

Shadow Mountain Ranch: Chestnuts take root

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

SILVERTON, Ore. — Paul’la Allen’s love affair with chestnuts began when she was a young girl.

“I used to walk through my neighbor’s cow pasture on my way to school and I’d have to push the affectionate cows out of my way,” she said. “One morning they didn’t meet me; they were clear across the pasture under these big trees eating these brown nut things.”

She took a handful to her neighbor to see if it was OK for the cows to eat them.

“My neighbor lady was from Switzerland, and she taught me all about chestnuts; I was late for school,” Paul’la said. “I found out how much people love them, and I became enterprising. The local grocery store would buy all I could pick for \$5 a bag — and this was in 1959.



Shadow Mountain Ranch
Growing chestnuts fulfills a childhood dream of Paul’la Allen. She and husband Jack Allen own Shadow Mountain Ranch Chestnut Orchards near Oregon’s Silver Falls State Park.

“I’d put them in my wagon and roll them away to Multnomah village, which was probably a mile away,” she said. “For several years I was the chestnut girl.”

Fast forward to the late 1980s, when her husband, Jack, announced he was ready to retire.

“He asked me where I wanted to live and what I wanted to do,” Paul’la said. “I said I want to live on a farm and raise chestnuts.

“We’re both from Portland, and we wanted to find a place where nobody would bother us for 50 years,” she said.

They went looking and found their “little piece of heaven” high atop the Silver-ton Hills not far from Silver Falls State Park.

They named it Shadow Mountain Ranch and began going after chestnuts in earnest.

Jack had been a mortician, and while he was conducting graveside services at the old cemeteries around Portland, Paul’la would walk around, teaching her young daughter, Julie, the ABCs on tombstones and picking up chestnuts from under the huge trees they all seemed to have.

“We revisited all the old

cemeteries and parks — and the old cow pasture — gathered nuts, brought them home and stuck them in the ground,” she said.

They also approached the owner of property in Woodburn that had the remnants of the Settlemeier pioneer chestnut orchards. Later, when a large tree went down, he offered the wood to the Allens, who were building their dream home. They hired a truck to take the wood to the mill, where it was dried for a year, then kiln dried, made into boards and shaped into their beautiful kitchen cabinets.

“Chestnut is considered an exotic wood, and it is pretty much impervious to rot,” Jack Allen said. “The American chestnut is the one the East Coast settlers all made their log cabins out of.”

Certain critters like chestnuts, too, so rather than planting the nuts directly in the field, Jack devised a successful propagation method for the taproot-based trees, planting them in 18-by-4-inch PVC pipes stood on end.

Today their orchards contain over 700 trees on 6 of their 38 acres.

The strictly U-pick operation has attracted a unique and loyal clientele.

“We have Asian clients, who like smaller chestnuts for their mooncakes; vacationing Europeans, who prefer bigger nuts to roast on top of their woodstoves, and people from the Middle East, and they’ve never seen anything like this,” Jack said.

HAT Ranch Vineyard: It’s a labor of love

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

CALDWELL, Idaho — Tim Harless is a retired Air Force pilot who made the switch from maneuvering high-speed airplanes to growing grapes.

When he got out of the service, he decided to grow a vineyard as a labor of love.

He is originally from Wyoming. His great-grandparents homesteaded there in 1902 and started the HAT Ranch. Their brand was the shape of a cowboy hat.

Harless was living in Texas when he became interested in winemaking and looked for property that might have potential as a vineyard.

“I’d been taking classes in winemaking and viticulture, but didn’t want to be in Texas,” he said. “I found a little piece of property in Idaho near Caldwell in the Sunnyslope area. The best vineyards are on higher slopes but this one has been productive.”

Cold air tends to settle in the valleys, and there can be a 6-to-8-degree difference from the top to the bottom of a slope.

The grapes he planted included Muscat Ottonel.

“I expect about 4 tons per acre. Every ton of grapes makes about 150 gallons of juice or about 63 cases of wine. I replanted 1½ acres

to Pinot grigio and Gruner Veltliner, both white wines. The Gruner Veltliner originated in Austria and is hardy and cold-tolerant,” he explains.

The rest of the vineyard is planted to Cabernet Franc, one of the parent plants to Cabernet Sauvignon.

“The joke in the wine industry is that Cabernet Franc (a red grape) got together with Sauvignon Blanc (a white grape) and created their love child Cabernet Sauvignon. This cross blends some of the best aspects of both,” he said.

“We also planted Tempranillo, a Spanish (primarily Basque) grape. Tempranillo is temperamental and challenging to grow,” said Harless.

He prunes the vines himself, with his assistant winemaker Will Wetmore.

“I had some hired help but soon realized I couldn’t train people to prune vines the way I want. It takes the two of us 10 to 12 days, 6 hours a day, using electric pruners.”

The plants each have a trunk, and vines trained onto a wire, going 3 feet to the left and 3 feet to the right.

“The shoots grow 3- to 5-foot length (a cane) and we cut 90% of that off. It’s a perennial crop and we prune the vines every year. I’ve stuck with one system called vertical shoot positioning (VSP), which means the shoots try to grow straight up, hopefully between several catch wires,” he said. “I try to grow the shoot about 3 to 5 feet long and hopefully have 2 to 3 clusters of grapes on each shoot. Each plant will have about 6 shoots to the left and 6 to the right, which means 24 to 30 clusters of fruit.”



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