Long Shadows: Winery with a diverse vision

Amalie Robert Estate: Small operation focuses on quality

By GEOFF PARKS
For the Capital Press

DALLAS, Ore. — To complement a traditional Pinot noir operation, Ernie Pink and Dena Drews like to do other things in their own way and with their own vineyard management and winemaking methods at Amalie Robert Estate.

Giving up a hectic life in Seattle working for computer software companies, the pair pulled up stakes, moved to Oregon wine country and, at the urging of legendary Oregon winemaker Dick Erath, fully immersed themselves in the life of agriculture and the hard work of making wine.

Amalie Robert is one of only three wineries in Oregon’s newest American Viticultural Area, a smallish — 5,530 acres — designation southwest of Salem called the “Mt. Pisgah, Polk County, Oregon” AVA.

By comparison, the largest Oregon AVA, Tualatin Hills, includes 144,000 acres.

The winery’s longish name is to delineate the area from other Mt. Pisgahs, both in Oregon (near Eugene) and elsewhere in the country.

Pink said his 35 acres of Pinot noir, Chardonnay, Pinot meunier, Syrah, Viognier and Gewurztraminer grapes are sited within a landlocked 60-acre parcel at the 654-foot elevation. The land was purchased in 1999, and was once home to a 1,200-tree cherry orchard.

A m a l i e Robert’s family names — the name combines family names from Drenw and Pink — 30-ton first crush was in 2006.

Pink is originally from Montana and Drews from Connecticut. The two met in Ireland.

Over the years, the pair gradually evolved their separate and co-equal duties at the winery. While the current planted acreage is all hand-picked by a 20-person crew, Ernie is hands-on himself, tracting the freshly harvested bounty up a south-sloping hill to the 17-year-old winery building.

Gilles Nicault director of Long Shadows winemaking and viticulture to collaborate with Long Shadows’ diverse group of winemakers and execute their shared vision.

Nicault grew up in southern France, where he studied viticulture and enology, and made wine in Côte du Rhône, Provence and Champagne.

He came to Washington state in 1994 to expand his winemaking skills, working for several top Washington wineries.

By the time Long Shadows was established, Nicault knew Washington vineyards very well. He took the position at Long Shadows to merge his winemaking skills with a remarkable group of vintners.

“The name Long Shadows honors the winemaker partners and the 7 core wines that comprise our original portfolio. Each was made by an acclaimed winemaker who owned the brand that carried his name,” said Narbaitz.

“Gilles has been our onsite winemaker in Walla Walla from the beginning, working alongside Allen to refine the vision for the project and collaborating with a team of all-star vintners to craft wine from their signature grape,” he said. “He represented our winemaker partners in the vineyards, working closely with growers and managing all winemaking to create and blend wines in the style each winemaker envisioned.”

The partner winemakers traveled to Washington state frequently in the early years, collaborating with Nicault on vineyard preferences, picking and fermentation protocols, barrel selections, and final blending. When construction started on Long Shadows’ Walla Walla winery in 2005, Nicault helped design and outfit the new facility to each vintner’s specifications.

Wines were produced in that partnership for about 15 years.

“Then, travel schedules and other demands on our partners’ time lessened their involvement in Long Shadows. Though the original partners are no longer involved, we continue to honor the same grape sourcing and style of winemaking each vintner created, with Gilles at the helm, as he has been since the first vintage,” said Narbaitz.

Washington wine visionary Allen Shoup founded Long Shadows winery in 2002 as his second act.

“Before that, Allen was president and CEO of Chateau Ste. Michelle winery for 20 years,” said his stepson, Dane Narbaitz, who is now president and CEO of Long Shadows.

Shoup ran Ste. Michelle during a period of tremendous growth in the industry, and was a pioneer of Washington wines.

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Shoup envisioned Long Shadows as an alliance highlighting the quality and diversity of Washington vineyards.

Building on the international partnerships he established at Ste. Michelle and taking inspiration for Long Shadows from his friend and mentor Robert Mondavi (whose Opus One collaboration with Baron Philippe de Rothschild furthered the prestige of Napa Valley), Shoup recruited a dream team of international winemakers to make a single Washington wine.

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