



GRAPE TALK

New team at Troon Vineyard

BY DEBBIE TOLLEFSON

Troon Vineyard, located on the Kubli Bench along with a number of Applegate Valley's best wineries, is one of the originals.

Troon's founder, Dick Troon, came to the Applegate from Scotland by way of South Dakota and planted his first vines in 1972. His original vineyard included cabernet sauvignon and zinfandel grapes on about 32 acres. In 2003 Dick convinced wine aficionado Larry Martin, an old friend and fishing buddy, to take over Troon. After purchasing the vineyard, the Martin family hired winemaker Herb Quady, who created Troon's signature Druid's Fluid blend along with many other Troon classics. Fast forward to 2015, and Troon has a new general manager, Chris Cunningham, and a new wine maker, Steve Hall.

Chris Cunningham is an Applegate boy whose family owned an alfalfa farm where Bridgeview winery is today. He was first exposed to wine marketing and sales on South Carolina's Hilton Head Island. For 25 years he

worked in the wine industry in the Carolinas. His last job before joining Troon was vice president for sales and distribution for a North Carolina winery. He returned to the Applegate to help his aging parents and took the job as general manager of Troon last year.

Troon's new wine maker, Steve Hall, who comes to Troon from the Napa and Sonoma wine industry, attended Napa Valley College after four years at University of California, Berkeley. He also got a great education at Stag's Leap Winery in Napa in the 1980s. Working alongside some legendary wine makers from that period, Steve learned the nuances of managing a vineyard and bringing grapes from their beginnings to the final result as an elegant glass of wine. Steve worked at Biale and Jarvis wineries in Napa County and in 2013 took a break to join a crush crew in west Sonoma to get a taste of the hands-on experience that he was missing at the large wine machines. At Troon he is truly hands-on, as evidenced by his purple hands, stained from his daily handling of the foot-tread crush.

Troon is now solely using foot treading (crushing the grapes using guys in new and newly washed high boots who jump in the bins and stomp). Steve says foot treading produces a better flavor from the skins and coaxes more flavor from the grapes.

On some of his blends, Steve uses



Applegate native Chris Cunningham is the new general manager of Troon Vineyard. Photo: Debbie Tollefson.

native yeast fermentation, which occurs naturally and gives the subsequent wines a very definite sense of place. While we walked around the winery, Steve pointed out various bins with co-fermentation of grape varieties like vermentino (Italian light-skinned wine grape originally from the area of Sardinia) co-fermenting with sauvignon blanc, and malbec co-fermenting with tannat (a varietal from southwest France and northern Spain). These small batches (200 cases) are passion projects, but there is no less passion for Druid's Fluid, the wine that makes up 50 percent of Troon's case production. This highly acclaimed and popular wine is created from merlot, zinfandel, cabernet sauvignon, and tempranillo grapes. Steve created a wine in Napa called Black Chicken, and he feels his version of Druid's Fluid is like "Super" Black Chicken. He wants all of his projects—whether a cellar blend of River Guide Red marketed in 1.5-liter pouches or a high-end reserve or estate zinfandel made from Dick Troon's original vines—to be a reflection of

what he has learned about the power and elegance of the individual grape.

To this end Troon is also embracing sustainability and has obtained certification from LIVE (www.livecertified.org) for "environmentally and socially responsible wine growing," from LEED (www.usgbc.org/leed) for one of its buildings (one of the first LEED-certified buildings in the Applegate), and from Salmon-Safe (www.salmonsafe.org). Troon's philosophy includes working with nature to keep the grapes' natural pests under control. Workers mowing between vines alternate rows so the natural pest eradicators, e.g., ladybugs and praying mantises, will stay in the vineyard.

Troon's beautiful facility includes a patio, tasting room, and large tank-and-barrel room with over 15 stainless tanks and hundreds of barrels. Troon is going to start tours of their state-of-the-art winery in the spring of 2016.

Troon is located at 1475 Kubli Road, Grants Pass, OR. The tasting room is open daily from 11 am to 5 pm.

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Winery news and events

- Schmidt Family Vineyards Holiday Open House, Saturday, December 12, 12 to 5 pm. Award-winning wine, delicious food, and great gift ideas and opportunities. www.sfvineyards.com/events.
- Internationally read publications like *Wine Enthusiast* and *Wine Spectator* recently gave kudos to southern Oregon wines: Cowhorn 2014 Viognier, Spiral 36, and Marsanne-Roussane; Cowhorn 2011 Sentience Syrah; Troon 2013 Estate Zinfandel and 2012 Old Vine Meritage; Leah Jorgensen Cellars 2013 Blanc de Cabernet Franc (grapes from Herb Quady's Mae's Vineyard). Applegate Valley wines and grapes are garnering more and more attention on the international stage.

Steve Hall, Troon Vineyard's new wine maker, has always been hands-on when it comes to making wine. Photo: Debbie Tollefson.



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