

OREGON Winery to Watch

KNUDSEN VINEYARDS

BY ERIC DEGERMAN

DUNDEE, Ore. - The legacies of Cal and Julia Lee Knudsen continue to thrive in the historic vineyard they left behind in Oregon's Dundee Hills.

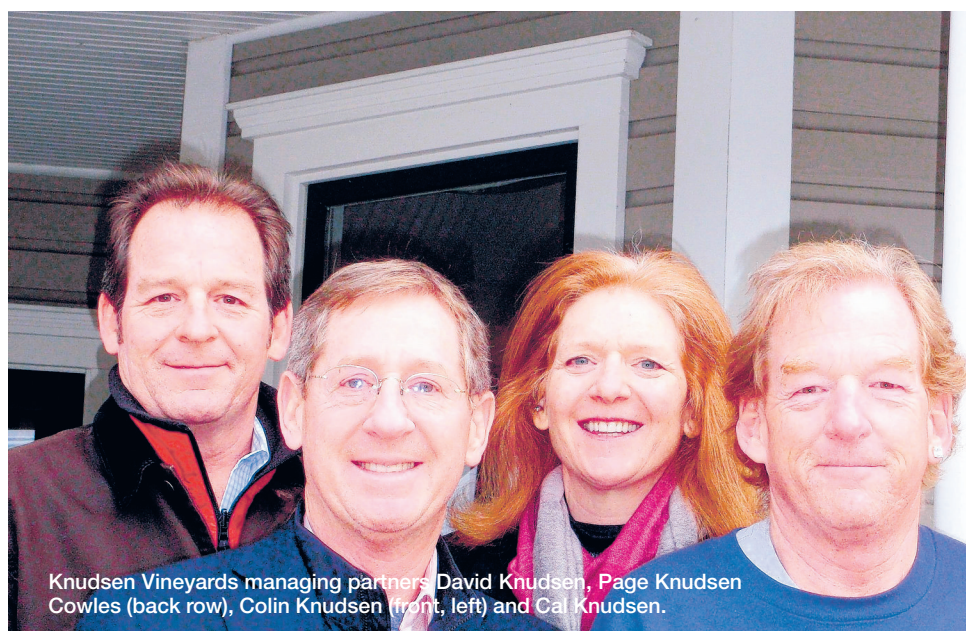
At this point, most wine tourists know of Knudsen Vineyard, one of Oregon's most important plantings, merely as those they drive past on the gravel road to the Erath Winery tasting room.

C. Calvert Knudsen, who died in 2009, laid the foundation for two of the Pacific Northwest's most important wineries — Erath and then Argyle. Now, Knudsen's four children are committed to making the vineyard its own successful brand. The rich story, combined with the quality of the winemaking and fruit, led to naming Knudsen Vineyards as Wine Press Northwest's 2016 Oregon Winery to Watch.

"We all care deeply about our land and the family's pioneering heritage in the Oregon wine industry, and our return to winemaking is natural," said Page Knudsen Cowles, who spearheads the effort with her three brothers. "We can make great wines from Knudsen Vineyard fruit, work together and honor our parents."

When their father, a Weyerhaeuser executive from Seattle, established the vineyard with a 30-acre block in 1972, Knudsen Vineyard was by far the largest in the Willamette Valley. Three years later, he grew it to 60 acres, making it the largest in the state. These days, its upper portions inspired the backdrop for the Oregon Wine Country license plate.

Soon after planting, Knudsen (pronounced Kuh-NUDE-sen) joined forces with winemaker Dick Erath to form Knudsen-Erath Winery. Their partnership ended amicably in



Knudsen Vineyards managing partners David Knudsen, Page Knudsen Cowles (back row), Colin Knudsen (front, left) and Cal Knudsen.

Photo courtesy of Knudsen Vineyards

1987 — soon after Texas winemaker Rollin Soles and Australian vintner Brian Croser landed in Oregon to make Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and sparkling wine.

"Producing sparkling wine was a big dream of my father," Knudsen Cowles said. "They had him at 'Hello.' We pivoted all of our grape production to Argyle."

Research led by Oregon industry leader David Adelsheim prompted perhaps an even more important project at Knudsen, the transition of its Chardonnay to phylloxera-resistant Chardonnay clones from the Dijon region of France starting in 1990.

"There isn't all that much Chardonnay planted in the Willamette Valley, and Rollin told me we have the oldest Dijon-clone Chardonnay planted in the New World — not just North America," Knudsen Cowles said.

That work inspired a pair of vineyard-

designated sparkling wines by Argyle, including the Julia Lee's Block Blanc de Blancs. Combined, the two bubblys account for nearly 2,000 cases with "Knudsen Vineyard" on the label.

"Those have helped our brand before we even had a wine in the new millennium," Knudsen Cowles said.

Knudsen Cowles, 60, and her brothers are spread throughout the country. Colin, 59, is an investment banker in New York City. At 56, David is the youngest and lives in Texas. He's also president of Ostrom's Mushroom Farm in Olympia, Wash. Cal Jr., the oldest at 62, resides in Woodinville. They make a point of meeting in Dundee to discuss the business of the winery, and they've been fortunate to have Soles make their first wines and then have his longtime protégé — Nate Klostermann — take over the Knudsen Vine-

yards production.

The children have grown the brand responsibly and with impeccable timing, starting with 100 cases of Pinot Noir from the stellar 2012 vintage, which sold out in six weeks. They added 100 cases of Chardonnay and doubled production of Pinot Noir the following year.

In 2014, however, the brand began to enter the bloodstream of Oregon Pinot Noir and Chardonnay consumers. Klostermann crafted nearly 600 cases of Pinot Noir and half that of Chardonnay. Last year, combined production eclipsed 1,000 cases.

This fall, they plan for 800 cases of Pinot Noir and 325 cases of Chardonnay. It's not much of a sacrifice for Argyle to pull off more for the second generation. Knudsen

Vineyard stands at 130 acres, and Klostermann crushed 450 tons of fruit from those vines in 2015 - the equivalent of 30,000 cases of wine.

"We're still a small producer, and we love building the mailing list and getting to know our customers," said Knudsen Cowles, who serves as managing partner. "At the same time, we need to expand the pie to offer more distribution and participate in more events."

Erath sold his brand to Ste. Michelle Wine Estates in 2006, and that Erath tasting room — in the middle of Knudsen Vineyard — sits on Knudsen property. Ste. Michelle's lease expires in 2018.

"While we do intend to create a tasting room at some point, it is very early on in our planning," she said.

So far, Knudsen Cowles, a Seattle native and Yale grad who earned her MBA at Harvard, is leading the sales and promotion of the family juice. She's opening up markets, including her adopted home state of Minnesota. One of her favorite events was a recent pouring for 60 friends during a formal wine-

maker dinner at the St. Paul Curling Club — the largest in the country at 1,200 members.

"It's been lovely to watch my husband get bitten by the bug," she said. "Now he's coming out with me for events such as the International Pinot Noir Celebration and Salud."

The winery project also has helped keep Cal and Julie Lee's children connected.

"We feel responsible in a happy way, not a burdensome way," Knudsen Cowles said. "It's been seven years since my father died, and time does heal. He was ill for a very short period, and we had some lovely time with him at the vineyard toward the end."

"And our mother died unexpectedly, but peacefully, at the vineyard cabin 25 years ago," she continued. "So it remains a lovely place where our family has lived and where we have died and where we come from."

ERIC DEGERMAN is co-founder and CEO of Great Northwest Wine. Learn more about wine at www.greatnorthwestwine.com.

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Knudsen Vineyards
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tastings by arrangement, 503-580-1596
knudsenvineyards.com



Located in the heart of the renowned Dundee Hills AVA, our vineyard is one of the oldest in Oregon and remains Knudsen family owned. Our acclaimed Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines highlight the distinctive and exceptional quality fruit from Knudsen Vineyard.

We are truly honored and appreciate being recognized as the **2016 WinePress Northwest Oregon Winery to Watch.**

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