# tasting room Openings

Do you know of a new WINERY, TASTING ROOM OR WINE BAR? **Drop us a line at Editor@WashingtonTastingRoom.com** 







New talent at Rocky Pond includes chef Doug Setniker (left), the winery's Director of Culinary Experiences, and Holly La Porta-Jones (above), a Level II Sommelier and the Woodinville tasting room manager

# ROCKY POND ESTATE WINERY WOODINVILLE

Rocky Pond Estate Winery opened a sleek tasting room in the hip, urban Woodin Creek Village district. They've borrowed a page from the playbook of Napa Valley wineries with illuminating chef-driven food and wine pairings. There's a ton of seating indoors, as well as two large outdoor patios.

David and Michelle Dufenhorst established the winery in 2013, building an estate winery and destination venue in Orondo, and setting up a tasting room in Chelan. "The new tasting room in Woodinville will take our King County and Northeastern Seattle offerings to the next level," says David Dufenhorst. In 2020 he brought on an impressive team to accomplish that goal companywide.

"Rocky Pond is all about experiences," emphasizes John Ware, who joined the winery as president in early 2020. Ware, formerly with Quilceda Creek for two decades, says their new culinary program will raise the hospitality bar. "And our tasting room manager and wine educator in Woodinville, Holly La Porta-Jones, is a Level II Sommelier."

Leading the culinary program is veteran chef Douglas Setniker. He brings nearly 30 years of high-touch catering expertise to the winery. "It's a tasting room first and all about the wine—we want the food to elevate the wine here, and we've got a special menu just for our Rocks Society wine club membership," Setniker says. He's created a dazzling menu of rotating small bites, weekly chef specials and multi-course wine dinners. Each menu item is thoughtfully paired with the wines.

The quality of estate-grown fruit shines in the wines, matched with a lot of talent from the winemaking and vineyard teams. Acclaimed Napa Valley winemaker Steve Leveque signed on as a consultant to Rocky Pond in 2020 and will work alongside winemaker Shane Collins. Levegue produced high-scoring wines at Robert Mondavi Winerv. Chalk Hill and Opus One. "This is another building block in our mission to elevate Rocky Pond as the top Eastern Washington wine destination," states owner David Dufenhorst. With an allstar team of this caliber, Rocky Pond is poised for greatness.

Rocky Pond 2017 Double D Vineyard La Domestique Reserve, 92 pts. Sultry and aromatic, this Bordeauxstyle red offers fine tannins and wellhoned structure matched by resounding plum and dark cherry flavors that mingle with details of vanilla and graphite. Picks up warm stone and cedary overtones on the lingering finish. \$45

# Rocky Pond 2019 Clos CheValle Vineyard Gewürztraminer, 91

**pts.** This elegant version leaps out of the glass with aromas of lychee, ginger, spice, honeysuckle and orange blossom. Crisply balanced on the palate, exuding pear, apricot and zesty minerality on a sleek frame. \$24

**Visit:** Tasting fees are \$15 and \$25; 13475 NE Village Square Dr, Suite 1010, Woodinville, (425) 949-9044; open WedSun, check website for current hours at www.rockypondwinery.com

# BROWNE FAMILY VINEYARDS

With tasting rooms in Walla Walla and downtown Seattle, Browne Family Vineyards has opened a third one in Tacoma, not far from the Point Defiance Zoo. "The excitement and vitality of the Proctor District, along with its charming neighborhood feel, is what really attracted us to this fantastic location," says proprietor Andrew Browne.

Renowned for exceptional quality and Bordeaux-style reds, Browne Family Vineyards was built as a legacy to Andrew Browne's grandfather, William Bitner Browne. Bitner was a World War II hero and attorney. Much of the look and feel of the tasting room is an extension of the Brownes' home, which also incorporates nostalgic touches of Bitner's house in Springfield, Ohio.

Andrew and Courtney Browne, along with their daughter Elliott and son Brooks, moved to the South Sound in 2018 and reside on Fox Island.

The tasting room is a feature of the Madison 25 building, a mix of retail and apartments. "I'm excited to bring the heart and hospitality of Browne Family Vineyards from Walla Walla to Tacoma and to welcome our wine club members," says Courtney Browne.

Tasting room guests will also have access to exclusive wines featuring single vineyards, unique varietals and small lot offerings not offered elsewhere.

Browne's award-winning reds and whites are the real deal, flawlessly executed with pure lines of grace and power. Winemaker John Freeman goes to great lengths to create expressive wines from their estate vineyard in the



Spring Valley district of Walla Walla.

Spymaster 2017 The Continent Cabernet Sauvignon, 93 pts. Only 285 cases were made, all from the prized Bitner Block in the Browne Estate Vineyard in the Walla Walla Valley. Ultrasavory, dark and brooding, revealing black plum and cassis framed with singed cedar, tea leaf, eucalyptus and underbrush. Fresh acidity runs through the long complex finish. \$67

# Browne Family Vineyards 2019 White Arrow Blend, 91 pts. A

study in contrasts is in play, leading with a creamy mouthfeel that snaps to attention on the juicy midpalate, displaying a complex swatch of grapefruit, yellow apple, pear and lime citrus. Deepening textural notes on the finish highlight stony mineral elements. \$32 Grenache Blanc/Marsanne/Picpoul

**Recommended:** 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon; 2017 Tribute Red Blend

**Visit:** \$20-25 tasting flights; 2805 N Proctor St, Tacoma, (253) 904-3066; open daily, check website for details at www.brownefamilyvineyards.com

# CATEGORY 5 CELLARS WOODINVILLE

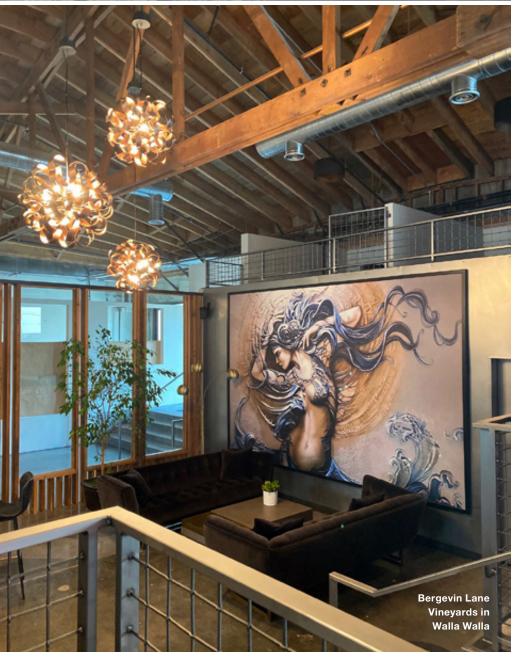
Jason Smith's first career was in high tech, which prompted him to name his winery after the ethernet networking cable referred to as "Cat 5 wire." Newly opened in the Winery Warehouse District in August 2020, Jason employs technology to create a unique tasting venue. "All our lights are WiFi LED that can change between 16 million colors,"





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LEFT Collage of winemaker Jason Smith of Category 5 Cellars, driving a tractor at age nine, and his great grandfather Solonas Smith

he explains. "We can light the room to fit any occasion. Feel like watching the Hawks game at Category 5? We can accent the tasting room greens and blues. Taking your valentine out for tasting? Think lots of pinks and reds."

Jason grew up working in the orchard as a fourth generation family farmer, learning a firm work ethic along the way. After college, he embraced a career in the tech world, developing a natural passion for wine by his early 20s. When he burned out in the tech sector he switched gears and took enology classes at Northwest Wine Academy and was instantly hooked.

"The older I get, I find myself being drawn back to my agriculture background, much like a goose flying south for the winter. My goal, outside of making kick-ass wines, is to help educate the consumer, so they understand where their food (wine grapes in this case) comes from," remarks Jason.

The inaugural releases were sourced from top growers, including sites like Dionysus, Gamache, Dineen and Lawrence Vineyards. The results would be impressive for any seasoned veteran in the field, but doubly so for someone's first time at bat.

Category 5 Cellars 2017 **Dionysus Vineyard Petit Verdot, 93 pts.** An opulent style that displays an expressive sense of place, this red packs monumental structure with finesse, showcasing compact purple and black fruit, violet, dusty spice and earthy minerality. The taut acidity and carpet-plush tannins create lovely tension that rolls seamlessly through the mesmerizing finish. \$40

Category 5 Cellars 2018 Albariño, 90 pts. Steely, with bright minerality led by floral notes of honeydew, pear, apricot and orange citrus. The crisp palate gushes with tropical flavors of pineapple and zesty lime that weave through the stony finish. \$18

Recommended: Firewall Red Visit: 19501 144th Ave NE, Suite D-900, Woodinville; open Fri-Sun, check website for current hours at www.cat5cellars.com



Rocky Pond 2017 La Domestique Reserve, 2019 Gewürztraminer, 92 pts.





Spymaster 2017 The **Continent Cabernet** Sauvignon, 93 pts.



EDITOR'S PICKS

**Browne Family** Category 5 Cellars 2017 Vineyards 2019 White **Dionysus Vineyard** Petit Verdot, 93 pts.



Category 5 Cellars 2018 Albariño, 90 pts.



Princess Syrah, 95 pts.



Bergevin Lane 2016 **Moonspell Cabernet** Sauvignon, 92 pts.



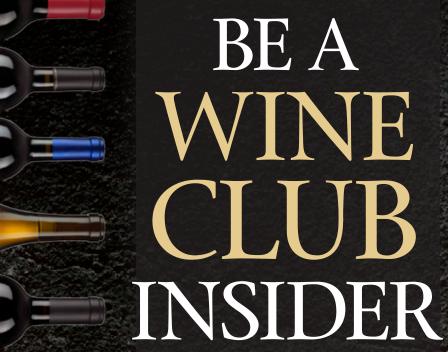
**Prospice Wines 2017** Cabernet Sauvignon, 94 pts.



**Bianchi Vineyards** 2018 Tempranillo, >>> 90 pts.

### **DRINK WASHINGTON FIRST**

## Wine Club Releases



TOP PICKS

Y7 ant to sip wines that only **W** a few insiders will ever get a chance to taste? That is one of the elite privileges of belonging to a winery club that offers their members limited releases.

Many of our readers join multiple clubs because they know that members (aka "insiders") drink better than the masses. Bonus: they enjoy extra perks all year long, from bargains on prices to foodie events and other memorable experiences.

In this section, we review 28 remarkable wines (many made in small lots selected from the finest barrels) that club members get their hands on first, or in some cases, totally exclusive access. »





#### **Columbia Winery** 2016 LX2 Cabernet Sauvignon

95 pts. Flawless in structure, with a creamy, plush texture that opens to rich blackberry, deep dark cherry and licorice flavors exquisitely inlaid with cedar and graphite details offset by firm, polished tannins on the long and poetic finish. \$110

#### **CLUB MEMBER PERKS:**

Very limited at 106 cases, this is a wine club exclusive. 10-20% club discounts apply.



#### Castillo de Feliciana 2016 Bolsa Negra **Reserve Red Wine**

95 pts. This elegant red flows with a fine silk texture and harmonious flavors of dense blackberry, cassis and dark cherry flanked by gorgeous crushed rock and deep purple notes that create a seamless impression. Velvet-clad tannins grip the finish. \$73 Malbec/Cab

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS:

Wine club exclusive. 10-20% club discounts apply.



#### **The Walls Vineyards** 2018 Wonderful **Nightmare**

94 pts. At-once beguiling, verging on opulent, but still fresh and youthful. Smoke, grilled meat and dark fruit aromas are followed by earthy flavors of leather, tobacco and red stone fruit. Ends with verve, forged by iron notes and lasting acidity. \$48 Tempranillo

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS:

Offered first to members, and then to visitors of the winery. 10-25% club discounts apply



#### **Maryhill Winery 2016 Elephant Mountain Vineyard Marvell GSM**

93 pts. Savory, deep and complex, this red shows muscle, with firm structure and refined flavors of blackberry, raspberry and currants mingled with white pepper, fig and espresso. Stony minerality rides alongside grippy tannins for the duration, \$48

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS.

Premium Wine Club member exclusive. 25% club discounts apply.

## DRINK WASHINGTON FIRST

Wine Club Releases

## Wine Club Releases



#### **Tsillan Cellars 2018 Estate Dolcetto**

93 pts. Sumptuous and rich, teeming with plump black and red currants, vibrant blackberry, leather and anise laced with copious black pepper and spice notes that contribute to the opulence on the firm finish. The fruit is 100% estate-grown from the Lake Chelan AVA. \$34

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS:

Wine club exclusive, only 73 cases produced. 15-25% club discounts apply



#### **Tinte Cellars 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon**

93 pts. Bursting with sophistication, exhibiting aromas of black fruit and pencil shavings. Opulent in structure with a pillowy mouthfeel and satiny tannins that contribute to the ethereal palate, heightened with cassis, blackberry, cocoa, graphite, loam and minerality that invade the finish. \$48

#### **CLUB MEMBER PERKS:**

10% discount on bottles. 20% discount on cases.



#### **Rocky Pond 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon** Reserve

93 pts. This captivates with taut structure flowing with alluring blackberry reduction, cherry and violet flavors backlit by expressive graphite, anise and sage. Firm tannins extend the finish with emerging river rock and tobacco leaf accents. \$60

#### **CLUB MEMBER PERKS:**

Pre-release to club members



#### **Brian Carter Cellars** 2017 Big Daddy

93 pts. This dry Douro-style red is sculpted with a mineral streak that flows through a rich center of red plum, dark currants, violet, dried orange peel and a mix of savory herbs. Shows precision to the intricate balance of fruit, spice, fresh acidity and tannin elements. \$50

#### **CLUB MEMBER PERKS:**

Wine club exclusive release through at least January 1, 2021 15-20% club discounts apply.



#### **Chandler Reach** Winery 2016 Carménère **Yakima Valley**

93 pts. Sublime and alluring, with savory spice, dried herbs and Poblano pepper details that coalesce with condensed flavors of crushed raspberry and rich cherry that deepen exponentially on the drawn-out finish. \$35

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS:

Wine club exclusive, only 80 cases produced. 15-20% club discounts apply.



#### **Treveri Cellars** 2016 Reserve Rosé

93 pts. This special Brut rosé is richly satisfying, with a stellar beam of minerality cut with fine beads and framed by expressive flavors of strawberry, pink grapefruit and yellow currant. Ends with lingering notes of yeast roll and gingerbread. \$55 Chardonnav/Pinot Meunier

#### **CLUB MEMBER PERKS:**

Available exclusively to Reserve Club members.



## **Lawrence Vineyard** 2019 Roussanne

93 pts. A floral bouquet of honeysuckle and citrus tree blossoms greet the nose with peach and melon. Silky in texture with a creamy rich mouthfeel and flattering flavors of pear, hazelnut and limestone minerality that echo on the finish. \$30

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS:

Released exclusively to wine club members every fall. Limited quantity produced.



#### **Ambassador Wines** of Washington 2017 **Estate Petit Verdot**

93 pts. Earthy notes abound in this rendition, with impeccable structure that retains a lofty feel. Crafted with luscious black fruit, interwoven by dark cherry paste, black olive, and crushed rock accents, the flavors delve deep on the balanced finish boosted by sweet tannins. \$75

#### CLUB MEMBER PERKS:

Wine club exclusive, only 100 cases produced. 10-20% club discounts apply







Judy Phelps is the winemaker at Hard Row to Hoe Vineyards and Don Phelps is the winegrape grower

I made a decision I
wasn't going to spray
anything in the vineyard
that required me to
wear a respirator.

DON PHELPS,
 Hard Row to Hoe Vineyards



Syrah grapes from Hard Row to Hoe's estate vineyard

The Phelps' operation was the first LIVE (Low Input Viticulture and Enology) and Salmon-safe certified vineyard and winery in North Central Washington. LIVE means you use the minimum amount of material to protect your fruit and do your job. Don says he uses only organic sprays and fertilizers in the vineyard.

As Don explains, "I made a decision I wasn't going to spray anything in the vineyard that required me to wear a respirator."

Judy adds, "We thought as we became the first to become LIVE certified, wouldn't it be great if other wineries around Lake Chelan followed our lead?" They were the ninth winery to open in the Chelan Valley, and protecting the Chelan Lake watershed was an essential consideration.

Their long-term commitment to follow standards which use lower amounts of approved material is paying off in the vineyard by producing healthier fruit and increasing flavors of the wines. Plus, their organic farming practices are more appealing to customers.

Like true pioneers, they educated themselves following a "trial and error" process of implementing more natural vineyard maintenance practices, including utilizing native-insects like the praying mantis, alternate mowing between rows, and hand pruning the trellis system in the vineyards.

They have recently introduced a new label: "Whole Picture" wines

that reflect both the vineyard and winemaking practices represented by the individual tiles pictured on the label showing the processes that went on in the vineyard and winery.

Their first release was a single vineyard, single-varietal sparkling Cabernet Franc 2019 Pét-Nat méthode ancestrale that scored 93 points by *Washington Tasting Room Magazine*. Judy says, "It's a direct expression of the vineyard." Their second release under this label was an amphora aged Cabernet Franc that is much along the line of a Beaujolais wine with no oak influence and released just 9 months after harvest. Bright, fresh and fruity, it is already developing a following.

# LIGHTWEIGHT, RECYCLABLE & RESUSABLE

you haven't heard about the success of canned wines and recyclable reusable packaging, then you haven't had the delightful opportunity to talk with Rob and Brenda Mercer, owners of Mercer Estates Winery in Prosser.

Known for their conservation efforts and responsible stewardship of the land, the Mercers use lightweight, recyclable, reusable aluminum cans to package their ICAN wines and ICAN hard seltzers. Think Chardonnay and Rosé in half bottle sizes with a resealable cap. As Rob points out, "You not only have a totally recyclable product, it can be reused as a water bottle."

With half the weight at half the

# Doing things that are environmentally friendly and sustainable are always foremost in our minds.

- ROB MERCER, Mercer Estates Winery/ICAN Wines

volume, wine shipments cost less. Using smaller, lighter-weight cardboard boxes without the need for plastic separators provides a better, safer way to protect both the environment (less trash) and the product (no glass).

Although the Mercers still use bottles for their other wine tiers, the canned wines are proving ever more popular and have enabled the winery to expand its marketing to "grab and go" convenience stores.

Brenda says the "ICAN" concept was a bootstrap project from the start, something unique to the winery. Her energy behind it conjures up that iconic image of World War II's Rosie the Riveter and the accompanying expression, "We can do it!"

Rob says they learned how to get started by working with can suppliers. While the canned Rosé and Chardonnay have been on the market for a while, the ICAN hard seltzers were only launched a few months ago. According to the Mercers, the science behind the ICAN concept raises the quality of the wines and seltzers in both body and mouthfeel.

Rob says, "Doing things that are environmentally friendly and sustainable are always foremost in our minds." Using high quality estategrown fruit from their sustainably farmed vineyards, the Mercers are confident their use of recyclable, reusable cans will continue to grow in the future.

#### TAKING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO WINEMAKING

DESPITE the name "Walls" being a play on the locals' nickname for the nearby penitentiary, there is no confining The Walls Vineyards in Walla Walla to a limit on solar technology and renewable energy. General manager Carrie

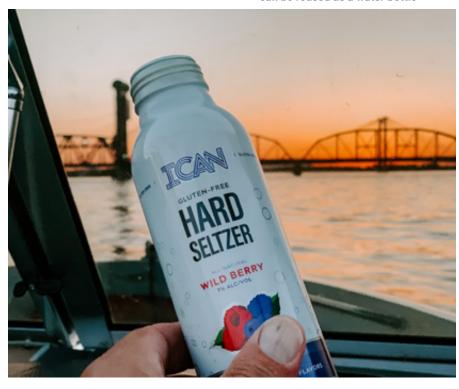
Alexander says, "Sustainability is the winery's mission," adding that she and owner Mike Martin think about the topic every day. Indeed, utilizing every possible planet-friendly technique in modernizing the winery's facility seems to be their goal.

The winery is currently in the middle of following a systematic, step-by-step, six-month process of becoming a B-Corp certified business, which verifies a company's reduced environmental impact utilizing ecofriendly business practices. "We're constantly thinking about our use of plastic, the use of energy, our packaging, and recycling to minimize our impact on the earth," says Alexander.

With recently installed solar panels on the roof, The Walls winery practically glows from renewable energy saving. The winery's \$200,000 investment in solar technology has saved roughly 100 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the equivalent of planting 5,000 trees. Along with the excess power



ICAN wines and hard seltzers are totally recyclable and come in a lightweight resealable can that can be reused as a water bottle



# WALLS STIVM JHE WALLS





The Walls Vineyards employ solar panels, organic farming, green packaging, even lighter bottles and composite natural corks

# "We're constantly thinking about our use of plastic, the use of energy, our packaging, and recycling to minimize our impact on the earth."

- CARRIE ALEXANDER, The Walls Vineyards

generated by the solar panels, Alexander says, "The winery also makes a monthly donation to support renewable energy with Pacific Power's Blue Sky program."

The vineyard is farmed organically, and the wine is made with a minimum of intervention. "The Walls strives to take a holistic approach to everything, including relying on an increased usage of neutral oak barrels for aging," says Alexander.

Other measures include switching to lighter-weight glass bottles, composite natural cork called Diam that utilizes the earth-friendly processes (and virtually eliminates cork-taint), and 100% organic cotton bags made in the USA for wine carriers. They've reduced the use of foil capsules, and use shipping packaging made from recycled cardboard pulp, even using paper tape to seal the boxes so that no plastic is used in the shipping of their wine.

Because glass recycling is not available in Walla Walla, the winery is installing a glass crusher for recycling used wine bottles. The ground glass can be used in landscaping or refired in large rock kilns for fabricating glass art objects. The Walls is also installing an onsite electric car charging station that runs off of solar power for customers who drive electric vehicles.

These cleaner practices not only generate cost savings for The Walls, they generate respect from happier customers who appreciate the winery's concern for protecting the environment.

# COMPOSTABLE WINE SHIPPING PACKAGES

CERTIFIED 100% sustainable in 2009, Amavi Cellars in Walla Walla continually seeks nature-friendly alternatives. For example, composting and no harsh chemicals are used in the

estate vineyard. But its philosophy goes beyond responsible farming according to co-owner and winemaker Jean-François Pellet.

The winery has one of the largest solar energy installations in Washington, no longer uses capsules on its wine bottles, changed all its lighting to LED, and uses compostable wine shipping packages made from recyclable materials. It hasn't used Styrofoam in its packaging in years.

Pellet grew up in Switzerland where he says, "You can recycle your whole house. We never put glass or a battery in the garbage. It's something I've been born and raised with." Using ecofriendly practices in his grape growing, wine production and distribution just comes naturally.

To find an alternative to using Styrofoam packaging, Pellet talked to vendors at trade shows both in Europe and the US. It was at the Unified Wine and Grape Symposium where he discovered a packaging company, Fleetwood-Fibre Packaging, that produces natural-colored, not dyed, cardboard cases that wrap and protect the wine during shipping. Pellet says, "It's not a cheap package, but it's strong and safe." Amavi hasn't experienced any problems with breakage. The cases come in four different sizes to accommodate small or large shipments of wine with one type of insert that fits

In the near future Pellet says they are looking at ways to use less and less water. "Keep trying to push the envelope," he says. "Although you can't change the world in a minute, you do it because it's the right thing to do for the earth and future generations."

#### **BIODYNAMIC GRAPE GROWING**

Hedges Family Estate has embraced biodynamic farming



# "Although you can't change the world in a minute, you do it because it's the right thing to do for the earth and future generations."

- JEAN-FRANÇOIS PELLET, Amavi & Pepper Bridge Winery

since 2009. Currently, they operate three vineyards in the Red Mountain AVA that are certified Biodynamic by the Demeter Association, and two more vineyards that are farmed organically.

Both organic and biodynamic farms grow their food without the use of pesticides, herbicides, or GMOs (genetically modified organisms). Both practices are good for the environment, relying on natural remedies to combat insects and disease. But biodynamic farming, developed by an Austrian scientist and philosopher named Rudolph Steiner in 1924, takes it further. It regulates farming practices through the lunar calendar. Planting, pruning, and harvesting is done by hand. And in wine production, no commercial yeast is added to the wine during fermentation.

Tom Hedges and his wife, Anne-Marie, lived in several different countries before settling in Washington and starting Hedges Cellars in 1986. Their son, Christophe, now handles the marketing and their daughter, Sarah Hedges Goedhart, is the winemaker.

Back in 2009, Christophe approached his father with an idea about going organic. Tom Hedges admits he was a bit skeptical but open to the idea. He

hired consultant Phillipe Armenier from Santa Rosa, CA who advised him not to convert all of the vineyards to biodynamic at once. He recommended that Tom start slowly and see how he liked it.

In 2009 they started biodynamically farming in their main estate Hedges Vineyards and Christophe's four acres of Cabernet Sauvignon. By 2011 both vineyards were certified. Then in 2017 they converted their Syrah vineyard to biodynamic and started organically farming the remaining two vineyards. Tom Hedges says they will both be certified by their next harvest in 2021.

The vineyards employ 40 free roaming chickens that love to eat pests, such as cutworms. They use cow manure as a natural fertilizer and harvest by the phases of the moon. The winery's onsite chefs use produce grown in the biodynamic garden and eggs from the chickens in the kitchen. When they have excess eggs and produce, they donate it to a local food bank.

The winery currently makes two fully biodynamic wines and others that are organic. Sarah hopes to add sheep and goats to the mix so that one day Hedges Family Estate might be a fully self-contained farm.



Sarah Hedges Goedhart digs up a Champagne bottle buried in the vineyard. Traditional biodynamic farming includes burying cow horns to enrich the soil.

