



Fab People: Black Leaders in the California Wine Industry



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Yountville

*In 2016, Kelly E. Carter joined the team at **Alpha Omega** after an award-winning journalism career, one that spanned from Los Angeles to Italy to New York to San Francisco and first introduced her to the wonderful world of wine. Now as the director of communications of the Rutherford-based winery, Carter gets to revel in the aspects of wine that she fell in love with in a beautiful region that brings her calm and peace.*

What inspired your career jump from journalism to the wine industry? Journalism has changed so much – and not for the better – from when I was in the fourth grade and told my mother I was going to become a journalist. I enjoyed an incredible, award-winning career covering sports, entertainment and luxury lifestyles, which introduced me to the world of ultra-premium wines and allowed me to travel to various wine regions throughout France, Italy and South Africa. I moved to Napa Valley while still working as the editor of a San Francisco magazine and fell madly in love with what wine represents, the blending of art and science, the labor and passion, farming and being outdoors and the conviviality of sharing wine with friends and strangers. In 2016, when Michelle Baggett, who founded Alpha Omega winery with her husband, Robin, asked me for recommendations on hiring a PR person, I recommended me. It was a no-brainer!

What drew you to Napa Valley? I had moved from my native Los Angeles to Italy in 2003 with the plan to live in Italy for the rest of my life. I joke that I couldn't find a count I could count on. After a glorious two years living *la bella vita*, I moved to New York, then back home to LA and later to San Francisco, where the fog and freezing summers sent me fleeing to wine country at every opportunity. The sense of calm and peacefulness that fell over me when I drove past vineyards in Sonoma and Napa is indescribable. It's like being in the Tuscan countryside. And, if I can't live in Italy, then Napa Valley is the next best thing. Napa Valley suits me perfectly because it's a sophisticated farming community with residents from all walks of life who care about one another. Yes, it shuts down early. But we starting olaving early here too.

fountains and people on the expansive terrace looking back at views of the Mayacamas Mountains, vineyards and fountains and say, 'I want to be over there.' And now I am. Talk about manifesting one's destiny! Although Alpha Omega is best known for its amazing portfolio of Single Vineyard Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignons, it's the elegant and refined Chardonnays that surprise people the most. Unfortunately, some people still associate California Chardonnay with butter.

What is the biggest reward in working in the wine industry? What about the biggest challenge? Industry discount! Seriously, the reward is literally tasting the fruits of one's labor two or three years after harvest. I love getting hands-on experience in the vineyards and cellar because it makes me appreciate each sip of wine even more. So much heart goes into each bottle. The other thing is people come to Napa Valley to escape from the real world. Visitors are generally in a good mood, which makes for a pleasant working environment. It's not life and death situations at wineries.

On the flip side, it is the wine industry not being reflective of the real world that is one of the biggest challenges. Diversity remains a huge issue. Things have certainly improved during my seven years in the industry, but there is still a long way to go in terms of marketing to different communities, hiring practices, not prejudging based on external characteristics and factors, and making wine less intimidating. Sustainability is a major challenge because of climate change, but there is a huge focus on this issue in wine regions around the globe, which gives me some hope.

What does the future of the industry look like to you? I'm encouraged by what's ahead for the wine industry. Although I constantly see articles about how people in their 20s and 30s opt more for cocktails than wine these days, I see differently when I look around Napa Valley (and beyond) at all the young people who range from wine newbies to those who were introduced to wine through the wine-collecting parents. Organizations such as [Wine Unify](#), the [Association of African American Vintners](#), [The Roots Fund](#) and [The Hue Society](#) are providing education, support, resources and more for POC. Through Wine

important to promote various jobs within the industry, whether it be in tech, sales and marketing, events or shipping, to people of all ethnicities to keep new ideas flowing into the industry and continue introducing more people to wine.

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