

14 Hands Winery a unique brand

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

This unique winery in Prosser, Wash., began in 2005, and the wine was introduced as a restaurant-only label.

“Success of this brand really took off,” said Stephanie Mendoza, senior manager of guest services at 14 Hands Winery.

This winery is part of the family of wineries of Ste. Michelle Wine Estates.

“The name 14 Hands comes from the wild horses that once roamed eastern Washington, where our grapes are grown today. These were small horses, only about 14 hands high, and known for their strength and tenacity,” she said.

In 2011, 14 Hands announced its national off-premise launch.

“The brand continued to grow and in 2014 we built a tasting room here in Prosser. We’ve just had our 5-year anniversary,” she said.

“What makes our tasting room unique



Keith Kenison



14 Hands Winery

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is that we offer a reserve tier of wine, and all the reserve grapes are sourced from the Horse Heaven Hills, with much smaller pro-

duction. We make between 100 and 850 cases of each of those wines, which is less than 1% of our total production. Altogether, our parent company, Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, owning wineries in Washington, California and Oregon, produces about 2 million cases of wine that can be found in retail stores across the country,” Mendoza said.

“We have a string-of-pearls philosophy. Every winery is different; we each have our own story and our own winemaker yet we all have the supportive infrastructure of Ste. Michelle Wine Estates. It’s a large operation but with a small, individual feel and personality like a big family.”

The winemaker at 14 Hands is Keith Kenison. “Keith has been with us since the beginning of our brand. He started out as a cellar worker in 1992 and also has a degree in psychology. He was promoted to assistant winemaker in 2002, and when they created our brand in 2005 he was named head winemaker at 14 Hands,” said Mendoza.

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The tasting room was inspired by the landscape of the Horse Heaven Hills and history of the region.

“We have a beautiful tasting bar and lots of space to lounge —indoors and out. We also have a barrel room we use 3 times a year for seasonal wine releases. We bring

in a barrel of production, and call it a seasonal release. The release consists of a single barrel of wine that comes to about 30 cases. These are really fun events and we had one in mid-June,” she said.

The tasting room story boards on the wall are a tribute to the region’s homesteading and grape-growing history and winemaking traditions. It features families that have lived in the area for a long time, showcasing a bit of history. This décor presents a homey feel, like it’s always been here.

“Our grapes come from the Horse Heaven Hills AVA, which is a fairly large growing region. We have some of our own vineyards but we source most of our grapes from growers with whom we work closely. Our production is so large that we have to buy additional grapes, and there are many grape growers here in eastern Washington that Ste. Michelle has partnered with for many years,” said Mendoza.

Recently 14 Hands started producing canned wine.

“We have 4 different varieties we offer canned — a Rose, a Pinot grigio, an effervescent white known as ‘Bubbles’ and the Hot to Trot red blend,” she said. “Canned wines have become very popular; they are convenient for camping or traveling to places where a bottle might break. The cans hold about 2.5 glasses of wine so 2 cans is the equivalent of one bottle. We are excited to be able to continuously innovate and are happy with the success of canned wine.”

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