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Napa Valley Wine Icon Robin Lail On Supporting The Porto Protocol



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Food & Drink

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Napa vintner Robin Lail is the US Representative to The Porto Protocol. COURTESY OF THE PORTO PROTOCOL

Since she was four years old, a child growing up in the vineyards of Napa Valley, Robin Lail knew she wanted to leave the world a better place.

Lail was raised at Inglenook, the legendary estate founded in the late 1800s by her great-granduncle, Gustave Niebaum. Her grandfather and father were the subsequent stewards of the property until the 1960s when the family sold it. When her father died in 1970, Lail tended to the remaining estate vineyards. She began her vintner career under the mentorship of Robert Mondavi and directed the creation of the first Auction Napa Valley.

Lail's thumbprint on Napa winemaking is secure: She co-founded Dominus with Christian Moueix, Merryvale Vineyards with Bill Harlan and, in 1995, she and her two daughters launched Lail Vineyards.

Deeply enmeshed in her family and career in winemaking, she reached a point where she looked upon her childhood dream and told herself that she "better get on with it, or forget it."

When she discovered The Porto Protocol in 2019, she felt it was an "instant fit." The Porto Protocol Foundation was founded by Adrian Bridge, CEO of Taylor's Port, as a collaborative force to mitigate climate change through shared "experiences and successes."

This appealed to Lail, particularly from her perspective as a Napa Valley winegrower. "We are farmers, dependent on our soil and climate," she says. "Good stewards of the land farm for future generations."

Lail describes three prongs of The Porto Protocol: to raise awareness, provide information and to bring people together to share solutions. The protocol grows when organizations [submit their projects](#), actions and innovations through a public commitment that can be consulted by others in the wine value chain. [Climate talk](#) conversations are made available to the public to share insight and perspective.

Members adhere to guiding principles, a pact to positively influence climate change by “doing more than they are doing now.” Included here are dozens of fascinating, forward-thinking projects such as beekeeping initiative, waste water management, predictive irrigation systems, bio-based bottles, natural pest management and more.

As the US Representative to The Porto Protocol, Lail was tasked with building membership. She says that she behaved like a “dog that runs after a car and catches it,” constantly in pursuit of fresh support.

She admits that the United States is a big place, but that commitment from Napa Valley is an important start. For example, Napa Valley Vintners joined in 2019, the first North American wine trade association to join the protocol. Honig Vineyard and Winery, Frog’s Leap, The Family Coppola, Silverado Farming Company, Larkmead, Spottswoode Estate Vineyard and Winery, St. Supéry Estate Vineyards and Winery and Crimson Wine Group are some of the Napa names involved.

“This is so exciting,” says Lail. “In the protocol we assume that if you present a solution, it’s your responsibility to follow through to the end.” This makes The Porto Protocol unlike a certification body—rather it’s a gathering commitment that can be shared, and potentially duplicated, among members.

Lail says that seeing other wine businesses involved in the effort makes the overall realities less daunting. “*Climate change* shuts people down, it’s too big,” she says. Instead of wondering from the sidelines about what can be done she offers this: “Do something. Start now. Grand and glorious or not.”

