

## From Napa to Idaho: Coiled Wines' twisted tale

By *Andy Perdue* on October 23, 2014



Leslie Preston grew up in Idaho but started her winemaking career in California. Now she is back with Coiled Wines in Garden City, Idaho. (Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

GARDEN CITY, Idaho – If you were happily building a life and winemaking career in Napa Valley – the heart of the American fine wine industry – would you move to Idaho to start a winery?

Leslie Preston, owner of [Coiled Wines](#), is finding tremendous success with her small winery. And while she got a few strange looks from fellow winemakers in Napa Valley, many were quite supportive – even fascinated – by her move to the Gem State. “Initially, I felt a little embarrassed,” she told Great Northwest Wine. “I didn’t want to talk to people about it.”

She also had to talk her husband into moving, but that’s another story.

Preston is the focus of this week’s Great Northwest Winecast. You can listen to her story here: [Play in new window](#) | [Download](#)

## From Idaho to California – and back



Leslie Preston, owner of Coiled Wines, talks about the 2014 harvest as she watches over fermenting grapes. (Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

Preston grew up in Boise. After graduating from Boise High School, she moved west to attend the University of Oregon, then headed to the University of California-Davis – not to learn about winemaking but to study French literature and teach French.

“Wine students were coming through my classes,” she said. “A lightbulb went off, and I thought, ‘That’s what I want to do.’ ”

So Preston earned a master’s degree in enology and went to work in the industry. She spent time at such wineries as Clos du Bois and Saintsbury in Sonoma County, then went to work at [Stags’ Leap Winery](#) in Napa Valley. Her boss was winemaker Robert Brittan, who later left to start his own winery in his home state of Oregon.

“It was a great experience,” she said. “I got to work with a really diverse group of grapes and wines. It was a great place to get a foundation.”

After she gave birth to her first son, she took time off but found she really missed making wine.

In 2006, she began to play around with the idea of returning home to Idaho. Her son was 2 years old, but she came to Caldwell and made six barrels of wine.

“I was playing with the grapes just to see if this was viable.”

She was still living in Napa Valley, so she ended up selling the wine to Fraser Vineyards and going back home to California.

In 2007, the Snake River Valley American Viticultural Area was approved, and Preston decided it was time to return home.

## Launching Coiled Wines



Leslie Preston currently makes three wines for Coiled Wines: Riesling, Syrah and a red blend.  
(Image courtesy of Coiled Wines)

Her husband was born on the East Coast and spent a lot of his life in California, so convincing him to come to Idaho was a bit of a chore.

“We were very happy in Napa,” she said. “I had no complaints about life in Napa, other than it wasn’t my winemaking community, and it wasn’t my world.”

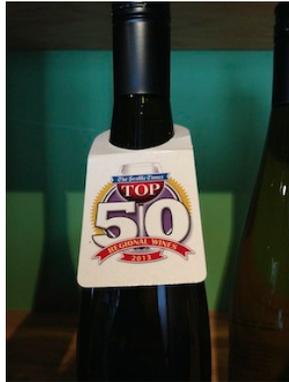
Her first year back home was 2008, and she launched Coiled, with the name an homage to the new AVA.

Preston plays up the snake angle rather heavily. Her silkscreen bottle design is taken from an actual snakeskin. Her Syrah is called Sidewinder, while her red blend is called Black Mamba. She has two levels in her wine club: Snake Charmer and Monty Python.

“I’m terrified of snakes, so I’m hoping all of this will bring me good karma,” she said with a nervous chuckle.

Preston’s wines are sold primarily in the Boise market, though she also has a distributor in Oregon and is taking a serious look at getting distribution in Seattle. Meanwhile, she is able to ship her wines directly to Washington wine lovers.

## Coiled Wines gains fame with Riesling



Leslie Preston's 2012 Dry Riesling made The Seattle Times list of the 50 top wines of 2013.  
(Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

Perhaps Preston's finest and most famous effort is with Riesling.

Last year, her 2012 Dry Riesling won best of show at the annual Idaho Wine Competition. This year, her 2013 edition won best white wine and nearly repeated as best of show.

"That would have been incredible," she said. "Frankly, it would have been a lot of pressure!"

After her success with the 2012 vintage, she was contacted by [Stuart Pigott](#), arguably the world's leading expert on Riesling, who wanted a bottle. He included a note about the wine in his new book, *Best White Wine on Earth*, and he also gave Preston some personal feedback on the wine.

"The criticisms of the wine were in line with my criticisms of the wine, and I've made those changes with the 2013," she said.

Preston had never worked with Riesling while in California, so her first vintage with the noble white variety was in 2011.

"I immediately fell in love with it," she said. "Being naive, I didn't recognize it was going to be a hard sell."

Her Riesling is made in a dramatically dry style that emphasizes steely acidity and bright, austere fruit over fleshiness and sweetness.

"I am committed to changing people's perception of Riesling," she said. "It's not just a grape that I love to work with and a wine that I love to drink. It's also kind of a personal challenge to me."

Her 2012 Riesling finished at [No. 44](#) in The Seattle Times top 50 wines of 2013, and it also landed at No. 46 in Great Northwest Wine's [top 100 list](#) last year.

## Coiled Wines' red blend, Petite Sirah



Coiled Wines' Petit Verdot from the 2013 vintage ages in barrel. The wine is destined for Black Mamba, a red blend by Leslie Preston. (Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

Preston's red blend, called Black Mamba, has given her latitude to play with different grape varieties. It started out with a focus on Tempranillo. Now its base is Petit Verdot.

"It's intensely black," she said. "It's really fitting with the name."

This fall, she decided she missed Petite Sirah, a robust red wine grape she'd worked with in Napa Valley. What little is grown in the Snake River Valley is unavailable to her, so she returned to her winemaking roots. She bought 1.5 tons of the Rhône grape from a vineyard in Calistoga.

"It's kind of a way to stay in touch with my friends," she said.

She was hoping to have the grapes hauled to her winemaking facility in Garden City near Boise, but she discovered that commercial grape truckers don't want to come to Idaho. So she jumped in her rig and made the 11-hour, 600-mile drive to Napa and brought it back herself.

She's excited about the resulting wine, which will rest in barrel for some time before being released to her wine club.

## Finding a new home for Coiled Wines



Coiled Wines is at the 44th Street Wineries co-op in Garden City, Idaho, where the red wines are made and the tasting room is located. By the 2015 harvest, Leslie Preston hopes to be in a new facility to handle her growing brand. (Photo by Andy Perdue/Great Northwest Wine)

Currently, Preston makes her red wines at leased space inside the 44th Street Wineries complex owned by [Cinder Wines](#) in Garden City, where she also has a tasting room presence. Her white wines are made at Sawtooth Winery, about 45 minutes away in Nampa. Sawtooth is owned by Precept Wine in Seattle and has been a great place for her to make her whites. Additionally, her two fruit sources, Sawtooth and Skyline vineyards in Nampa, also are owned by Winemakers LLC, which is owned by the family that owns Precept.

Because Coiled is growing, Preston is looking for a new location in Garden City where she can make all of her wines under one roof. She hopes to be in that space by the 2015 harvest.