

[View this email in your browser](#)

# tucson **MEET OUR** *makers*

Southern Arizona's burgeoning wine region is on the rise thanks to people like Sarah Fox, the subject of this month's newsletter. She'll spill the beans (or should we say vino?) on Sand-Reckoner Vineyards, the winery she co-owns with Rob Hammelman, and why they've chosen Tucson as the location of their tasting room. Read on to hear her story or click on the link below for the latest and greatest media updates from Tucson.

[What's New](#)



## Meet Sarah Fox

The way that Sarah Fox describes her little vineyard in Willcox, just an hour south of Tucson, is how many described Napa several decades ago.

At 12 acres, it's a little parcel of heaven isolated from the world.

And in 2010, when Sarah and her business partner Rob Hammelman stumbled upon it, they felt it was serendipitous. It checked all their boxes – the price was right, a small portion of the acreage already had grapes growing on it, and most

importantly, its locale in Southern Arizona's high desert offered the terroir they had long sought.

They closed on the property in June 2010, and two months later, Sand-Reckoner Vineyards had its first harvest.

"What we really like about Willcox is the soil is fantastic. It's a Sonoita sandy loam, so it's sand and silt with a little bit of clay, and the further down you go, you reach limestone. There's a minerality, especially to the white wines, that is unexpected," Sarah said. "One of my favorite things to do is pour for someone who hasn't had an Arizona wine before and watch them have that aha moment."

Though it's only been 13 years since the inception of Sand-Reckoner, the winery is now producing 2,000 cases per year and is considered a small but mighty player in Southern Arizona's wine industry.

In 2016, Willcox earned its AVA thanks to the hard work of people like Sarah and Rob, who say they have been privileged to not only operate their own winery but determine the long-term trajectory of the region. Working hand-in-hand with four other vineyards in Willcox, Sarah and Rob have been among the most influential voices when determining which grapes to plant. Sarah says they've shied away from producing traditional domestic varietals such as Cabernet and Chardonnay because it's not what Arizona does best.

"We're looking for the grapes that will do well in the heat. We're the high desert, yes, but it does get hot," Sarah said. "We're also really interested in varietals that attain their acidity as they ripen. Because we have an abundance of sunshine, it's a shorter ripening period than many places."

Some more recognizable varietals, such as Syrah and Sangiovese, have made the cut, as well as a slew of more obscure ones, including Fiano, Vermentino,



Tannat and what Sarah refers to as the "Southern Arizona superstar" Malvasia Bianca.

While the decision to plant more unconventional grapes means there's an ongoing education component to Sarah and Rob's work, it's ensured the longevity of winemaking in the region.



"When we select a grape, we think of what will work well for our kids and grandkids should they choose this path," Sarah said.

Family is of the utmost importance to Sarah and Rob, who were married to each other previously and remain business partners.

Their vineyard is the setting where Sarah and Rob raised their two sons, 10-year-old Levi and 8-year-old August. She describes their children's first years as shoeless and free, full of long, yet idyllic days spent among the vines with their parents and the vineyard dogs.

"When Levi first started preschool, I remember he came home one day and said to me: 'Mom, did you know there are some families that don't even have vineyards?' That made me laugh because they were raised as such vineyard kids. They didn't know any different," Sarah said. "It's truly a family business. The first time Levi was in the winery, we were bottling, and he was just days old. And we have pictures of them in their PJs when we were opening the tasting room. The kids have really seen and experienced it all."

Today, Sarah calls Tucson, where Sand-Reckoner's tasting room is located, her home. A native Coloradoan who initially fell in love with winemaking while working at a vineyard in Grand Junction, Sarah's devotion to Tucson was gradual, but is now complete.

When she's not working or being a devout mother (or some combination of the two), she enjoys hiking in Tucson's iconic mountain ranges or spending time with some of her dearest friends, many of whom are entrepreneurs like herself.

"That is one of the reasons we wanted to open our tasting room in Tucson, because there are so many small businesses. The city has done a beautiful job of maintaining its identity by keeping small businesses downtown. It hasn't become super commercialized," Sarah said.



Rob also has an affinity for the city, having grown up in Arizona and worked for Ken Callaghan, whom Sarah refers to as the "granddaddy of Southern Arizona's viticulture," as his first job in wine.

Though they've traveled the world over, working in wineries ranging from Napa to Gigondas, France (and Rob received his graduate degree in Oenology from the University of Adelaide in Australia), the two always dreamt of opening a winery in Arizona.

Today, Rob remains the winery's winemaker, while Sarah's role at Sand-Reckoner has shifted. She's no longer in production, which is what initially drew her to the industry due to its "fully immersive elements" that she found both

exhausting and intoxicating (no pun intended). Instead, she's overseeing Sand-Reckoner's tasting room while actively marketing the business and running its operations.

In a male-dominated industry, there are still times she has to assert herself as the foremost expert in the room because, as a 40-year-old female, her age and gender don't fit the stereotype of a winery owner. She's grateful it's occurring increasingly less these days, which she attributes to the inclusivity of Tucson's business community.

"Some of my dearest friends are women I've met through the winery in one way or another. All have this common thread of entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, and a deep respect for each other," Sarah said. "We all know what we're going through, and we lift each other up."

Throughout our conversation, Sarah names several female business owners whom she calls friends and colleagues, including Sally Kane, one of the proprietors of one of Tucson's most notable restaurants, Coronet. Sand-Reckoner recently collaborated with the Coronet on a few wines that bear the winery's label but are "really Sally's wines," Sarah said.

"The way that the wine plays with the food really demonstrates who Sally is and what the Coronet means to Tucson," Sarah said.

Though Sarah's efforts to build inroads in the community may seem minute, they're all part of a larger goal to bring awareness to Sand-Reckoner's Vineyards and Southern Arizona wines as a whole. Today, you can find Sand-Reckoner's labels in Whole Foods, AJs, and Total Wines throughout the state, as well as in more select retail options and at their Tucson-based tasting room.

"We see Tucson as the gateway to Southern Arizona viticulture," Sarah said. "Watching the culinary scene flourish over the past several years after Tucson

received its UNESCO City of Gastronomy designation has only helped our cause. Showcasing Sand-Reckoner wines alongside the restaurants, breweries, and distillers in Tucson has been both fun and rewarding. We are excited for what's ahead."

## Like What You Read?

Share our Meet our Makers Newsletter with your friends in the media, who can subscribe to our monthly emails [HERE](#).



*Copyright © 2023 Visit Tucson, All rights reserved.*

You are receiving this email because you asked to receive updates on what's new in Tucson.

**Our mailing address is:**

Visit Tucson  
115 N Church Ave # 200  
Tucson, AZ 85701-1130

[Add us to your address book](#)

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).