

# An introductory trio

*Three Angels Winery enters market with wines seldom seen on the Northwest scene*

Ed Fus calls his wife, Laureen, and his daughters, Alex and Morgan, his three angels. They being his first loves and wine being his second, when he decided to establish a winery, naming the second after the first seemed a natural fit.



Karl Klooster

Thus, Three Angels Winery was born.

But that's only the most recent chapter in a quarter-century-long story that begins at Penn State University where Fus majored in the school's most renowned field of study — agriculture.

Natural resources were a complementary extension of that specialty and he went from Pennsylvania to West Virginia to earn a degree in mining engineering. From there it was on to New Jersey for work in wastewater treatment.

He and his wife moved to Denver in 1988 where he landed a HazMat job dealing with petroleum cleanup. The underlying theme of all these technically oriented undertakings is bioscience.

All along the way, Fus continued his love affair with fine wine. It was a fascination inherited from his father who had been raised in the Finger Lakes, a long-established winegrowing region in

## The Cork Stops Here



Marcus Larson/News-Register

**The first releases from Three Angels Winery include two zinfandels and a primitivo, all from the 2007 vintages.**

upstate New York.

His first visit to Oregon in 1991 was enough to convince him that this was the place where he could enjoy life and grow winegrapes.

A consulting assignment at OHSU brought the couple to Portland in 1997 and they soon began touring the wine country on weekends in their pursuit of vineyard property.

It was only a matter of time before the right opportunity arose. In 2000, they purchased land in the Eola Hills and began developing their Three Angels Vineyard

the following year.

“We were very hands on,” Fus said. “It really satisfied our green thumb urge.”

Appropriately, the three-acre vineyard is divided into three blocks — Laureen's, Alex's and Morgan's. All are planted to pinot noir which has been sold to Dobbes Family Estate and Domaine Coteau since 2003.

**As often happens** with vineyard owners, however, the desire



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**Three Angels Winery owner and winemaker Ed Fus stands proudly among his 2008 wines aging in French oak barrels at Domaine Coteau in Carlton.**

## Trio

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to combine growing the vine with making the wine became irresistible. Fus began helping out at Dean Sandifer's Domaine Coteau Winery in Carlton, learning as he went.

Being an astute student with the mind of a scientist and the heart of an artist, it wasn't long before he gained enough confidence to determine not only that he could do this but that he could be good at it.

But, even though he was growing what was turning out to be top notch pinot noir and everyone he knew was making pinot noir, he decided to make something other than pinot noir.

Putting their heads and palates together, the Fuses mutually concluded that "something" could be one of their favorite types of wine, the extraordinarily diverse and roundly appealing California workhorse — zinfandel.

This sounded like a great idea in theory. But the practical application turned out to be a bit more challenging. First of all, it appeared that the only places where zinfandel grapes could be readily acquired were in California.

Upon further investigation, however, they discovered that a few — very few — growers in Washington had planted a few acres — very few — to the variety.

Persistence and persuasion ultimately convinced four of those growers to sell

grapes to Three Angels. The vineyards include Avery, Columbia Gorge AVA; Les Collines, Walla Walla AVA; Coyote Canyon, Horse Heaven Hills AVA; and Stone Tree, Wahluke Slope AVA.

Each of these sites yields its own distinctive rendition of the grape and each is being bottled separately. Another interesting development is that one of the grapes is not zinfandel at all, but rather primitivo, the southeastern Italian variety long believed to be zinfandel's European parent.

**Advances in DNA** plant testing have now revealed that both are genetically equivalent to the Croatian variety, *crljenak kastelanski*, but clonal selections developed over the years have lent their own variations to the flavor profiles.

This was borne out in a blind tasting of the three recently released 2007 Three Angels wines — Avery Vineyard Zinfandel, Les Collines Zinfandel and Coyote Canyon Primitivo.

The Avery exhibited spice, earthiness and a chewy richness in the mouth, complemented by resolved tannins. Subtle character and complexity, usually associated with a Bordeaux blend, further differentiated it from the other two wines.

The Les Collines enticed with a forward berry fruit aroma that rolled out of the glass. From the standpoint of this taster, who has had a lot of them over the years, it was very zinfundel.

Such mouthfilling fruit typifies what one expects from the variety while hints of cocoa, coffee and oak vanillin lent additional elements of flavor interest.

Though certainly a well-made wine, the relatively simple, straightforward primitivo was in tough company. An initial grapey roughness gave way to soft tannins and easy drinking, but it didn't hold up overall against such classy competition.

All the wines are priced at \$24 and were made in small quantities — 188 cases each for the zins and 283 cases for the primitivo. Fus looks forward to releasing three more wines from the 2008 vintage in addition to the three discussed here.

He's particularly excited about the prospects for the three — zinfandel, primitivo and petite sirah — all of which come from Stone Tree Vineyard in the Wahluke Slope AVA in the Saddle Mountains.

The site is among Washington's warmest, which could portend exceptional things for varieties well known to yield exceptional wines in warm growing conditions. A year or two in barrel will tell.

If I was a betting man, I'd say the odds seem to be with them. After all, three angels are on their side.

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