



Recording History

HOGUE CELLARS CELEBRATES 30 YEARS IN THE COLUMBIA VALLEY

story and photos by Rob Brown



Mike (left) and Gary Hogue walk through the Schwartzman Vineyard, where they first planted Riesling 30 years ago.



“We were skeptical at first, so we planted Concord grapes!” laughs Mike Hogue, reminiscing 30 years later. “But I got caught up with how much fun people were having with these new grapes and drinking wine. Our first vintage of Riesling was 50 gallons of backyard wine made in my daughter’s dollhouse. It was remarkably good!”

Hogue Cellars is celebrating 30 years of glorious winemaking in the Columbia Valley of Eastern Washington, and Mike and Gary Hogue are sharing a few laughs over stories for a documentary-style video production. The movie is as much a highlight reel of their wines as it is a look into a heritage of family pride and reputation.

As young boys, Mike and Gary worked their family’s farm, which produced a variety of crops including hops, Concord grapes, cherries, spearmint and, of course, apples. Quality was always first and foremost. “We’d produce hops and sell them to Anheuser-Busch and Miller,” recalls Mike Hogue. “We’d grow spearmint and peppermint and sell it to Wrigley’s. As soon as the crops left the farm, you’d lose your identity. With wine, you’re able to keep your identity.”

Gary is quick to respond, “Dad felt we were a little bit crazy and he questioned the venture. After all, we knew nothing about it. He was very concerned about the Hogue family name and its reputation. Once you decide to have the family name on the bottle, then it becomes even more a matter of family pride, and quality has to be foremost.”



Director of Vineyards Colin Morrell.

Right Place, Right Time

The Hogue’s surrounded themselves with a talented team, including close friend Mark Schwartzman, “a city boy who loved farming,” remembers Mike. “We had a small six-acre piece of ground that wouldn’t fit for hops, and the first vineyard became a reality. We planted Riesling and eventually named the vineyard the Schwartzman Vineyard. Mark was following the success of Mondavi in California and encouraged us to continue planting wine grapes.”

At the same time, Washington State was becoming recognized as a future

superior grape-growing region with the potential to produce world-class wines. As fortunes would continue, Dr. Walter Clore, “The Father of Washington Wines,” had already set up shop in Prosser and had been experimenting with different varieties for nearly 20 years. Early on, they learned from Dr. Clore that a bigger crop is not always a better crop, and they understood the region was unique; specific varieties needed to be planted in the right spot. “We were definitely in the right place at the right time,” Mike reports with a smile.

Hogue Today

What started as backyard wine 30 years ago has developed into a winery producing 650,000 cases annually, the fourth largest producing winery in Washington. Hogue features a range of 18 different wines among its three core lines: Hogue, Genesis and Reserve. The **Hogue Cellars** label showcases fresh, crisp, well-balanced wines at a premium value of \$10.99. The **Genesis** wines celebrate the family's original vision of sourcing grapes from superior vineyards within the acclaimed Columbia Valley and producing distinctive wines in a definitive Washington style. All Genesis wines are priced at \$15.99.

The **Hogue Reserve** wines showcase the highest-quality fruit from various regions where growers have matched the best clones with specific terroir.

These small-production Reserve wines have extended aging, noticeable in the layers of complexity and elegance, and are all priced at \$29.99.

Not Done Yet

As in all other great growing regions, growers and wineries in Washington are continuing to experiment with new varieties. The uniqueness of the Columbia Valley, the incredible Columbia River and the longer summer days create fruit with very high acid and intensity. The Yakima Valley is a whopping 30 miles wide by 80 miles long and offers enormous future potential.

"We're not done planting yet!" Both brothers chime in. "This beautiful wine country grew up around us. Never in our wildest dreams would we have imagined this scenario."



Hogue's trio of tiers: Genesis, Hogue Cellars and Hogue Reserve.



Director of Winemaking for Hogue Cellars is Co Dinn, speaking for a video production.

Screwcap Pioneers

Hogue Cellars has been a pioneer in the industry, conducting extensive research on, and testing of, screwcaps. More than 3,200 samples were tested over a five-year span. Results showed that wines aged under Saranex-lined screwcaps offered better results than aluminum, tin-lined, synthetic or traditional cork closures. The nearly airtight seal provides superior retention of wine quality characteristics, without unwanted oxidation.

Hogue Cellars Director of Winemaking Co Dinn tells THE TASTING PANEL, "Our studies prove that high-quality white and red wines can be sealed and preserved with screwcaps. We believe that our extensive research and proven results will help to positively shift the perception of screwcaps with consumers." The Hogue Cellars has since committed 100% of its production, including the premium tier Genesis and Reserve wines, to screwcap closures with Saranex liners. ■■