

HISTORY & WINEMAKER

Cougar Crest Winery has three estate vineyards owned and farmed by Deborah and David Hansen. In 1998, Stellar Vineyard was planted with Syrah cuttings from Cailloux Vineyard and Cabernet Sauvignon cuttings from Windrow Vineyard (the original Seven Hills Vineyard). The new site was a huge success and the following year Cougar Hills Vineyard was planted. The next year, Golden's Legacy was planted on a five acre site that had been a vineyard in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Dr. Golden planted the original vineyard in white wine grapes. During Prohibition he made wine and sold it "for medicinal purposes." Since then, the land has grown tomatoes, apples and is now back to wine grapes.

The move from growing grapes to making wine was a natural progression for two people with a love of wine and strong science backgrounds. After selling grapes and making homemade wine for several years, the decision was made to do it professionally.

The Hansens established Cougar Crest Winery in 2001 at the Walla Walla airport. The first vintage was 900 cases and earned many accolades. The Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon both won Gold Medal and Best of Class at the LA County Fair, the largest and oldest wine competition in the United States. The Cabernet was also judged the Best Cabernet Sauvignon of the entire competition and went on to earn a "91" rating in Wine Spectator. The 2002 vintage has also won numerous gold medals, and been highly rated. The 2002 Syrah was rated "94" in Wine Spectator, and is currently one of the Top 100 Wines of the World. The Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Cabernet Sauvignon were also rated 90s and 89. The 2003 vintage will be released later in 2005, and the 2004 vintage will barrel age into 2006.

WINEMAKER Deborah Hansen became a winemaker through a gradual and at times, bumpy process. First came a degree as a pharmacist from Washington State University. Training in chemistry, biology, and bacteriology would prove useful down the road.

Deborah and her husband Dave moved to the San Francisco area in the late 70s. In California, the Hansens developed a keen interest in wine production and grape growing. Traveling to Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, the Coastal regions and the Central Valley they learned to appreciate different styles of winemaking and the effects that various soils and climates had on the wine.

While working and raising children in California, Deborah and Dave knew they eventually wanted to return to the Northwest. To make the dream a reality, they purchased several small farms in the Walla Walla Valley and planted apple orchards. After the 1995 harvest, the family moved to the Walla Walla Valley. Raising the children on the farms in a small community seemed idyllic until the apple markets plummeted, resulting in difficult choices. The love of wine led to the decision to tear out apple trees and plant wine grapes.

The new vineyards were a big success and after a few years making homemade wine, the decision was made to start a winery. Deborah would be the winemaker so back to college she went to UC Davis. The specialized classes taken there gave a new purpose to the many science classes taken years before. It awakened a new passion for learning and the desire to excel at this ancient art of winemaking. It is the discovery of new wines and the challenges of new vintages that excite Deborah in her new career as winemaker at Cougar Crest Winery.