

Abeja Winery: More than a vineyard

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

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The Abeja Winery and The Inn at Abeja are on a restored century-old farmstead in the foothills of the Blue Mountains four miles east of Walla Walla, Wash.

The 38-acre site is part of a property that was homesteaded in 1863. A new owner in 1986 began restoring some of the old buildings and eventually opened the Mill Creek Inn.

Abeja founders Ken and Ginger Harrison came to Walla Walla in the late 1990s looking for land suitable for planting world class Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. While searching for an ideal vineyard location they discovered this historic farmstead that captured their hearts. The property was well-suited for grape growing and winemaking, and by restoring more of the farmstead's buildings, the Harrisons saw an opportunity to preserve a rich heritage while creating a one-of-a-kind wine country destination.

Today Abeja is the realization of the Harrisons' vision. The name Abeja, which is Spanish for bee, was chosen in respect for the environment. The winery and The Inn at Abeja operate on the belief that each person can make a difference in the world.

Winemakers Daniel Wampfler and Amy Alvarez-Wampfler together create Abeja's Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Merlot as well as limited-release estate and reserve wines, offered exclu-

sively to Abeja List members.

Dan and Amy met years ago at the Columbia Crest Winery in Washington. "We had a big team there, and Amy was responsible for the white wines and I was responsible for red wines," Dan said.

He left Columbia Crest to become head winemaker at Dunham Cellars in Walla Walla, and Amy started a new winery called Sinclair Estate Vineyards.

"She custom-crushed her fruit at Dunham Cellars so we made our wine under her direction and watchful eye," he said.

"We worked together and had some overlapping vineyards and spent time in the vineyards together. For sales, however, she'd be going one direction and I another. It was always our dream to make wine together from start to finish, under one roof and one label. We never imagined we'd have the opportunity to be co-winemakers at Abeja!"

They started at Abeja in January 2016. "Ken Harrison brought us on board, which gave us the chance to create evolutionary wines based on estate vineyards. Amy and I make all the winemaking decisions together—from picking to blending to barrel choices," he said. "We have a team of 37 full-time employees which includes the vineyard crew, grounds crew, and a crew to take care of the Inn, which can accommodate up to 28 people."

They also recently opened a high-end culinary dining experience and hired an executive chef and a team to delight our guests with 5- or 7-course dinners, paired with the wines.



Courtesy of Abeja Winery

Abeja winemakers Daniel and Amy Alvarez-Wampfler.

'Wiking' the Willamette Valley's vineyard trails

By **GAIL OBERST**
For the Capital Press

RICKREALL, Ore. — Visitors who linger at a vineyard or winery are likely to buy more wine. That marketing theory, touted by many vineyard owners, heads the list of reasons many Oregon wineries have added hiking trails.

The trend has given rise to the term "wiking," combining Northwesterners' love of wine and hiking.

But marketing is not the only reason some have opened hiking trails around their vineyards.

Bob Pfaff, whose family in 2003 founded Left Coast Winery west of Salem in the Van Duzer corridor, points to the 100 acres of oak woodlands running through the winery's 500 acres, and confesses: "When we came here, we didn't know about oak. We evolved into environmentalists."

Very little of the Willamette Valley's original oak woodlands and savannas are left, Pfaff said. Part of the Pfaff family's hope in building the one-mile loop trail through their oak stands is to share with their visitors this rare resource.

Forty miles south at Tyee Wine Cellars, Dave Buchanan, a former research

biologist, maintains his two-mile trail for sentimental and conservation reasons. He is the fourth of five generations of his family to farm the 460 acres. Before his family put 250 acres into native woods and a wetland preserve, sheep had forged a trail past ponds, oak woodlands and ash swales. Buchanan turned the sheep trail into an interpretive loop.

Now, hikers can walk through hazelnut groves, view ancient farm tools, rest at picnic tables, and pass native trees, flowers and wildlife ranging from ducks to foxes and elk.

Visitors can stop in at the tasting room to get the interpretive trail map. For majestic views of the Willamette Valley, walk any portion of the two-mile perimeter of Eola Hills' Legacy Estate Vineyard, eight miles west of Salem on Oak Grove Road.

Tom Huggins, founder of Eola Hills Winery, gestures at the view from a plateau near the top of the 162-acre Legacy vineyard, part of 300 acres the winery owns in the Willamette Valley. Currently winery hikers can skirt two miles of gravel roads and trails through the steep hillside vineyards. Along the shady forested bottom, quaint bridges, grassy clearings and camping sites attract

visitors for family reunions, weddings and other events.

Established in 1983, Yamhill Valley Vineyards' 150-acre estate west of McMinnville invites hikers to check into the tasting room for a map of trails through the vineyard. There are two routes — one an easy 1.5-mile walk through the lower vineyards, and the other a mile-long climb to the hilltop, going from 200 to 600 feet. Both offer vistas from the foothills of the Coast Range across the Yamhill Valley and beyond. The trail maps point out blocks of Pinot noir, Pinot blanc, Riesling, Chardonnay and Pinot gris. Winery staff suggest first making a reservation for wine-tasting before a hike.

Jenny Burger, general manager at Yamhill Valley, said they opened the trails last summer to provide pandemic-weary visitors with an outdoor relief.

"It felt like everyone was cooped up and needed space and a sense of freedom to move about amidst the restrictions of the pandemic. So we opened up the trails to give people a safe way to get away from others, be in nature, and experience the growing vines and active vineyards, something we find to be grounding, peaceful and beautiful," she said.



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