






# TIPPING THE GENDER SCALE

## AT THE RITZ-CARLTON MARIKA VIDA-ARNOLD'S 'PHENOMENAL FEMMES' WINE DINNERS AND LIST SHINE AN IMPORTANT SPOTLIGHT

BY KRISTEN BIELER

Are you aware that Quintessa, Duckhorn and Domaine Drouhin are all helmed by women winemakers? Marika Vida-Arnold, Wine Director at The Ritz Carlton New York, wants more people to know. Several years ago, she created her "Phenomenal Femmes" series at the Ritz's Auden Bistro, to showcase female luminaries at wineries around the globe.

"I started these dinners to try to bring a bit of balance to our industry—a bit of Yin to the Yang," explains Vida-Arnold. "The wine business can be so male and clubby. I wanted to call attention to all the fabulous women making some of the world's greatest wines."

The dinners—which feature a single wine professional and her wines, paired with a four-course tasting menu by Executive Chef Mark Arnao—have become hugely successful. With both genders. "Men love these dinners! I think both genders like the idea of balance—this isn't about burn-your-bra, break-the-glass-ceiling," Vida-Arnold says. (A percentage of the proceeds are donated to the women's shelter at Crossroads Community in NYC.)

Vida-Arnold has extended the concept to her wine list. Auden's by-the-glass offerings highlight women winemakers with info on their philosophies. There are facts about historical figures such as Madame Clicquot; the "I am woman, hear me SCORE" section features wines that have earned 90+ points from key critics. "Our wine list has become a celebration of women pioneers, rising stars and legends," she explains.

### SOME PHENOMENAL FEMME HIGHLIGHTS

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| Veronique Drouhin | Domaine Drouhin |
| Merry Edwards | Merry Edwards Winery |
| Mia Klein | Selene Wines & Bressler Winery |
| Laura Catena | Bodega Catena Zapata & Luca Wines |
| Lynn Penner-Ash | Penner-Ash Wine Cellars |
| Lilian Barton | Château Léoville Barton |
| Theresa Heredia | Gary Farrell Vineyards |
| Renee Ary | Duckhorn |
| Jasmine Hirsch | Hirsch Vineyards |
| Jean Arnold | Sonoma County Vintners & former Hanzell president |
| Rebekah Wineburg | Quintessa |

Marika Vida-Arnold (above center) with Executive Chef Mark Arnao (left) and (inset, clockwise from top left) Renee Ary, Duckhorn; Laura Catena; Jasmine Hirsch; and Merry Edwards.

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The female focus has also become one of her most powerful marketing tools—a way to differentiate her list, while still covering the range of palate preferences and price points. "Customers comment frequently on our unique list; it's a great way to engage our clientele," she describes.

Fortunately, the pool of women Vida-Arnold has to draw from is large enough to keep the series going for decades. "Every year we see a huge increase in female applicants in all aspects of viticulture and enology," says Renee Ary, head winemaker at Duckhorn Vineyards, and a recent host of a Phenomenal Femmes dinner. "Marika is helping wine consumers become more aware of this shift." ■

INSET LOWER RIGHT CORNER PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUG YOUNG