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WINE ENTHUSIAST

PORTRAIT OF A VINEYARD

Painter Ann Rea captures the essence of wine country on canvas.

Ann Rea in her "studio"

"Long Afternoon Vines", painted at Monte Rosso vineyard in the Sonoma Valley

With prime vineyard land in the Napa Valley selling for $275,000 an acre, not many can afford to own a piece of wine country. But California artist Ann Rea offers a reasonable alternative: vineyard "portraits" whose style is inspired by French Impressionists such as Van Gogh and Monet. Painting en plein air (in the open air), Rea says she seeks visions over vistas. "I look for color, light and shadow, and uniqueness of composition," she explains. "My paintings are quite specific capturing a particular place at a particular time the way the light was hitting it."

Rea completes each work in one sitting — two to three hours from start to finish. "My creative process is very much about being present in a specific moment." She recounts her day painting vineyards on Monte Rosso in Sonoma Valley (above), which is known for red-clay soil and old-vine Zinfandel: planted in the late 1880s, it's got acres upon acres of gnarly vines that have been pruned over generations -- each of these vines is like are individual sculpture."

For many years, Rea's life centered on corporate cubicles, not canvases. After graduating from the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1987, she embarked on a "more practical" career in investments and IT project management. For seven years, she didn't draw or paint a thing. "But I was miserable in my job and had a passion that was unfulfilled." ln 2004 she opted for an extreme career makeover and started painting full time.

Rea feels a special connection with the vineyard owners and workers who guide her around their properties. "They're thrilled to see spots that they're very familiar with through my artistic interpretation. It reminds them what a beautiful place they get to work in every day. " For more information, go to www.annrea.com -RISA WEINREU WYATT