to none. The highly trained onsite Master Goldsmith Karin Bunzeit studied and apprenticed in her native Germany and is a core part of Stittgen's award-winning team.

Ladak opened a second location in the Four Seasons Hotel Vancouver, which closed when the hotel shuttered earlier this year.

Among the many features that set Stittgen Fine Jewelry apart is that it's one of the few high-end jewellers that still designs and handcrafts its works using time-honoured techniques and specialized hand tools. With the focus on quality, pieces can easily last for generations.

Even many international luxury brands are using wax molds that churn out mass-produced items. Stittgen is often called upon to repair these pieces, and this turns



Following in the footsteps of acclaimed designer Karl Stittgen, Selina Ladak opened Stittgen Fine Jewelry in 2003 in West Vancouver. *SUPPLIED*

into an opportunity for the customer to see firsthand the difference between mass-produced and handcrafted pieces.

Ladak has built a loyal following of clients who value quality over

brand names.

"Many of our customers these days are women who want to purchase something special for themselves," Ladak says. "Many such customers become lifelong friends

PROFILE:

Name: Selina Ladak 
Title: Founder
Company: Stittgen Fine Jewelry

and will drop in just for a cappuccino. Men looking for something for their significant other always have someone to talk to who they trust and can help identify just the right piece."

Giving back to the community is important to Ladak. She is a board member of the Lions Gate Hospital Foundation and the North Shore Hospice & Palliative Project. The shop has created a "butterfly" pendant for honouring the life of your dearly departed; partial proceeds go to North Shore Hospice. Stittgen Fine Jewelry also supports various local charities.

Ladak attributes much of her success to her early experience at Swedish Jeweller, where owner Helen Stewart was her boss. Now a mentor and dear friend, Stewart describes Ladak as talented, professional, and gracious.

"I can relate to Selina because her life is like my own; you have to balance a business with so many other things: family, friends, charity. She seems to do it all so gracefully," Stewart says. "Being in business as a woman can be a challenge, and I'm so proud of everything she has done."

Ladak wanted to re-create a feeling of family at Stittgen Fine Jewelry.

"We run our business with integrity," Ladak says. "The creativity, the commitment and the camaraderie I enjoy at work is the best reward. With a great team and great customers, it never feels like work."