

*Grace & Style on Cloud Wine*KAREN
MACNEIL

By Annabelle Marceno Pericin

Photography by Vincent Gotti

www.vincentgottiphotography.com

Among the springtime blush of blossoms, scents and colors in Napa Valley, the golden beauty of mustard fields can be seen up and down the roads and throughout the vines. It's one of the reasons why wine expert and author Karen MacNeil happily calls this place home. GEV spent time with her at Cliff Lede Vineyards, one of Napa's most modern and diversified estates, and luxurious Poetry Inn, perched on a hillside in the Stags Leap District. Both properties are owned by the Cliff Lede Family and the perfect locations to showcase the classic beauty of Karen MacNeil.

ELEGANTLY STYLISH

As one of the few female wine experts in a male-dominated industry, Karen MacNeil embodies grace and style balanced with knowledge and authority of the vines. She expresses that being a woman has its advantages, although it can occasionally be tough as the only woman in the room when important and great-wines are being poured. "I believe one should be unafraid of femininity while still exhibiting intellectual gravitas," she describes.

MacNeil identifies her feminine sensibilities as romantic yet strong. She recalls her appearance at eighteen years old, traveling

with her boyfriend to Europe. When they arrived in Amsterdam, the woman who hosted them exclaimed, "My God, it's Katharine Hepburn," referring to her. "Katharine Hepburn was both powerful and feminine, that's the kind of appeal I admire," she claims. As a young woman, she preferred very feminine things especially form-fitting pieces that emphasize the waist. "I've always loved skirts! I didn't buy my first pair of jeans until I was 40 years old. My fashion sense has very little to do with what is fashionable and more to do with what historically makes a woman beautiful and feminine," she clarifies.





Eliza J White Scuba Crop Top \$88.00
| Eliza J Floral Organza Ball Skirt
\$188.00 | Barbara Lee Designs Ltd.
Miss JEAN No. 2 All White Baroque
Pearls Silvertone

When it comes to her sense of style, MacNeil most identifies with characters from eighteenth and nineteenth century literature. Her love of lace expresses her romantic sentiments and if she could, she would have a closet full of them. Jane Austen immediately comes to mind. “I think I missed my century,” she muses. However, if she has to pick a few of her favorite “girly” things from this century, she includes MAC’s red lipstick in Retro, multiple pairs of eyeglasses in varied shades of red, hats to wear in summer — her least favorite season, and coats to wear in fall — her favorite season.

HMUA Josette Vigil Jelveh
josettejelvehmakeupandhair.com

Head Stylist: Awnalee Visalli
Executive Producer: Kaye Cloutman

Featured Locations:
Cliff Lede Vineyards
The Poetry Inn Napa

Featured designers:
Eliza J
elizajdresses.com

Ana Cecilia Ortega
anaceciliaortega.com

Barbara Lee Designs Ltd
fb.com/barbaraleedesignsltdsf

“The finest wines are multi dimensional on the palate. There are wavelengths of flavor, force, volume, and velocity. In my experience when the fifth dimension of the wine is spellbinding, you're in the midst of a great wine.”

- Karen Macneil



Crepe Cctel blue dress by Ana Cecilia Ortega \$700 | Barbara Lee Designs Ltd. Miss Ana No. 2 Goldtone Collar necklace and cuffs with white, grey and black freshwater pearls

WINE CHOSE HER

MacNeil feels that certain things choose you, you don't choose them. She knows that wine chose her and has led her down the path most of her adult life. She always loved wine with food. At 15 years old, she left home for school. She describes how she would sit in her apartment and drink wine every night while she did her homework. "I loved wine, I loved the idea and mystery of it. It wasn't always clear to me I would make my career in wine but it was certainly clear it would be something I would always love," she remembers. "I was under age and back in the early 1970's, the people I would buy wine from knew next to nothing about wine themselves," she says. Self-taught, she bought wine from proper wine stores and learned mainly through trial and error. "Back then, wine was not sold in super markets such as Walmart, Safeway or Costco. Proper wine stores were hugely intimidating," MacNeil recalls.

"As a young woman, I was terrified to step foot in those places. There were older men behind the counter and I was afraid to ask questions, I was petrified they would ask ME questions. For years, I would drink only what was closest to the cash register. I drank a lot of 89 cent Bulgarian reds," she laughs. "I learned wine from the bottom up. I didn't have parents who drank wine. I didn't have access to great wine. My love of it was absolutely primary."





Barbara Lee Designs Ltd. Josefine
No. 2 Red
Coral, Freshwater Baroque pearls,
goldtone



PUTTING SOUL BACK INTO WINE

After graduating from Pace University in New York where she studied English language and literature, MacNeil began to build her career as a food writer. As she educated herself more in gastronomy and wine, the wine books she tried to learn from were written by older British men straight out of the British school system in the 1950's. In other words, they were extremely dry and lifeless tomes. "What I love about wine is the way it reveals the art and culture of a place. These books had stripped everything cultural out of the wine. Absolutely no food, no history, no religion, no customs," she points out.

That seemed wrong to her. "Over the last 15-20 years, I taught myself about wine. I wanted other people to be able to enjoy it," she conveys. MacNeil credits the late Peter Workman of Workman Publishing for getting *The Wine Bible* into print. He had read something she wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* food section and he called her. "Tell me the book you've always wanted to write.

"Great wines incite emotion. They stop you in your tracks. Send chills down your spine. Make you write things like "Oh my God", as a tasting note. Great wines appeal not only to the intellect; they have the rare power to make us feel!"

- Karen Macneil

I love your writing and I want to publish it," he told her. She wasn't sure if she wanted to do a book but he convinced her otherwise. That's when she told him she wanted to do a book on wine, not food. He was surprised yet his reply was, "Okay, wine it is." They agreed it would be global and teach people about wine. MacNeil reveals it was originally conceived as a much smaller book and would have taken a year to write. Ten years later, *The Wine Bible* was finished; it was the book she wished to create. It was also where she developed her philosophy about how to teach wine to a global audience.

The Wine Bible has been a best-selling wine book in the U.S since it was released in 2001. The second edition took a record four years for MacNeil to revise and update. She explains that writing the second edition was in some ways easier because she went into it knowing the Herculean task of research involved. As she had created the "structure" of the book when she originally wrote the *Wine Bible*, she already knew the tone, the feel and the layout she wanted for the second edition. It was released in October 2015. She shares that people who have read the book tell her it's so easy and fun to read. She affirms, "That's how wine should be: not intimidating; it shouldn't be impossible to master."

LIVING AMONG THE VINES

Most of her time has been spent in either New York or Napa Valley so when she decided to move from New York, it didn't occur to her to live in any other place but Napa. "Both New York and Napa are perfect opposites though both are sophisticated. Napa Valley is in a sense, the New York of the wine world. Many important things that have happened in the wine industry, happened here first," she expresses. "I felt living closer to grape vines would make me a better wine journalist and it's true. Everyone here lives and dies relative to the wine industry. Come fall harvest time, it's astounding that even the clerks in the grocery store will be a little on edge." She points out it's as if it were hundreds of years ago where agriculture is the necessity, not an afterthought. Fall and spring in Napa are her favorite seasons. "Fall is coat season. I love dressing in layers, it's also harvest season and anyone in wine knows it's the most important season."

TOPPING THE LIST

How does she top writing a best-selling wine book in the U.S? MacNeil is actively thinking about her next book but hasn't settled on what kind it might be. In the meantime, she's having a lot of fun with something she recently created called *WineSpeed*. It's described as "fast weekly wine intel from Karen MacNeil." In a nutshell, it is quick information, tips, and recommendations on wine, delivered to your email in-box every Friday morning. It's free and anyone can get it just by subscribing at www.karenmacneil.com. The WineSpeed community is now 60,000 strong. "I'm grateful people have really embraced it."



“I love wine because it is one of the last true things. In a world digitized to distraction, a world where you cant get out of your pajamas without your cell phone, wine remains utterly primary. Unrushed. The silent music of nature.”

- Karen Macneil

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“I have a deep appreciation for the historic connection between the foods of a place and the wines of a place. Together the two allow us, however briefly, to actually participate in the culture of a place. And that, it seems to me, is one of the true gifts wine and food offer us.”- Karen Macneil



Rose Cotton-blend Satin Embellished
Robe by Ana
Cecilia Ortega \$1100 | Barbara Lee
Designs Ltd. Miss Ana No. 2
Goldtone Collar necklace and cuffs

KAREN MACNEIL'S Summer Sips and Tips



Freshness is important in summer. Wines should taste vibrant, alive and refreshing. For me, that would mean I would be in the geographies that produce Champagne and Sparkling Wines, Rosé, Sauvignon Blanc including French Sancerre, and a really sheer Dry Riesling. An insider's secret to finding wines that are really vibrant and refreshing is to drink wines that have seasonally cold climates such as Germany, Austria, Northern France, and New Zealand which is a cold spot in the Southern Hemisphere. Also, wines with high acidity impart freshness. Having been to every major winery in the world, I do advise people who want to learn about wine to choose a specific place or region. For two months, drink only wines from that specific region. You begin to get a real sense of the flavor. Switching and drinking wines from different places is often one of the reasons why we never really understand that type of wine. When you move around too much, it's hard to really get the flavor of the place. If you move on every two months or so and if you do this for one year, you will wake up knowing so much more.