

WSU's Voice of the Vine– Science and Sensibility, Student Wine Label, Raise a Glass

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Science and Sensibility: Part Two

In “Science and Sensibility: Part One,” Jim Holmes, known as the first to plant grapes on Red Mountain, shared his experience getting started in the wine industry in the early 1980s. You can read part one in November’s Voice of the Vine, [here](#).

In the early days, Jim Holmes struck a deal with a regional winemaker to purchase their crop, but because there was little brand value for Washington grapes, the sales price was low. “We knew that our grapes were [worth more] than what we were being offered, so we started making our own wine.” The move towards vertical integration meant that Holmes also became the lead salesman for the operation. Holmes utilized a small Seattle startup wine distributor to get things started in the big city as well as in the local market.

Successful local distribution reinforced what Holmes



knew all along—he had an exceptional product and it wouldn't be long before others realized the potential of the area and competition rolled in.

Jim Holmes, retired owner of Ciel du Cheval Vineyards.

Holmes and Williams were hauling their product to Seattle, selling to restaurants and businesses that were interested in local wines. Demand was on the rise and they recognized the need to acquire more land, develop partnerships with the wineries that now coveted their grapes, and shift from a hobby to full-time work. At that time Holmes and Williams amicably ended their partnership and Holmes began to focus on growing “new and adventurous varieties.” He has since settled on three broad types of grapes—Bordeux, Rhone, and Italian—that he believes are ideal for the region.

After more than four decades as a leader in Washington's wine industry, Holmes' recipe for success was simple. “Every time we encountered a roadblock, we just did what seemed to be the sensible thing to do.” That sensibility is based on more than intuition and Holmes credits WSU for contributions to the industry, including Dr. Walter Clore's groundbreaking report.



Holmes taking a stroll through vineyards at Red Mountain.

Holmes frequently refers to the art of grape growing, but he also acknowledges the science that informed his techniques and decisions. “We used to take water from alfalfa fields but research at (WSU) showed that we were over-watering and not stressing the vines. Growers now irrigate with much less water, which preserves this natural resource.”

Holmes praises WSU for another major contribution that not only saved his grapes, but his employees: “We had problems with cutworms climbing up and attacking the buds on our vines.” Growers would spray their entire plants with troublesome chemicals. “WSU research determined that if we just sprayed the base of the vines the larvae wouldn't climb [past that].”

Although he's not a WSU alum, Holmes has become an ardent supporter of WSU and its research in viticulture and enology. His support, and the support of others like him, are making WSU projects like the WSU Wine Science Center possible. And Washington wine, Holmes' wine, is no longer being tasted and peddled solely in a local garage—it's gained international recognition, thanks

to both science and sensibility.

Catch this full story in print, along with a series of features on WSU wine science and the Washington wine industry, in the January 2014 ReConnect alumni magazine for the WSU College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences. Subscribe to ReConnect [here](#).

–Joshua Paulsen

Introducing The First WSU Student–made Wine Label

Pour a glass of Riesling from the tall, sleek green bottle labeled *Blended Learning*, and out comes not only a unique blend of white wine grapes from the Yakima Valley, but the story of six WSU students finding opportunity and education in the heart of Washington wine country.



A toast to the first WSU student–made wine label. From left to right: Colin Hickey, Garrett Grover, Joel Perez, Robb Zimmel, Lora Morgan and Dane Day. Photo by Amos Morgan.

Robb Zimmel, a senior in the WSU Viticulture and Enology program, was working as a LifeFlight paramedic in Portland when he discovered an interest in fermentation science and decided to move to Tri–Cities with his wife and children two years ago. Now in his final year at WSU, when he talks about his favorite part of winemaking, he waxes poetic.

“It’s that pinnacle moment,” he says. “After the grapes have been crushed, the soak is done, the yeast is ready, and you’re waiting to see if the fermentation will take off like a freight train or be

sluggish...it’s that next day when you come into the winery. There is an intoxicating wine smell, and you’re just hoping and praying that the ferment is working, and you’re waiting for the sugars to drop,” he said. “From that point forward the birth of your wine begins and you watch it all the way through to its maturity, and guide it.”

Zimmel and five fellow students began planning for what would be the first WSU student–made wine back in spring 2012 when the project was launched by Viticulture and Enology Program director Thomas Henick–Kling. With

support and mentorship from their professors, Henick–Kling and Bhaskar Bondada, from Charlie Hoppes at Fidelitas winery in Richland, Washington, and the winemaking team at Hogue Cellars in Prosser, Washington, students chose their grape varieties, harvested, crushed, barreled, and, in the summer of 2013, bottled their finished product. They worked with Noir Designs to develop a marketable label design, released 100 cases of the Riesling in Fall 2013 and made it available at the new WSU Visitor's Center and WSU Connections in Seattle.

Student winemakers Dane Day and Joe Perez began the Riesling project during their first semester in the program, along with Zimmel, Colin Hickey, Garrett Grover, and Lora Morgan. Going into their final semesters of the program last summer, Day and Perez began pouring at wine shows and tastings, shaking hands with alumni and buyers, and developing an online presence to promote the wine. Meanwhile, they had another premium wine project underway. Two Cabernet Sauvignon wines are currently in the works at Barnard Griffin winery in Richland, Perez said.

“The ability to ask questions and soak up knowledge on a regular basis is fantastic and the Griffins are such a nice family—they make very good wine,” said Perez, who decided to pursue an education in wine after serving in the Marine Corps. “Luckily for us, what we are learning in the wineries is also what we are learning in the classes. The two work in concert with each other.”

Launching a Legacy

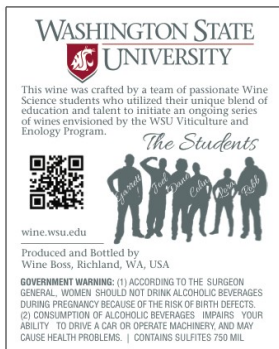
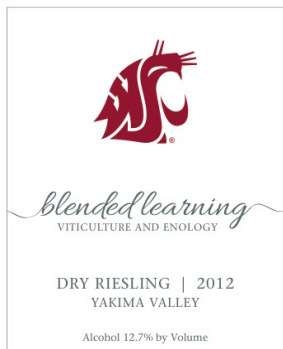
Some of the student winemakers have graduated since the launch of the Riesling, but while finishing up the program, Zimmel has already begun to develop his own label in partnership with Fidelitas and incredible support from Hillary Sjolund in her winery laboratory, Enomama, he said. Perez and Day are heading into their final semesters with what Perez describes as an “enormity” of options and connections within the wine industry. But their wine certainly won't be the last of the student-made wines coming from the WSU Viticulture and Enology program.

Les Walker graduated from WSU in 1984 with a degree in geology and



“Blended Learning,” a Dry Riesling, is the first in the vision of a series of student-made wines.

returned to WSU Tri-Cities two years ago looking to make a change in his career path. Along with Jeff Thompson, a Navy veteran who, while hiking the Pacific Crest Trail decided to study agriculture, and fellow student Dave Balsz, the three began harvesting Chenin Blanc grapes and Barbera grapes this last fall. They also learned about bottling with the red wine blend the first group of student winemakers left at the barreling stage at Columbia Crest Winery. In spring 2014, the Chenin Blanc will be ready to bottle. Other blends of 2012 reds prepared last fall will soon be ready for bottling.



This spring, when the bustling atmosphere in the wineries has settled down and the new crew's wines are aging in the barrels, they will discuss the design for a label and take the next steps in marketing their product. In the future, students will continue create their wines in collaboration with local wineries so they can learn in a hands-on atmosphere

with staff. With a vision of creating a series of wines from the WSU Viticulture and Enology Program, the new group is already helping establish a new tradition of blended learning — bringing together students, alumni, winemakers, growers, and wine enthusiasts to uncork possibilities. *Learn more about viticulture and enology at WSU at <http://wine.wsu.edu>.*

–Rachel Webber

Raise a Glass, Fund a Scholarship



Chateau Ste. Michelle is proud to partner with Washington restaurants to support the sixth annual “Raise a Glass, Fund a Scholarship” program to benefit viticulture and enology programs at Washington State University and other Northwest universities.

Nearly 200 restaurants in Washington participate in this annual program, which runs through the end of December 2013. Since the program started in 2008, together we have raised over \$250,000 for future wine industry professional scholarships. Participating in this cause is simple. Next time your plans call for dining out, we hope you select one of the participating restaurants and Raise a Glass, Fund a Scholarship.

For a list of participating restaurants visit: <http://bit.ly/1bUzI8X>. Enjoy what you read in Voice of the Vine? You might also want to subscribe

to these newsletters:

On Solid Ground is a bi-weekly, electronic newsletter for the friends and stakeholders of the Washington State University College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS), WSU Extension and the Agricultural Research Center with an emphasis on natural resources sciences and agriculture. Subscribe [here](#).

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