

Ser Winery (CA sales only)

Santa Cruz Mountains



Nicole Walsh came to the Santa Cruz Mountains by way of Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula, where she worked in the state's wine industry for four years after graduating with a degree in enology and viticulture from Michigan State. Her first gig in California landed her with Randall Grahm at Bonny Doon in 2001, and she stayed with him until 2020. She did every imaginable job during her tenure, including, of course, sourcing fruit. She took one break in 2008 to move her family to New Zealand for a year to make wine at the Churton Winery, where she helped the winery convert to biodynamic viticulture, but

then Grahm's vision of a final great undertaking enticed her back to the northern central coast. That vision unfolded (and continues to unfold; Grahm's still at it) at Popelouchum, located due east of Monterey Bay in the foothills of the Gabilan Mountains, where Grahm embarked on a wildly ambitious 10,000 vines project to discover a true American match of vine and site. Nicole became his project manager, working with engineers, architects, surveyors, contractors, and labor crews to plant and manage orchards, olives, gardens and of course vineyards amid Popelouchum's 400 acres. Throughout that time, she was also a winemaker at Bonny Doon.

In 2012 she started her own label, Ser. Essentially meaning *to be* in Spanish, the word is a reference to origins, and the label became Nicole's way of showcasing varietals and small, independent vineyard sources with which she has an affinity. Each of these vineyards is influenced by its close proximity to the Pacific, and Nicole is an avid surfer, hence the unifying image of the wave on her label. She works with growers spread among the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Gabilan Mountain range, the Cienega Valley, Monterey, Paso Robles, Santa Ynez, and even one source in the Mokelumne River AVA of Lodi. She's a minimalist in the cellar, working with light extractions, natural ferments, low sulfur additions, and little or no fining or filtration. If there's wood involved in the aging process, it's well considered, be it old or new, standard barrels or large puncheons. She works with a variety of grapes, including Cabernet Pfeffer (there's only some 12 acres of the stuff in California and she's one of the rare winemakers with access to this grape) and Nebbiolo (Barolo may be her favorite wine). At one point, she reached a production of 1,000 cases, but now the annual mix runs between 500 and 800 cases. She makes her wine at the Bargetto Winery in Soquel, down the road from Santa Cruz. Hers are true artisan wines whose strength comes not from high octanes or cellar artifice, but from clear, clean fruit and balance.

FYI, she's also partnered with a company named Maker to produce wines in cans on a small scale. One of them, a sparkling wine, got placed with United Airlines in 2024-25. <http://www.serwinery.com/>