

Word to The Wise: Valley VIPs 2015

Written by Christina Tetreault



From the worlds of wine and design, real estate and retail, learn the daily driving force of nine Valley VIPs and how they landed at the top of their respective fields.

By Melissa Larsen, Photographed by: Cori Roberts



Sheree Hartwell

Owner/Director, Ford/Robert Black Agency

"I have always loved the model and talent industry. It's constantly changing; I never know what will come my way on a day-to-day basis. It's unlike any other profession, and I am incredibly fortunate to love what I do for a living. I attribute my success to my talented staff and the loyal models and actors that we represent both locally and nationally. They are the reason I invest my time, energy and heart so fully into Ford/Robert Black Agency. It's truly rewarding to see the success they garner for themselves with my guidance. It can be a crazy industry to navigate and oftentimes asks me to wear many different hats—mother, friend, confidant, counselor. At the end of the day, I hope that I can be the role model to those we represent and others aspiring to have a career in this industry because it has been so fulfilling for me."

Hartwell is seated, middle.



Janet Brooks

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President, Janet Brooks Design

"I love my life, and I am truly amazed and grateful when I think of the whirlwind of excitement it has been so far, thanks in part to finding a career that fulfills me in every way. I'm a very detail-oriented person, and interior design definitely demands that; however, getting to work with gorgeous materials and designs throughout each project and the big-picture reward at the successful end of every project is what keeps me coming back, anxious for the next challenge. The details along the way are sometimes overwhelming, but the end result somehow ends up looking seamless and easy, which is exactly what I'm attempting to achieve!"



Kevin Binkley

Executive Chef/Owner, Binkley's Restaurant Group

"First and foremost, my driving force is to create food that is incredibly delicious. I constantly strive to push the boundaries of innovation and edible art. I tell my team, 'If we're not getting better, we're getting worse.' I'm always looking to offer a creative take on the absolute best seasonal ingredients while delivering never-before-seen execution and memorable presentations. Someone is raising the bar every day in the culinary world, and you've got to stay on top of your game. At all four of my Valley restaurants, we are aiming for every meal to be an exceptional culinary experience."

Photograph by David Zickl.



Kate Cavaliere Birchler

Assistant Vice President of Tourism Marketing, Macerich Shopping Centers

"I believe I have the best job at Macerich because I have the privilege of meeting and working with people from all over the globe who want to experience the No. 1 activity while visiting the United States: shopping! I have been with Macerich for 15 years; my job is very unique in that I stand with one high heel in retail commercial real estate and the other high heel in the travel and tourism industry. My philosophy is to be kind, work hard, cheer on others, give back, build consensus and develop long-lasting relationships. I am of the mindset that kindness, loyalty, passion and trust in God's plan are the ingredients to an authentic self. I'm always thinking: what's next? What can I do better? How can I be better? I have deep respect for thoughtful leaders and many mentors in my life. I love mentoring others and hope to encourage our next generation to stay true to their authentic self."

Wardrobe by Diane Von Furstenberg. Photo shot on location at Diane Von Furstenberg at Scottsdale Fashion Square.

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Jessica Rose Boutwell

Co-Owner/Creative Director, Ruz?e Cake House (with her mother, Joyce Boutwell, Co-Owner/Head Pastry Chef)

"As Yogi Berra said, 'You don't have to swing hard to hit a home run. If you've got the timing, it will go.' And with our business, timing has really been a key element to our success. We'd been baking for friends and family for as long as I can remember; as passionate as we were, we never dreamed it could be our vocation. But thanks to a crashed economy, cancer, new Arizona baking laws, and a friend's bridal shower at El Chorro Lodge (and their incredibly intuitive sales catering manager who saw something in us that not even we could then see), everything serendipitously fell into place. I never paid much attention to the old adage, 'You can be anything you want to be.' But because of a series of Lemony Snicket-y types of events, and our ability to capitalize on timing, I finally accept that it even applies to me."

Photo shot on location at Camelback Flower Shop.



Raini Keyser

Director of Operations, Vinum 55

"My inspiration in wine really came from my fine dining restaurant experience. I enjoyed delivering an experience to my guests that more than exceeded their expectations. I realized my passion for wine after the outstanding experience of tasting 1947 Cheval Blanc Bordeaux. I had no idea what I'd tasted until I went home and researched the wine. The story of that wine made an indelible mark that has driven me to study and achieve one wine degree and study further for another degree. At Vinum 55, my passion for wine and outstanding service is a driving force. Work doesn't feel like work when you love what you do!"

Makeup by Dolly Kousonsavath.



Hal Looney

Arizona Area President, Shea Active Lifestyle Communities Division

"I believe an undeniable component in the success of our Trilogy communities is providing an unparalleled resort lifestyle for our members. Yes, we deliver some of the highest quality homes by teaming up with the best architects, designers and trades in the country, but we are also the experts in creating a five-star luxury lifestyle. To help produce an unmatched experience, Trilogy clubhouses are uniquely designed to stand in their respective areas, with signature amenities that include championship golf courses, luxury spas, swimming pools, sports complexes, wellness centers, fine dining restaurants and more. Our guest services inside each club are superb, as employees are resort-trained staff. I've been in this industry for over 20 years, and what still excites me is knowing that we are making a difference in people's lives by providing exceptional experiences in our resort-style communities and exceeding their expectations."



Walt Danley

President, Walt Danley Realty

"I made a conscious decision early in my career to surround myself with really good people. I sought out experienced managers and mentors to help guide me early on. I connected with peers that shared my same principals. As I grew in my career and started to build my own business, I added people who had similar work habits and ethics. It wasn't important that they think and act exactly like me, but it was critical that we all share common core beliefs and standards. The technical aspects of my industry can be taught. The intangible parts cannot. We have a very simple philosophy: Do what is right, take care of the client, and the bottom line will take care of itself. It has served me well for almost 40 years."



David Tyda

Festival Organizer, Affordable Food Festivals

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"Before owning and operating large-scale food festivals, I was a magazine editor. Both lines of work have long stretches of downtime followed by a stint of intense focus to produce the actual product. The key to being successful with this type of deadline-driven career is using downtime productively—staying healthy, learning and keeping the goal in sight. In a word: preparation. I used to say that magazines are simply curated ideas—editors sit through mounds of information to present a cohesive story with each issue. Our festivals are produced the same way. My company is lean at just three people, but we devour information and stay current—that makes us appear larger than we are. Knowing what's available and possible allows us to create, what I believe to be, some of the most imaginative events in town."

Photo shot on location at Joyride Taco House.