

Planting a Second Career

Peggy Fiandaca reinvents herself as leading Arizonan

BY ALISON BAILIN BATZ

In 1804 France, Barbe-Nicole Clicquot Ponsardin was left a veuve, which translates to widow. With her husband's death, Madame Clicquot inherited holdings in banking, wool trading and a vineyard, the latter of which many said was a waste of time. She, however, saw opportunity. Within six years, she created the first-ever recorded vintage of champagne in the region and pioneered riddling, a technique that effectively removes the cloudiness present in champagne. As a result, champagne became a mainstream beverage of choice worldwide.

More than 200 years later, women continue to innovate the wine industry, including Peggy

Fiandaca, who proves it is never too late to follow a dream.

From urban planning to vineyard rows

For more than three decades, Fiandaca's career was rooted in cityscapes rather than vineyards. As an accomplished urban planner, she shaped communities across Arizona and even became the first woman recognized as an Arizona Planning Pioneer by the Arizona Planning Association. But as the years passed, she felt the pull of another passion that had long been waiting in the wings: wine. Instead of slowing down as retirement approached,

Fiandaca made the bold decision to reinvent herself, swapping blueprints for grapevines.

In 2008, alongside her husband, Curt Dunham, Fiandaca planted the first vines of LDV Winery in the high desert of Southern Arizona. The land wasn't the easy, lush terrain of Napa or Bordeaux — it was rugged, unpredictable and challenging. But Fiandaca's experience in planning communities gave her a unique perspective. She approached the vineyard not just as a farm, but as a long-term project with layers of possibility.

Building LDV Winery

Today, LDV Winery spans 13 acres of estate vineyards in the Chiricahua Mountains, where Fiandaca and Dunham focus on Rhône varietals such as Grenache, Syrah, Viognier and Petite Sirah. These grapes thrive in the high-altitude terroir, where dramatic temperature swings and volcanic soil contribute to wines of remarkable character. The winery produces between 3,000 and 4,000 cases annually, each bottle a reflection of Fiandaca's hands-on approach and her determination to showcase Arizona wine on the national stage.

LDV's wines are estate-grown and estate-produced, a rarity in Arizona, ensuring



Peggy Fiandaca with one her recent bottlings of LDV Wine. (LDV Winery/Submitted)

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that Fiandaca has influence over every step of the process — from tending the vines to blending and bottling. Her attention to detail has helped LDV gain acclaim not just as a winery, but as proof that Arizona deserves a place among the country's respected wine regions.

Reinvention and resilience

Fiandaca's career pivot is a testament to reinvention. While some may see starting later in life as daunting, she views it as invigorating. The skills honed during her decades as an urban planner — strategic thinking, patience and a knack for envisioning potential where others saw obstacles — translated seamlessly into viticulture. Where many might hesitate, Fiandaca leaned in, proving that passion paired with discipline can yield extraordinary results at any stage of life.

The heart of Scottsdale

While the vineyard is in Southern Arizona, Fiandaca has also cultivated a home for LDV's wines in the heart of Old Town Scottsdale. The LDV Winery Tasting Room is a vibrant



Peggy Fiandaca's LDV Tasting Room in Scottsdale. (LDV Winery/Submitted)

extension of the vineyard, offering tastings, flights, and bottles to enjoy on-site or to go. Visitors can explore LDV's current varietals in a welcoming space that reflects the winery's philosophy: approachable yet sophisticated.

The tasting room also serves as a community hub, where wine lovers gather for special events, educational sessions and seasonal celebrations.

Fiandaca often greets guests, sharing stories

of the vineyard and guiding them through the nuances of each pour. For her, the tasting room isn't just a business; it is a way to connect, inspire and educate people about Arizona wine.

Beyond the vineyard and tasting room, Fiandaca has embraced modern storytelling as well. She hosts "Wine Time with Peggy," a monthly podcast and YouTube series where she breaks down everything from wine terminology to food pairings, vineyard updates and behind-the-scenes glimpses of harvest season.

A legacy in the making

Just as Madame Clicquot changed the face of champagne centuries ago, Fiandaca is reshaping perceptions of Arizona wine today. Her journey proves that success doesn't always follow a straight line — and that it's never too late to start something new. What began as a leap of faith in 2008 has grown into a thriving winery, a bustling tasting room and a respected voice in the wine community. ■

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From Dugouts to Rooftops

How Elliot Clark found his true calling later in life

BY ALISON BAILIN BATZ

For Elliot Clark, life has always been about coaching. Whether on the ballfield as a young player, in the locker room as a graduate assistant at Arizona State University, or now on rooftops across Arizona, the common thread has been teaching, leading, and inspiring others. It just took him a few decades — and a few career pivots — to figure out where that passion truly belonged.

Starting in sports

Clark was born in Eden Prairie, a suburb outside Minneapolis, where sports consumed much of his youth. Baseball was his first love, though he also played basketball and football. He was rarely the biggest or fastest on the team, but he excelled in one crucial way: he understood the game. Clark could see the blueprint of plays unfolding before others did, and he had a knack for explaining it clearly.

Much of that came from his father, who doubled as a coach on many of his teams. Watching him mentor players left a lasting impression. “Coaching wasn’t just about wins and losses,” Clark recalled. “It was about helping kids grow into themselves.” By the time he neared high school graduation, Clark had abandoned any lingering dreams of going pro and instead focused on a future in coaching.

Moving out west

That dream led him west to Arizona State

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University, where he studied secondary education and served as a student manager for the basketball team. Eventually, he earned a graduate assistant role, giving him a glimpse of life on the sidelines. But reality soon set in. The long hours, grueling travel, and uncertain climb to land a coveted coaching position forced him to reconsider. Coaching at a high level might mean sacrificing 15 to 20 years of his life for a shot at one big break.

“I loved the game, but I also wanted a life,” Clark said.

So, he pivoted into sales. His natural ability to motivate, mentor, and strategize translated seamlessly into leading teams, and he thrived financially. Along the way, he formed bonds with colleagues, including one teammate named Zach Costa. At the time, Clark couldn’t have imagined how important that friendship would become years later.

Pivoting, part one

While sales provided stability, it lacked the fulfillment Clark craved. To scratch the itch, he joined a local softball team with the United



(Left) Elliot Clark transitioned from a career in sports to a leadership role at Valley Roofing & Repair; (Above) Just one of Elliott’s hundreds of roofing projects across Arizona. (Valley Roofing & Repair/Submitted)

States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA), a governing body for multiple sports. At first, it was just weekend fun. But as the team excelled, Clark’s role expanded. Before long, USSSA tapped him to run tournaments, eventually promoting him to national director of the men’s softball program. He was soon organizing events with thousands of participants, including showcases at Disneyland.

The work allowed Clark to merge business skills with his love of sports, but it came with its own demands. The constant travel again strained his work-life balance. That’s when Costa reentered the picture, this time as a player on one of Clark’s teams. He was also out of sales, now working as a construction professional specializing in roofing. Clark admits he initially thought roofing was an odd choice, but he couldn’t ignore how balanced and happy Costa seemed.

As they reconnected, Costa revealed that much of his own success in sales and beyond came from Clark’s early coaching. In turn, he began nudging Clark toward considering a career change himself. Roofing, Costa explained, wasn’t just about shingles and repairs — it was about building teams, mentoring employees and serving communities.

Up on the roof

The idea simmered for years until, in 2022, Clark took the leap. He joined Costa in the

roofing business, first learning the ropes on the sales side and then gradually stepping into a leadership role. The parallels with sports were striking. He was coaching again — just in a new arena.

Today, Clark is a leader at Valley Roofing & Repair, which officially launched in early 2025. In just months, the company has grown to more than 20 professionals, with Clark at the center of customer service, recruiting and training statewide. The work is hands-on, whether he is educating homeowners on repair options, guiding crews through a project, or mentoring new hires.

And true to his roots, he hasn’t left sports behind entirely. Valley Roofing & Repair recently donated a new roof to a local high school baseball program, a gesture that brought Clark’s journey full circle.

“Coaching is who I am,” Clark said, adding life is better than ever at home thanks to his wife, Courtney, and daughter, Chloe. “I just never expected it would take a hard hat and a rooftop to bring me back to it.”

For Clark, happiness came later in life, not in the dugouts or sales meetings where he once thought it might. It came instead with the chance to mentor, to give back, and to lead a team once more — building something solid enough to last a lifetime.

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