

# Valley Girl

Angella Nazarian continues her series of candid conversations for *LALA* with Ann Colgin, vintner and founder of Colgin Cellars, and trustee and executive committee member of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

## Angella Nazarian: Why did you start Colgin Cellars?

**Ann Colgin:** I started the Colgin label in 1992. So, this is our 25th anniversary of the wine, which is really exciting. I started on a shoestring budget, buying grapes from a grower and making wine at the co-op. I always felt like I was the new kid on the block, but I don't any longer. Originally, my purpose was to showcase different vineyard sites in Napa Valley, and that is still what we do. Today, we make four wines from three different vineyard sites, and our goal is to show the distinctiveness of these fantastic properties and to express the finesse and beauty of Napa Valley.

**You have said that each vintage has its own personality, and you have to play the hand you're dealt by nature. That really intrigued me. Could you tell me more?**

That's one of the beautiful and challenging things about being in an agricultural arena. Every year, mother nature provides what she provides. Sometimes that is challenging, and sometimes it's easy. It's always different. There are similarities between certain vintages, but every single one has its own personality. That's one of the things that informs what we do.

**I find it fascinating that your background is in a completely different field. You studied at Sotheby's, correct?**

Yes. When I got out of university, I studied with Sotheby's in London, and that was a very eye-opening time for me because I tried wines that I had never had the opportunity to try before. It was very fun and exciting, and it made me want to have a relationship with wine for the rest of my life. Then I moved to New York City, and I got a job at Christie's. That was fortuitous because my mentor at Christie's was a big wine lover and also one of two auctioneers that came each year to auction in Napa Valley. In the '80s, I attended my first auction in Napa, and I got to see a lot of wineries behind the scenes and meet a lot of the vintners. The people that I met made me fall that much more in love with Napa, and I wanted to spend more time here.

**Why did you want to make wine? Was it to be creative or to make something that doesn't exist, or did you want to be closer to the process?**

It was a little bit of all of that. I also love to entertain, and I love to be with people. Wine, for me, is something that has always brought people together around a table with a great meal. It's very important to me—especially today—to try to teach the younger generation that one of the best things you can do is put away your devices, sit down

at the dinner table with your family and friends and really be present. Wine stimulates conversation; it is part of a wonderful lifestyle; it gives you something to contemplate and think about; and it's a great accent with the great food that we all try to eat today.

**Isn't that the real power of wine to bring people together?**

Yes, and you know it's opened so many doors for me. I have made so many friends that I wouldn't have met in my life if it weren't for wine. It's a wonderful hobby for people to have, a wonderful passion. There's a great synergy between art and food and wine, which is actually how I put together this wonderful LACMA event.

**Yes, I wanted to talk to you about the intersection of art and wine and food, because you really brought together the best of the best for the LACMA Collectors Committee weekend that you recently planned.**

Well, it's a really fun weekend. On Saturday morning 10 curators give a sales pitch about a work of art they want to buy for the permanent collection at LACMA. It can be from any avenue at the museum because LACMA is an encyclopedic museum; it's varied in its scope. The curators do a tremendous job presenting the sales pitch, and then people get to vote on how the money is raised or spent. I added a wonderful element to this weekend: a Friday night dinner party series, each hosted by a trustee or big supporter of the museum. There are seven of these dinners, and I provide a guest vintner and we also secure a guest chef. The dinners are intimate, no more than 36 people, so everyone gets to know each other and see the collections that are owned by these incredible supporters of the museum.

**I know that you're an art collector. Do you have a favorite piece of art?**

Years ago I bid on a piece at Sotheby's by Ed Ruscha that got away. It is one of those moments that I still kick myself about.

**Which one was it?**

It was one of his gunpowder paintings, and it said "Grapes." I so wanted it, but it soared way past the high estimate. Of course, it would have been a bargain looking back at it, and that's so often the case. Fortunately, a good friend of mine was very friendly with Ruscha and helped convince him to do a private commission. Ed did a "C" in grapes that is inspired by the capsule of the Colgin bottle. It's here in our condo in Santa Monica. It's so personal; it is my most favorite piece.



Collector and vintner Ann Colgin is celebrating the 25th anniversary of her wine label, Colgin Cellars.