

# red mountain SUNSET

KLIPSUN VINEYARD is known for its *big, bold flavors* and has *evolved* as a shining example of Red Mountain *terroir*

WRITER **Kori S. Voorhees**

**K**lipsun means *sunset* in Chinook Indian jargon. But the sun is certainly not setting on Klipsun Vineyard, located in the Red Mountain AVA near Benton City, Washington. In fact, it's more like late morning in the evolution of Klipsun Vineyard, with many of its best vineyard blocks just entering the prime of their productive lives.

If you ask the best winemakers in the state of Washington to name the top vineyards in the state, Klipsun Vineyard is near the top of almost every list. And in the very next breath, they usually mention owner Patricia Gelles. One of the few women in a largely male-dominated industry, Patricia does not put up with any nonsense.

When winemakers speak of contacting Patricia about buying some of her fruit, they turn into scared little boys. She is very particular about

who she sells to because she is determined to preserve the reputation of the vineyard.

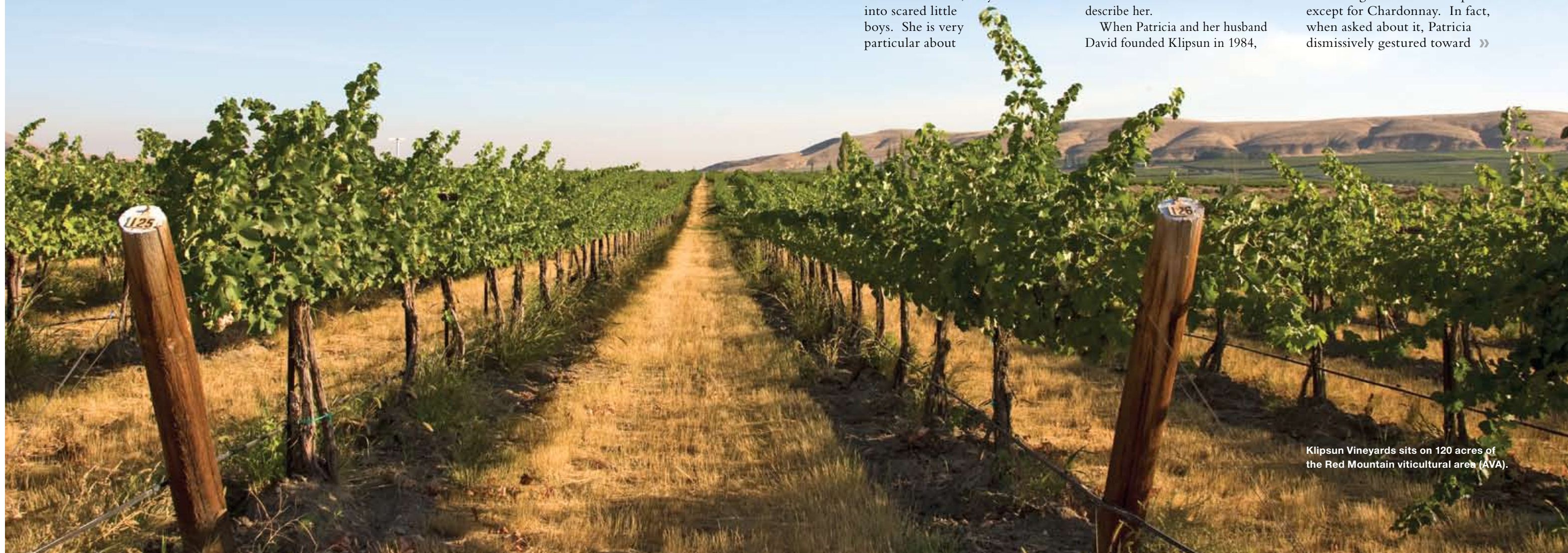
Patricia Gelles, with her fire engine red-streaked hair and British accent, is not the prototypical Eastern Washington vineyard owner. If you ran into her on the street, you would probably imagine her sipping a glass of high-end wine with friends, not being the woman responsible for the grapes that go into some of the best wines in the world. According to owner/winemaker John Bigelow of JM Cellars, Gelles is "an amazing ambassador of Washington wine." Given her marketing background, it is no surprise that she is not only a tireless advocate for Klipsun Vineyard but also the Washington wine industry. In fact, a friend affectionately coined the term "Baroness of the Mountain" to describe her.

When Patricia and her husband David founded Klipsun in 1984,

there weren't many wineries or vineyards in the state. The Gelleses were friends with the owners of Kiona Vineyard, the Holmes and Williams families, who told them about the adjacent land for sale and asked them if they were interested. "We said yes, not knowing at all what we were getting into," remembers Patricia.

Known for its dark cherry fruit flavors and bold, masculine characteristics, Klipsun's soil composition is mainly sandy loam, the majority of which was deposited during the Missoula floods. The vineyard faces west with approximately 120 acres of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Malbec, Nebbiolo, Sauvignon Blanc, and Semillon.

Every variety that they have tried has grown well at Klipsun except for Chardonnay. In fact, when asked about it, Patricia dismissively gestured toward »



Klipsun Vineyards sits on 120 acres of the Red Mountain viticultural area (AVA).

Right: Klipsun's Old Block of Cabernet Sauvignon was planted in 1984.  
Below: David and Patricia Gelles, owners of Klipsun Vineyard



wineries using grapes FROM KLIPSUN VINEYARDS

**Andrew Rich Vintner**  
www.andrewrichwines.com

**Andrew Will Winery**  
www.andrewwill.com

**ArborBrook Vineyards**  
www.arborbrookwines.com

**Arbor Crest Wine Cellars**  
www.arborcrest.com

**Barrister Winery**  
www.barristerwinery.com

**Betz Family Winery**  
www.betzfamilywinery.com

**Bookwalter Winery**  
www.bookwalterwines.com

**Boudreaux Cellars**  
www.boudreauxcellars.com

**Brian Carter Cellars**  
www.briancartercellars.com

**Col Solare**  
www.colsolare.com

**Covington Cellars**  
www.covingtoncellars.com

**O'Shea Scarborough Winery**  
www.osheascarboroughwines.com

**DeLille Cellars**  
www.delillecellars.com

**Efeste**  
www.efeste.com

**eKlipse**  
www.klipsun.com/eKlipse.htm

**Facelli Winery**  
www.facelliwinery.com

**Gorman Winery**  
www.gormanwinery.com

**Januik Winery**  
www.januikwinery.com

**JM Cellars**  
www.jmcellars.com

**L'Ecole No 41**  
www.lecole.com

**Laurelhurst Cellars**  
www.laurelhurstcellars.com

**Mark Ryan Winery**  
www.markryanwinery.com

**Page Cellars**  
www.pagecellars.com

**Pamplin Family Winery**  
www.pamplinfamilywinery.com

**Quilceda Creek**  
www.quilcedacreek.com

**R. Stuart & Co.**  
www.rstuartandco.com

**Ross Andrew Winery**  
www.rossandrewwinery.com

**Seven Hills Winery**  
www.sevenhillswinery.com

**Sheridan Vineyard**  
www.sheridanvineyard.com

**Solena Cellars**  
www.solenacellars.com

**Soos Creek Wine Cellars**  
www.sooscreekwine.com

**Sparkman Cellars**  
www.sparkmancellars.com

**SYZGY**  
www.szygywines.com

**Three Rivers Winery**  
www.threeriverswinery.com

**Trouville Winery**  
www.trouvillewinery.com

**Vitarossa**  
www.vitarossa.com



After a freeze in 1986, Chardonnay vines were pulled out and Syrah planted, but the Chardonnay wood pile remains.

That's our *Chardonnay* over there, that *wood pile.*

a pile of dead vines at the back of the property, saying, "That's our Chardonnay over there, that wood pile." After a freeze in 1986, they pulled out all of their Chardonnay vines and planted Syrah.

Their most sought after grapes are their Old Block of Cabernet Sauvignon, which is the first variety they planted back in 1984. "Andre Tchelistcheff (legendary California winemaker and consultant) said that the Kiona Cab was the best he'd ever tasted, so we decided to put in Cab too, since we are right next to Kiona," said Gelles. As for how they decided what other varieties to plant, "We planted what we wanted to drink."

Currently, about 35 producers purchase Klipsun grapes, among them Andrew Will, DeLille, Januik, JM Cellars, Seven Hills, and Quilceda Creek. It takes a while for winemakers to learn how to make a wine from Klipsun fruit so that it is not too big. For that reason, many producers blend the masculine Klipsun fruit with more refined feminine fruit from vineyards like Ciel du Cheval and Boushey.

"In a blend, Klipsun fruit lifts up tannin, and adds structure and power," said winemaker Chris Upchurch of

DeLille Cellars.

Even though many winemakers choose to blend Klipsun fruit, there are also winemakers who choose to produce a Klipsun vineyard-designated wine. In fact, Patricia remembers the first time she was asked by a winemaker if she would mind them putting the Klipsun name on the label. It was then that she realized that Klipsun was going to be a very special vineyard.

Since the beginning, Patricia Gelles has spent most of her time in the office making sure that the Klipsun fruit is sold. Her background is in marketing and after year two, she was trying to figure out where to sell the fruit. Rob Griffin, who was working for Hogue at the time, knocked on their door, and they haven't looked back since. She lets her vineyard manager take care of the hands-on work in the vineyard.

Over the course of 25 years, there are only two people who have managed Klipsun, Fred Artz and Julia Kock. Fred Artz, who owns his own Artz Vineyard adjoining Klipsun, originally planted Klipsun Vineyard for the Gellesees and worked as their vineyard manager for 20 years. They hired Julia Kock, soon after she graduated from viticulture and enology school, to take

In a *blend*, Klipsun fruit lifts up tannin, and adds *structure* and *power*

CHRIS UPCHURCH, DeLille Cellars.

over as vineyard manager in 2005. While some people in the industry may have been skeptical about them hiring what appeared to be an inexperienced vineyard manager, Gelles is quick to point out that Julia "was fresh out of viticulture and enology school, but very experienced in human resources and she'd done an internship at Columbia Crest. Julia has a fabulous palate. She understands what the winemakers are trying to do."

Under Julia's direction, Klipsun Vineyard is focused on sustainable viticultural practices. There is much debate in the wine industry today as to the merits of organic, biodynamic, or sustainable farming. While the ideal may be organic farming, there are many factors that generally make it impractical. Klipsun has not used an herbicide in twenty years, and Julia uses a very soft pesticide program.

However, as Patricia points out, "There are too many things going on physically in nature and too many people close by that can have an impact on us. If we get an infestation of mites or something like that, we need to be able to treat it."

So where does a vineyard that has been named as one of the top 25 vineyards in the world by Wine & Spirits Magazine go from here? "We want to keep on doing what we do best," said Gelles. "If we get enough demand, we might put in another few acres. We have 30 or 40 acres that we could plant at some point, but we're not in a mad rush."

When you get to know Patricia Gelles, who is as bold and commanding as her fruit, and you see the emphasis she and Julia are placing on sustainable viticultural practices, you quickly realize the sun is shining brightly at Klipsun Vineyard. 🍇



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