

# GENTRY

SOUTH BAY

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010

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ISSUE

Kim Stubblefield

JAN/FEB '10 WWW.GENTRYMAGAZINE.COM

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## local gentry

### The Good Life

Carolyn Smith found love, family, and wine all in the same place.

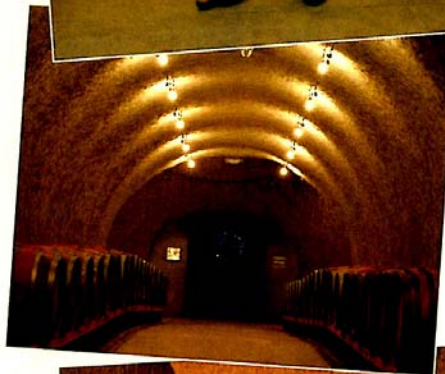
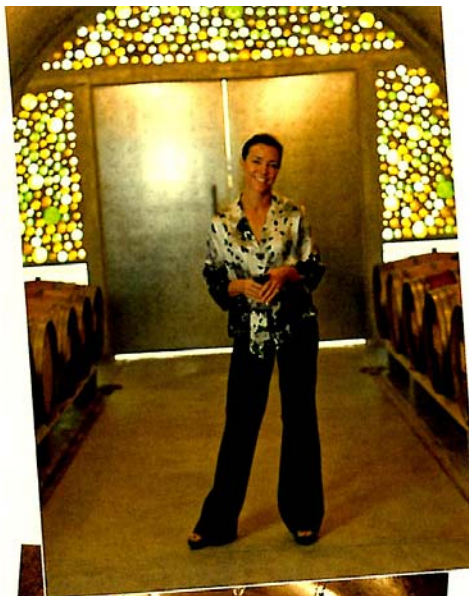
It's a rare joy when your profession complements your lifestyle. And it's even better when that lifestyle involves a Calistoga winery. Meet Carolyn Smith. She and her husband Jeff own and operate Hourglass Wines, which has produced one of Napa Valley's most coveted cabernet sauvignons since its 1997 vintage was originally released in 2001.

But, as we all know, it takes a lot of time and hard work to be an overnight sensation. "We didn't plan it at all," says Carolyn, a fourth-generation San Franciscan who spent much of her childhood growing up in Atherton. The Smiths' story goes back to their meeting in San Francisco's Marina neighborhood when she was working as a television producer and he was in sales and marketing for SKYY Vodka, while also moonlighting as the lead singer of a rock band of local repute. The couple loved their urban life but gazed across the bridge to the North Bay as a place to settle down and raise their family (they have an 11-year-old daughter and an 8-year-old son).

The area was also already home to Jeff's family, as he grew up there when Napa Valley was only a hint of the wine mecca it was to become. When Jeff's mother, who had run Napa's first Bed and Breakfast with Jeff's father and grown grapes for retail, planned to sell the property in 1991, Jeff and Carolyn encouraged her to let them manage the vineyard instead. "Jeff said, 'Could you take care of selling wine?'" Carolyn remembers of her official switch from TV to wine marketing.

The Smiths took advantage of the new model sweeping the Valley at the time—to produce and sell wine, not just grapes. Four acres of cabernet were planted in what could be described as the "hitch" of an hourglass, the natural shape of the Valley, and from whence their winery name came. After rave reviews (from no less than *The Wine Advocate's* Robert Parker), the small vineyard stepped into world-class status. The brand recently expanded with the purchase of the new 40-acre Hourglass Blueline Vineyard, just north of St. Helena and which hosts its own winemaking facility and produces their estate cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and cabernet franc vintages.

The Smiths are also staying busy hosting the Valley parties they're famous for—including their annual Backstage Pass event, which raises money for the St. Helena Unified School District—and remain close to the land that reminds Carolyn so much of her own upbringing. "Napa Valley reminds me of the Peninsula I grew up in. It's rural and how I remember the Peninsula," she says, harkening back to a time when San Jose boasted orchard after orchard, as well as her own Menlo-Atherton High School tennis-playing days. "We have a laid-back atmosphere," she says of the new facility, where you can even play a game of ping-pong while you taste. A rare joy, indeed. ■



PHOTOS: DOUGLAS STERLING