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AN ALL-STAR PANEL MAKES THE CASE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION AT A NAPA EVENT HOSTED BY NONPROFIT **WINE WOMEN**

story and photos by Deborah Parker Wong

WHEN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Wine Women recently brought together a group of female wine professionals for a no-holds-barred discussion on the opportunities, challenges, and costs of continuing wine education, the goal was to serve up inspiration on tap. I served as moderator for the panel, which was held at Naked Wines in Napa and featured bottlings—many of which were made by women—from owner Ryan O’Connell’s portfolio.

Wine Women Education Director Olga Mosina assembled a dynamic group of speakers who hold certifications and degrees from the world’s most prestigious wine programs. In addition to sharing the requirements and expenses related to their continuing education, the panelists unanimously agreed that they’ve received a high return on their investment through their successful careers.

C. Mondavi & Family CFO Claire Hobday, a recent graduate of Sonoma State University’s Executive MBA program in wine business, has held senior finance roles in three countries: England, New Zealand,

and the U.S., where she realized that an MBA “was a prerequisite to advancement as a finance professional.” As a relative newcomer to the California wine industry, Hobday also wanted to expand her network, and she found ample opportunity to do so. “I embraced the mindset of a C-level executive, and [as a result], I was perceived by prospective employers as a C-level candidate,” she said.

As for Certified Sommelier Sylvie Tannhauser; training with the Court of Master Sommeliers has, in her words, “given [her] the skills and credibility [she needs] to train and manage the hospitality team at Cakebread Cellars.” As Assistant Tasting Room Manager, Tannhauser conducts weekly staff training on wine theory, tasting, and customer service while seeking additional venues for her own education: She’s currently pursuing her Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Level 3 and Society of Wine Educators (SWE) Certified Wine Educator certifications.

Wine Business Monthly Managing Editor Erin Kirschenmann, meanwhile, said she’s



Nakedwines.com People Manager Seanna Ochoa and Portfolio Manager Laura Bacharach with Elizabeth Smith, Ph.D., of the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone.

“making up for the business classes [she] didn’t take while pursuing a journalism degree in college” as she works toward earning a WSET diploma. Among her major takeaways so far is that, “in any profession, you’ve got to understand how your decisions and actions impact the bottom line,” she explained. “Let’s face it—money talks.”

Finally, Balkis Johnson, a full-time student in the advanced viticulture program at Napa Valley College, shared her ambitions to start her own brand. She recalled that when she moved to Napa Valley, she “had to learn the language of wine,” so she enrolled in the Wine Industry Sales Education (WISE) Academy and adapted her skill set to include winery sales and customer service. “It gave me credibility,” said Balkis of her training, noting that she has since pursued her Certified Specialist of Wine certification from the SWE as well. For more information on upcoming Wine Women events, visit winewomen.net. ❏



Pictured from left to right are panelists Erin Kirschenmann, Claire Hobday, Sylvie Tannhauser, and Balkis Johnson. Not pictured: Deborah Parker Wong.