

## MEET ALIS ARROWOOD



Anyone who remembers the Callaway Girls of the 1970s will remember Eli Callaway as a very good marketer of wine. He brought restaurant staffs by the busloads to his winery, for instance, and treated them to a tour, tasting, and lunch, all with the purpose of demonstrating how well his wines paired with food. Since the staff could then say they had visited the winery in person, they went back to their restaurants with a certain intimacy with the wine that enabled them to sell it as their own. Callaway's strategies worked so well that, when he sold his vineyard and winery in 1981 to Hiram Walker, it was valued at the then-astronomical sum of \$14 million. His lunches-at-the-winery scheme certainly contributed to his success, but Eli Callaway's ace in the hole were the Callaway Girls — beautiful, unpretentious, clever women — whom he hired to help sell his wine. Callaway's idea was to not have "snobs with biases" selling his wines. At a time when women could be "forgiven" for not having extensive knowledge of wine, the Callaway Girls posed no threat to their mostly-male customers who willingly shared their wisdom, and then their purchasing dollars on Callaway wines.

Alis Demers was one of the original Callaway Girls, and she was very good at it. It is easy to see why. Watching her in action — at this year's Nantucket Wine Festival, for example — is like watching an updated version of a classic. She is still beautiful, still unpretentious, still very clever, and she still excels at the face-to-face, personal relationship strategy that served her so well as a Callaway Girl. As one of the top saleswomen of wines like dry Johannisberg Riesling, Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay, Alis Demers was well-versed in the wines of Callaway's competitors. At the time that included the Chardonnays of Chateau St. Jean of Sonoma, where Richard Arrowood was the winemaker.

Alis and Richard's professional and personal paths crossed, they married, and in 1986 they founded Arrowood Vineyards

& Winery, whose Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon have consistently received high critical acclaim. With Richard at the winemaking helm, Alis Arrowood took to the road as lead marketer and salesperson. "The first year was easy," she recalls. The couple's initial Arrowood wine, from the 1985 vintage, was released in 1988. "All the people who had the purchasing power knew Dick Arrowood as the winemaker from Chateau St. Jean. The wine sold before it was released."

But then, heading into the economic downturn of the late 1980s, the market toughened and Dick and Alis quickly went through their cash reserves. To compound the problem, buyer recognition of Dick's name on the label started to fade. In the earliest years of Arrowood, the *buyers* in the trade knew Dick Arrowood's name from Chateau St. Jean and selling the wine was easy. But the *consumers* in the general public did not recognize his name, so when the Arrowood-friendly buyers moved on, sales declined. By 1991 Alis and Dick were wondering if starting their own winery was such a good idea. Then two of their growers — who had worked with Dick Arrowood when he was the winemaker at Chateau St. Jean — said the Arrowoods could pay them next year. "It made a difference for us," Alis Arrowood said, by helping them get their financial legs under them. It also gave her time to strategize about building a purchasing base for Arrowood wines among consumers. Her job, as she saw it, was to "relay the story between the back of the bottle — where Dick Arrowood's name was on the Chateau St. Jean label as winemaker — to the front of the Arrowood bottle as winemaker and proprietor. For 15 years [before we started Arrowood] people reached for the Chateau St. Jean label, for its reliability, and Dick Arrowood's name was on it." Now it was time to turn the corner and focus on the Arrowood name and its brand.

For the next 20 years Alis Arrowood relayed the story, and sold the wines of Arrowood with evident success. During the Nantucket Wine Festival in May 2009, for example, Alis represented Arrowood at a luncheon at the beachfront Galley Beach restaurant. The theme was “A Classic American Quartet” and Arrowood was joined by Christopher Howell of Cain Vineyards, Chuck Wagner of Caymus, and Ray Coursen of Elyse Vineyards. Even in that company, the Arrowood wines — and the Arrowood brand that Alis and Dick have cultivated for so long — were exceptional. Alis was first-up with Arrowood’s 2003 Reserve Speciale Cabernet Sauvignon and their 2006 Reserve Speciale Chardonnay. The Cab showed especially well with its supple tannins, black fruit and cassis, but it also had a sense of *in medias res* about it. It was meant to be aged longer, and it invites return visits three, seven, and ten years from now. Although Alis and Dick have sold the Arrowood winery — first to Robert

Mondavi, who then sold to Legacy Estate Group, who then sold to Kendall-Jackson Wine Estates — their influence is still obvious.

“Dick has a hard time closing the door,” Alis Arrowood said. “It’s hard for him to leave a project he respects, which is why he lingered at Chateau St. Jean even though we started Arrowood, and it’s why he’s lingering at Arrowood even though we started Amapola Creek.” Amapola Creek Vineyards and Winery in Sonoma is the couple’s newest venture and their first release falls on the 20th anniversary of Arrowood’s first release. Although marketing wine today is not the same as marketing wine when she began as a Callaway Girl, or even during her years with Arrowood, Alis Arrowood is still in the business of communicating the story from one side of the bottle to the other. Except now, on every label of the Amapola Creek wines, Alis Arrowood’s name and signature is there too, on top of Dick’s.

— Cathy Huyghe