

## Trefethen takes visitors behind the scenes with Hands-On Harvest event

By: Sam Jones | Sep 29, 2021



Before giving us blades and sending us into the vineyard, the Trefethen staff taught us how to properly harvest grapes.

Wine lovers from across the country flock to [Trefethen Family Vineyards](#) each year to learn about the different steps of winemaking, and this year.

I, the Napa Valley Register wine reporter, was also able to attend and try my hand at harvest. The winery's annual Hands-On Harvest event — previously named Harvest Bootcamp — brings club members, interested locals and traveling wine enthusiasts alike together for a day of picking, tasting and behind-the-scenes peeks at the family's estate operation, yielding a waitlist year after year.

The morning began with an introduction to Hailey Trefethen, who walked visitors through the vineyard and encouraged us to pick a few grapes along the way to see (and taste) the raw form of the family's wines.



Hailey Trefethen sees herself as a sort of steward to the land, and helps the vineyard keep up their Napa Green and Certified California Sustainable Winegrowing alliance programs.

While the Trefethens had already begun harvest, they did leave a few rows for us amateurs to hack away at for the sake of educational purposes. The vineyard crews taught us how to properly cut the grape clusters from the vines without damaging the plant or losing any fingers, making it look much easier than it actually is all the while.

Their crews typically hit the fields in the middle of the night to harvest, gliding through the rows quickly, snipping cluster after cluster, whereas we got started mid-morning and probably looked a bit more sluggish. Letting these luscious grapes drop to the buckets below seemed sacrilegious to me, but gently placing each bundle to avoid squashing isn't the quickest method of harvest. As a result, our group of over 40 picked about 1,495 pounds of grapes — the same amount that three seasoned Trefethen pickers do in the same amount of time.

Regardless, we still somehow earned our keep, and were treated to an outdoor lunch in Katie's Acre, which proved to be a special spot on the property. As per matriarch Catherine Trefethen's request upon purchasing the estate, instead of cutting down the giant nuisance of a walnut tree that was on there, they planted around it. The result? One acre of eternally-cleared communal space underneath the tree.

Chef Chris Kennedy served a plethora of vegetables grown right there at the Trefethen gardens, as well as a dessert of pot de crème with homemade salt and cream topping. (According to Hailey's brother, Lorenzo Trefethen, if it were up to Chef Kennedy they would have livestock and chickens running around the estate, too.)



After lunch, we headed to the winery to learn about the second half of production: The actual winemaking. Trefethen's winemaker, Bryan Kays, walked us through each step, starting with when the grapes came in from the vineyard. He explained the processes of destemming, crushing, and the other prep required before the grapes begin fermentation, pointing out the different pieces of equipment in use at any given time.



Trefethen winemaker Bryan Kays (left) and Hailey Trefethen (right) explain the winemaking process to visitors at this year's Hands-On Harvest event.

We then tried half-fermented versions of various Trefethen wines, which we were told NOT to actually drink, as we wouldn't be too thrilled about the fermentation process continuing inside our bellies.



Trefethen winemaker, Bryan Kays, answers visitor questions about how to make award-winning wines.

Spit takes and all, this step showed the midway point of transformation between the grapes we were sneaking while harvesting earlier that day and the finished wines we would be tasting afterward, serving as a testament to the transformation of wines before they hit the market. A similar consistency to cider, these half-fermented wines each possessed very different qualities than the muted versions that we would later enjoy from the bottle, many boldly tasting of fruit. After walking through the tank room, we finished the day with a seated tasting in one of the winery's courtyard areas, enjoying the final product after seeing the work that goes in firsthand. For someone who works in a vineyard, this day may seem mundane, but for those who simply drink wine rather than make it, seeing the tedious labor required at each stage of production only makes you appreciate the beverage more.

Plus, a glass tastes much, much better after picking and romping through a vineyard all day.

[https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/trefethen-takes-visitors-behind-the-scenes-with-hands-on-harvest-event/article\\_d70f8715-6ebe-52fb-ba3a-27a14e976787.html](https://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/trefethen-takes-visitors-behind-the-scenes-with-hands-on-harvest-event/article_d70f8715-6ebe-52fb-ba3a-27a14e976787.html)