

Unique wines in a unique setting

By **HEATHER SMITH THOMAS**
For the Capital Press

Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery, owned and operated by Mike and Tamara Mackenthun, is 7 miles northeast of Mountain Home, Idaho.

The couple retired from the Air Force and bought the property in the late 1990s to build a retirement home.

"When we were designing the house, we went to Disney's California Adventure, the year they opened. Mondavi was a sponsor for the wine country area and we talked to their representative about growing grapes and winemaking. When we came back from that trip, we looked at our land and started doing research," Mackenthun said.

They thought if they selected the right vines they could create a small vineyard and winery.

The vineyard was planted in 2006 after they finished building their house; they started making wine in 2008.

"We soon had more than enough for family and friends and decided to get our license for selling wines. We intended to name the win-



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ery after Rattlesnake Creek that runs through the back of our property, but named it Sweetbriar after the wild roses in the area," he said.

The vineyard has 700 vines including Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Lemberger for red wines. For white wines they



Heather Smith Thomas/For the Capital Press
Sunset at Sweetbriar Vineyard and Winery, near Mountain Home, Idaho.

have Vignoles, Riesling and Pinot gris.

"I make between 700 and 1,000 bottles of wine each year; ours is a very small boutique winery. I don't get grapes from anywhere else; we just use the ones we grow," Mackenthun said.

Grapes at this location do fairly well. The vineyard is above the valley floor and doesn't get extremes in temperature like the Snake River area and south of Boise.

"Cold air flows downhill and follows the

river. Rattlesnake Creek is right behind us and a low spot, so cold air keeps flowing on down the creek and doesn't settle here like it does in lower areas. Temperature is usually not a problem. My main concern is that the grapes ripen by the end of season, but so far we haven't had a problem," he said.

The winery consists of a wine storage and aging room, tasting area and wine production area.

"I sell only out of my winery and we're generally open Saturday and Sunday with no appointment needed," he said.

He has a simple website and doesn't advertise because he sells out every year.

"I don't want to sell out too early or I don't have anything for people to come taste. People hear about us by word-of-mouth," he said.

"What makes my winery unique is the fact I have so few vines — so my wine tastes different every year. Right now I have a couple bottles of 2017 Pinot gris, which tastes totally different from my 2018 crop," he said.

He tells people that if they don't like the wine this year they should come try it next year.

Winery features two tasting rooms

By **SHERYL HARRIS**
For the Capital Press

The winery likes to use very old vines.

"The older the vines, the deeper the roots, the more complex the wine, and the more consistent it is year to year," Josh says. "Elderding Canyon, for instance, has the second oldest Viognier vines in Washington; 6 Prong has many varieties that are among the oldest of their type in Washington; and Marcela's Merlot is old vine."

He explains that the average vine in Washington is only 6 years old, but many of the vines Stottle Winery uses are 25 to 35 years old.

Stottle Winery currently produces 17 wines from 11 varieties of grapes. According to Josh, sometimes the determination of what to make is whatever has the highest demand. Sometimes it is traditional.

"In Europe," Josh explains, "different regions have specific styles. For us, the varieties that go into a blend stay consistent. Just the percentage of each grape may vary."

The casual observer can look around the room and see dozens of awards. Some of the more recent are the Seattle Wine awards, which is the largest wine competition in the Northwest. Stottle's Cabernet Sauvignon, Hombre, Tempranillo and Big Eddie have all won Double Gold, which means all 12 judges had to agree, not just a few.

And their Tempranillo won Best of the Best. Their 2016 Roussanne won the Gold and Best of Class at the Cascadia International Wine Competition. Several of their other wines have won Gold at the Seattle Wine Awards.

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