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PHOTO: DAWN HEUMANN

*Merry Edwards winemaker Heidi von der Mehden.*

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# A Most Challenging Vintage

**MERRY EDWARDS WINEMAKER HEIDI VON DER MEHDEN'S 2020 BOTTLINGS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS** by Meridith May


**EXHIBITING EXPRESSIVE FLAVORS** and textures, Merry Edwards' 2020 vintage not only exceeded expectations but allowed winemaker Heidi von der Mehden to sigh in gratitude that no smoke taint impacted her bottlings. Although case production was down from previous years, she admits, "We were lucky to get through those

awful wildfires."

In fact, to von der Mehden, the results from the 2020 season "were a blessing and a relief." Facing the threat of the fires and their smoke, she decided to pick early at the flagship estate. "The Meredith Estate

was close to being ripe but not quite at optimum—but the fruit wasn't green," she says. Once the wines were made, the only labs that had space for testing volatile phenols were in Australia. So off went samples of Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc from Meredith Estate and the other vineyard sources she uses throughout the Russian River Valley. "Everything we bottled came back A-OK," she tells *The SOMM Journal*. Indeed, it all shows beautifully.

Meanwhile, when the Roederer Collection purchased Merry Edwards in 2019 and the founder passed the torch to Nicole Carter, who was appointed president of the winery, von der Mehden found only encouragement. "Working with Roederer's executive winemaker, Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon, has been a positive experience," she says. "He makes suggestions and oversees the group's wineries all over the world, but he is empathetic and understands our style."

The financial support from Roederer also allows for the opportunity to work with Pinot Noir from the Dach Vineyard and the company's other holdings in Mendocino while making improvements in all the vineyards. For instance, the transition to organic farming at Meredith Estate is a highlight for von der Mehden, who had experience with the practice at Arrowood Estate. Between new vineyard sites and organic farming practices, it's an expanded arena for her and the winery. "I am super-excited to go down that road," she says. 



**Merry Edwards 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$48)** This is the first vintage for which winemaker

Heidi von der Mehden whole cluster-pressed the Sauvignon Blanc grapes. "It preserves the aromatics," she comments. "Sourcing from two estate vineyards—Meredith Estate and Maefield Vineyard—provided the backbone and the clones we needed for this white." One-third Sauvignon Musqué adds floral tones of chamomile, while flavors of luscious pear nectar and candied lemon feel silky on the palate. Minerality peeks out, but the creamy mouthfeel from aging sur lie in French oak for six months defines the finish. **93**



**Merry Edwards 2020 Meredith Estate Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$90)** This wine comes from Merry Edwards' most mature estate vineyard, planted in 1998. Whole berry-fermented and aged ten months in (54% new) French oak, it shows notes of cinnamon candy and Darjeeling tea. Cigar box also enriches the bold palate, with its profile of kirsch, white pepper, and grainy tannins. **95**



**Merry Edwards 2019 Legacy, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$150)** "This wine needed no blending," states von der Mehden. "It's one perfect lot on the Meredith Estate that embodies Merry's legacy." Made from 100% destemmed grapes that are aged nine months in (57% new) French oak,

the inky-purple red is brooding and broad. Black-peppered cherry, walnut, and nutmeg-kissed cigar leaf magnify its complexity. Bergamot, dark chocolate-flavored tannins, and a nuance of graphite complete the experience. **96**



**Merry Edwards 2020 Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley, Sonoma County (\$65)** After the vineyard designate wines are chosen, the remaining lots make up the blend for this wine, which demonstrates the diversity of terroir in the Russian River Valley. Aged sur lie for ten months and aged in (25% new) French oak, it's bright and cheerful, with dark cherry and shaved cocoa. A juicy flow of sweet tobacco and nutmeg comes in mid-palate. Hints of sandalwood and sassafras lead on the graceful finish. **95**

PHOTO: DAWN HEUMANN



**Winemaker Heidi von der Mehden works in the lab at Merry Edwards.**