

## Idaho Winery to Watch: Telaya Wine Co.

By: Eric Degerman, March 16, 2015

Earl Sullivan knows if he is to compete against California wines in the Boise market that Telaya Wine Co., must make wines that are worthy of attention – regardless of who in the Pacific Northwest grew the grapes.

“The best thing for Idaho is for us to make the best wine we possibly can,” he said. “If I bring in high-quality Washington grapes and make that sing, then my customers will have more faith in trying my wines made from local fruit. I have more customers than not who tell me, ‘Please don’t stop making Washington wines.’”

Heck, many winemakers in Washington state can’t get the grapes that Telaya has bought from such renowned vineyards as Boushey, Champoux, French Creek and Gamache. And his early work with some of the Columbia Valley’s top sites prompted Wine Press Northwest to name Telaya Wine Co. as the 2015 Idaho Winery to Watch.

“I probably explain it more to people in the industry than the consumers,” Sullivan said with a chuckle. “Consumers are used to seeing ‘Columbia Valley’ or going to Walla Walla, which is an easy drive from Boise. It may actually make our sales process a little easier.

“Consumers are willing to give us a shot because they recognize Columbia Valley or some of the names we’re able to put on our bottles because of our growing relationships,” he added. “And the Idaho Wine Commission has been incredibly supportive of us before we even had Idaho fruit in our profile.”

Their flagship wine is a Syrah-based blend named Turas – the Irish word for “journey” – and their latest vintage is the most critically acclaimed bottling in Telaya’s young history. Last fall, the 2011 Turas (\$30) earned praise from Sonoma County-based critic Dan Berger. Earlier this year, it also received a 90-point rating from a national magazine, marking the first time a Telaya wine has cracked the 90-point plateau.

Sullivan and his wife, Carrie, earned the trust of Columbia Valley growers through their relationships with consulting winemakers Charlie Hoppes of Fidelitas on Red Mountain and House, who left acclaimed Betz Family Winery to start a family and be a part of Idaho’s emerging wine industry. So Telaya relies on Washington for its top barrels of Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Viognier.



*Telaya Wine Co., owned and operated by Earl and Carrie Sullivan.*

*PHOTO BY KATHERINE JONES, IDAHO STATESMAN – Idaho Statesman*

“It’s a real challenge to ripen Cab most years in Idaho, and my customers like Cab,” Earl said. “We’re not hiding that. We’re proactively telling people, ‘We’re probably always going to do a Washington Cab.’”

As the Sullivans became more confident with their winemaking talents, they began working more with Idaho fruit. Starting with the 2013 vintage, wines from the Snake River Valley make up about 80 percent of Telaya’s 2,500-case production. And most of their wine since starting in 2009 has been made in Garden City at the Cinder Wines production facility on 44th Street.

“We weren’t interested in burdening ourselves with debt so much that we couldn’t make the type of wines we wanted,” Earl said. “It was a conscious choice to utilize somebody else’s facility in the short term, but it also was a process of having access to winemakers who were willing to teach and had facilities they were willing to teach in.”

This spring, Telaya is poised to move its tasting room and Idaho wine production to a new home for their special events.

“We love to throw an amazing party where people come and bring their friends, have a great time, stay too late and enjoy themselves to the point that when they walk out, they go, ‘Wow! That was so much fun that I can’t wait for the next one,’” he said.

The blend of entertainment, hospitality and acclaimed wines has grown Telaya’s wine club into a loyal 500 members, who’ve learned how to pronounce the winery’s name (tuh-LIE-uh), a word created by blend two of Earl and Carrie’s favorite places — the Teton Range and playa, the Spanish word for beach.

“We were down in Mexico taking some time off and realized our lives were not heading in the trajectory we wanted,” Earl said. “We wanted to find something we were passionate about, which was wine.”

Their road began as sweethearts at Centre College in Danville, Ky. Earl graduated with a science degree and spent two decades in the pharmaceutical industry. Carrie (class of ‘93) went on to graduate studies in molecular genetics at Texas A&M and received her doctorate in veterinary medicine from Ohio State.

They’ve lived in Boise for nearly 15 years, only now they work as consultants in their respective fields. That allows them to walk vineyards, work in the cellar and spend time with their two young boys, who both are active in the business.

“This winery is our opportunity to teach our kids the work ethic we learned,” Earl said.

