

NEWS

Diamond Creek Owner Adelle 'Boots' Brounstein Dies at 92

Brounstein and her late husband, Al, were Napa pioneers, making some of California's most prized single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons



Boots Brounstein spoke to a crowd of 2,000 at the Wine Spectator New York Wine Experience in 2016. (Deepix Studio)



By Augustus Weed

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Adelle "Boots" Brounstein, who cofounded Napa Valley's legendary Diamond Creek winery with her husband, Al, and

helped guide the winery for more than half a century, died July 31 following a brief illness. She was 92.

Brounstein, who went by Boots, a nickname her mother gave her as a baby, was widely admired in the industry. Spritely, with an easygoing smile and a light laugh, she and her husband were trendsetters in California, planting Cabernet Sauvignon on Diamond Mountain, south of Calistoga, in the late 1960s. The winery was ahead of its time, focusing on single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon at a time when there were fewer than 700 acres of the grape planted in the entire state.

When [Al passed away in 2006](#)

[\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/napa-pioneer-al-brounstein-dies-at-86-3118\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/napa-pioneer-al-brounstein-dies-at-86-3118) from complications related to

Parkinson's disease, Boots continued to oversee the day-to-day operations at the winery with the help of her son Phil Ross, who joined the winery in the early 1990s. She carried on the couple's vision of producing *terroir*-driven wines from the estate's four vineyards, and [Diamond Creek remains a benchmark for Napa Cabernet](#) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/the-diamond-creek-school-of-cabernet\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/the-diamond-creek-school-of-cabernet).

"Mom was the heart of Diamond Creek," Ross said in a statement issued by the winery, adding, "What she and Al did as pioneers, helping to bring the French idea of *terroir* to the Napa Valley, was extraordinary, perhaps only exceeded by the great work she did over the past decade since Al's passing to maintain Diamond Creek's renowned place in the wine world."

“It’s just going to be a huge loss,” said U.S. Congressman Mike Thompson, who represents Napa, Mendocino and parts of Sonoma. Thompson met the BrouNSTEINs when they moved to the valley, and became close friends with Boots, who put on fundraiser dinners at his home. She was always positive and upbeat, and always willing to help, he recalled. “The valley is going to miss her, the industry is going to miss her, and her family and friends are going to miss her.”

“Ours is a story of inspiration, and then aspiration,” Brounstein told an audience at [Wine Spectator's New York Wine Experience in 2016 \[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/new-york-wine-experience-wine-star-boots-brounstein\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/new-york-wine-experience-wine-star-boots-brounstein), describing the couple’s journey. Always warm and gracious, she attributed their success to a few good ideas and a little luck, but mostly the vision and passion of her husband, Al.

Diamond Creek pioneered single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon in Napa and helped establish th...

Born Feb. 25, 1927, in Oakland, Calif., Adelle Sternback was raised in Los Angeles, and it was there that she met Al Brounstein on a blind date in the 1960s. He was a successful pharmaceutical wholesaler in Southern California who had become enamored with wine after taking a wine-appreciation course at UCLA. Al introduced Boots to French wine, and it soon became her passion.

While scouting California for a suitable site to plant Cabernet Sauvignon, the couple found a rustic 70-acre property on Diamond Mountain, purchasing the land in 1967, the same year that they married. After seeking advice from wine luminaries [André Tchelistcheff](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/andre-tchelistcheff-1901-1994-6106) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/andre-tchelistcheff-1901-1994-6106>] and [Louis P. Martini](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/napa-valley-vintner-louis-p-martini-dies-7943) [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/napa-valley-vintner-louis-p-martini-dies-7943>], they planted 22-acres of Bordeaux varieties, mostly Cabernet, from cuttings that Al had smuggled from Bordeaux via Mexico.

As Al cleared the densely wooded property, he discovered that they had a treasure trove of soil types on the property. He designated four distinct vineyards, not more than 60 feet from each other: Volcanic Hill, Red Rock Terrace, Gravelly Meadow and Lake. The couple bottled each of the vineyards separately, releasing their first wines from the 1972 vintage.

Success did not come easily for the BrouNSTEINS. It took Diamond Creek 15 years to turn a profit. Boots recalled an encounter with a retailer in the 1970s who scoffed at the idea of bottling their vineyards separately instead of blending them into a single wine.

One banker nearly laughed them out of his office when Al said he was going to charge \$12.50 a bottle, a then-unheard-of price. But the couple persevered and Diamond Creek eventually became the first winery to charge \$100 for a bottle of Napa Cabernet.

Through it all, Boots was Al's trusted companion and partner in the winery. Despite pressure to grow, the couple kept the winery small, producing around 2,000 cases of wine a year so that they could be hands-on. Diamond Creek has had just two winemakers in its long history. The winery didn't miss a beat during Boots' tenure, producing long-lived Cabernets that remained true to the dense and structured style the property has always been known for.

Boots was also an active member in the Napa community. She raised millions of dollars for Parkinson's disease research through a charity event she started with her husband, called Diamonds in the Rough. While the winery was not open to the public, she welcomed guests to the property for her synagogue's annual Shavuot celebration.

Brounstein is survived by her sons Phil and Chuck, her stepson Gary, her sisters Renee and Janice, and seven grandchildren. Details for a memorial service to celebrate her life, to be held in Napa, will be announced soon.

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