

# Abeja Winery: More than a vineyard

By HEATHER SMITH THOMAS For the Capital Press 14 hrs ago



A room with a view at Abeja Winery & Inn.

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The Abeja Winery and The Inn at Abeja are on a restored century-old farmstead in the foothills of the Blue Mountains four miles east of Walla Walla, Wash.

The 38-acre site is part of a property that was homesteaded in 1863. A new owner in 1986 began restoring some of the old buildings and eventually opened the Mill Creek Inn.

Abeja founders Ken and Ginger Harrison came to Walla Walla in the late 1990s looking for land suitable for planting world class Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. While searching for an ideal vineyard location they discovered this historic farmstead that captured their hearts. The property was well-suited for grape growing and winemaking, and by restoring more of the farmstead's buildings, the Harrisons saw an opportunity to preserve a rich heritage while creating a one-of-a-kind wine country destination.

Today Abeja is the realization of the Harrisons' vision. The name Abeja, which is Spanish for bee, was chosen in respect for the environment. The winery and The Inn at Abeja operate on the belief that each person can make a difference in the world.

Winemakers Daniel Wampfler and Amy Alvarez-Wampfler together create Abeja's Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Merlot as well as limited-release estate and reserve wines, offered exclusively to Abeja List members.

Dan and Amy met years ago at the Columbia Crest Winery in Washington. "We had a big team there, and Amy was responsible for the white wines and I was responsible for red wines," Dan said.

He left Columbia Crest to become head winemaker at Dunham Cellars in Walla Walla, and Amy started a new winery called Sinclair Estate Vineyards.

"She custom-crushed her fruit at Dunham Cellars so we made our wine under her direction and watchful eye," he said.

"We worked together and had some overlapping vineyards and spent time in the vineyards together. For sales, however, she'd be going one direction and I another. It was always our dream to make wine together from start to finish, under one roof and one label. We never imagined we'd have the opportunity to be co-winemakers at Abeja!"

They started at Abeja in January 2016.

"Ken Harrison brought us on board, which gave us the chance to create evolutionary wines based on estate vineyards. Amy and I make all the winemaking decisions together—from picking to blending to barrel choices," he said. "We have a team of 37 full-time employees which includes the vineyard crew, grounds crew, and a crew to take care of the Inn, which can accommodate up to 28 people."

They also recently opened a high-end culinary dining experience and hired an executive chef and a team to delight our guests with 5- or 7-course dinners, paired with the wines.

The main objectives are sustainable farming practices, winemaking and business practices.

“Our dream would be for one or both of our daughters to someday be involved in the business long-term. Jada, our 18-year-old, just graduated from high school and has worked here during the summers doing office work, and is now serving in the dining room,” he said. “Our 8-year old daughter Elise helped, too, this past year, because of schools being shut down during COVID. We brought Elise to work with us during harvest for 5 days a week, so she got a real-world education as well as a virtual school education.”

This is a family-oriented business.

“Amy and I feel blessed. People are only as good as the folks they surround themselves with, and we are surrounded by some great people,” Dan said.

“We try to organize amazing guest experiences from the moment people arrive — through their wine tastings, their breakfasts, their in-stay and strolls through the vineyards and our 38 acres, and dining experiences. They can take those memories home in a time capsule — which is a bottle of Abeja wine!”