

# WINE COUNTRY WOMEN *of Napa Valley*

*Created by Michelle Mandro • Foreword by Amanda Harlan*





# NICOLE MARINO

*"I believe in the possibility of dreams coming true."*

**W**ith two suitcases in hand—and without knowing a soul in her destination—Nicole Marino left Massachusetts and moved to Napa Valley in 2009. What she did have, however, was an idea of what she wanted to accomplish with her life. And, most important, she had the voice of her grandfather in her head, telling her that she could do anything she put her mind to.

"I consider myself a go-getter and a dreamer," Nicole elaborates. "I believe in the possibility of dreams coming true and was in the pursuit of my own dreams when I left the nine-to-five work life in Boston to pursue them in Napa."

She has since developed her Bigshot in Winecountry and Nicole M. Co. brands, which together make up what she describes as a lifestyle business that helps others stay "organized, goal oriented, and inspired."

After earning a business communications degree, Nicole began working in marketing in her hometown of Boston, all the while pursuing her real passion: photography. Her photographs were well received and getting national exposure in publications such as *Vogue*, *Wine Spectator*, *Boston Common*, *San Francisco Brides*, and *Napa Valley Life*, among others.

Nicole knew that she had to merge her love for photography with her marketing career—at some point.

The move to Napa proved the necessary jump-start to create a meaningful lifestyle business. Her expertise in photography, business, and social media have come together under the umbrella of her brands, allowing Nicole to provide clients with the tools that she herself used to successfully balance her life and career. She uses her abilities in front of the camera to host

her own online television segments to share inspiring stories. In Napa Valley, she is finding not only a following for all of her skills but also a community in which she is growing both professionally and personally.

At times, these two facets of her life sometimes merge. Recalling one very special evening, she relates: "I was lucky enough to attend a private dinner at which Thomas Keller was preparing the meal. As he shaved truffle over my plate, I thought 'Do I grab my camera to snap a shot, or do I just embrace this moment as a guest?' Ironically, the previous year, Thomas had hired me as the photographer for the French Laundry holiday event. That night, being there and dining with him as opposed to working the event reminded me that anything is possible. Who knows where life can take you?"

Through everything Nicole does, her goal is to make a difference and to give back to her community—especially the local Veterans home, due to her close relationship with her grandfather and grandmother.



RIGHT: Nicole interviewing Aaron Eckhart at Film Festival Napa Valley



## CALABRIAN LASAGNE

1 tablespoon olive oil  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
6 fresh basil leaves, or more to taste,  
cut into ribbons  
Salt and freshly ground pepper  
Two 28-ounce cans crushed San Marzano  
tomatoes  
14 ounces water

2 tablespoons freshly grated Romano cheese,  
plus more for sprinkling  
3 or 4 large eggs, hard-boiled, peeled, and cut into  
small dice  
12 to 14 ounces Muenster cheese,  
cut into small dice  
1 pound ziti pasta, cooked al dente

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until softened and fragrant but not browned, about 1 minute. Stir in the basil and season with salt and pepper. Add the tomatoes and 14 ounces water. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until thickened, about 2 hours. About 15 minutes before the sauce is done, stir in the 2 tablespoons Romano.

Meanwhile, in a bowl, toss together the diced eggs with the Muenster cheese and set aside.

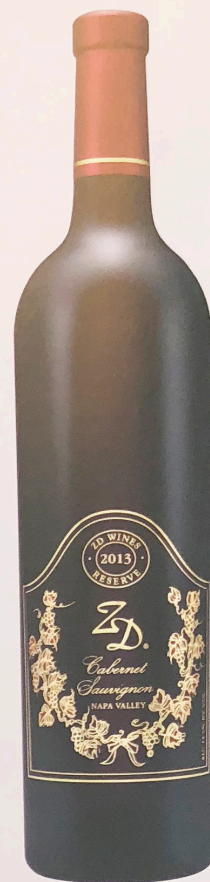
Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Spread a thin layer of sauce in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Assemble the lasagna, making layers of pasta, cheese-egg mixture, and more sauce, in that order, until all the ingredients are gone. Reserve a little sauce for the final layer and sprinkle with Romano cheese.

Cover with ovenproof plastic wrap and then aluminum foil, and bake 20 to 25 minutes.

Remove the foil and plastic wrap, being careful of the steam that will rise. Bake for another 5 to 10 minutes until the top is golden. Let rest for 15 minutes, then cut into squares and serve.

SERVES 4



### Pairing Note

Nicole recommends a ZD Cabernet Sauvignon with this lasagne. “I chose this wine because I’m a huge fan of big, chewy Cabs, and this certainly is one that lingers on your palate with vivid characteristics, layers of complexity, and nuances of rich, ripe currants. It pairs wonderfully with my family’s lasagna—the cheeses and tender bites of egg play back and forth with gulps of the delicious liquid magic made from gorgeous fruit.”

TOP LEFT: Nicole and the New Kids on the Block at a Live in the Vineyard event in Napa

\* LEFT: Nicole in Barbados





