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Wine Talk: Kate Upton Adds Wine to Her Résumé

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Kate Upton, cover model turned Cabernet mogul (Amy Sussman/Getty Images for Vogue)

From the Aug 31, 2020, issue

Supermodel and actor Kate Upton shot from obscurity to international fame in 2011 with a viral video and an appearance in *Sports Illustrated*. She'd be on the cover of the magazine the following year—and then three more times—and has since expanded her career in modeling and acting to campaigns for Bobbi Brown, Express and Guess, plus parts in *The Other Woman* and *The Layover*.

Through her travels with her husband, Houston Astros pitcher Justin Verlander, Upton, now 28, grew to love wine. At Auction Napa Valley 2016, she offered to accompany the

winning bidder of one lot to a Golden State Warriors championship game; the lot gaveled off for \$1.04 million. In 2019, the couple decided to add wine to their résumés, becoming co-owners of Immortal Estate in partnership with friend and Tusk Estates proprietor Tim Martin, who had first invested in the property in 2016 and changed its name from Hidden Ridge.

The steep, Cabernet-dominated vineyard is on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas Mountains. It's a dramatic site, ranging in elevation from 900 to 1,700 feet, with 50 acres planted on the slopes of Spring Mountain. Upton recently spoke with senior editor MaryAnn Worobiec about her favorite boutique producers, her pilgrimages to wine institution Bern's Steak House, and what she and Verlander are up to in the kitchen these days.



Kate Upton and Justin Verlander have made it to the top of their fields, and now they're pretty high up on Spring Mountain too. (Courtesy of Tim Martin)

Wine Spectator: How did you get into wine?

Kate Upton: When I was working and I spent a lot of time in Europe, it was very much a part of the culture there. After a long day of work, everyone bonds over dinner and a glass of wine.

I always preferred white wine until somebody, for my 22nd birthday, brought me a few bottles of Opus One. That's when I knew I was really a red wine drinker.

WS: Did you start traveling to wine regions?

KU: When Justin and I first got together [in 2014], we both found a similar interest in red

wine. When we first started dating, I was in Tampa and he was in Lakeland, Fla., so we would go to Bern's Steak House because it had [one of] the largest wine cellars in the world. We enjoyed trying all of these new, fun wines together. For off-season that year, it was both of our first trips to Napa.

Going to Napa completely changed our experience with wine. Learning about how it was made, and the culture in Napa ... To their core, everyone there is a farmer, and they have this love of wine. There is such a strong community there—there's a sharing of wine and information. We were hooked. We try to go back at least once a year.

WS: Do you have favorite places to visit in Napa?

KU: We try to go to at least one different place just to experience something different each time, but we love Tusk; it's such a beautiful property. Hourglass is a cool experience, in the vineyards and cave. We actually did Melka last time—I love their CJ [Cabernet]; it's a very drinkable wine.

Napa is about friendship and a family environment. Take a place like Lamborn. You walk in, and it's like you're walking into a family house. You see how much love they put into the wine. Being able to experience that and hear their generational story, it adds so much to the wine.

WS: Do you collect wine at home?

KU: Yes, we have a wine cellar. It's one of our favorite places in our home. Wine really brings people together. [Our cellar is] mainly Napa Cab. Then we have different fine wines, mainly super Tuscans, Brunello. One of Justin's former teammates on the Astros, Gerrit Cole, is a big Bordeaux lover. He has shared his love of Bordeaux with us and it's really rubbed off. So we're kind of new Bordeaux drinkers. But I'm definitely ready to learn—ready to get some bottles under my belt.

WS: Do you enjoy cooking?

KU: We both enjoy cooking. We mainly cook in the off-season, because that's when he's home for dinner. I always cook different fishes, or salmon. He's usually grilling steak. He's really into sous vide right now, which is really amazing.

WS: How did you get involved with Immortal?

KU: From our frequent trips to Napa, we formed a friendship with Tim [Martin], and we were [members of] Tusk. Tim reached out to us about wanting to take over Hidden Ridge and rebrand it, because it was an amazing wine.

I think we were probably the easiest sell. We have a real love for Napa, wanted to find a way to become involved, but also wanted to make sure it was the right team and the right wine. When I first got involved, I was pregnant, and I banned myself from Napa; it was too sad. Now, though, I'm hoping to be way more involved in each of the steps.