

# 2013 Idaho Winery of the Year: Snake River Winery

BY ERIC DEGERMAN

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BOISE, IDAHO — Scott DeSeelhorst made the choice of 2013 Idaho Winery of the Year an easy pick when his Snake River Winery earned a trio of double gold medals, a gold medal and Best in Show last fall at the 2012 Idaho Wine Competition.

One of those wines — the 2009 Arena Valley Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon — then went on to win a Platinum at Wine Press Northwest's Platinum Competition. It was only the second time in the event's 13-year history that a red wine made with Idaho fruit achieved a Platinum.

“That was really exciting,” said DeSeelhorst, who not only makes the wine but also manages 70 acres of vines. “I think a lot of it comes down to me knowing the vineyard, and that’s actually my favorite part of all this — being in the vineyard. It’s such a rewarding thing and the most dynamic part.”

DeSeelhorst, 47, relies the 30-year-old Arena Valley Vineyard for nearly all his wines. The 2009 Reserve and 2010 Sangiovese came off the bowl-shaped site near Parma, but the other gold medal winner was grown in Martin Family Vineyard — across the Snake River in Adrian, Ore.

Yet there’s a special satisfaction that comes with the Platinum because it was judged alongside other bottles of Northwest-made Cabernet Sauvignon that also won gold medals.

“You don’t see a lot of vineyards in Idaho that can ripen Cabernet Sauvignon,” DeSeelhorst said. “I like to shoot for an Old World style with it, but I’m letting the Cab hang a bit more to build sugars. That 2009 got to 25 brix.”

That he offers that wine for \$16 makes it even more remarkable.

“The Cabernet has been very consistent for us,” DeSeelhorst said. “I’ve kept the tonnage at around 2 tons per acre for the past seven or eight years, but in 2009 I did a bit more new French oak with the dollar bouncing back against the Euro.”

He purchased the vineyard in 1998, then analyzed the performance of each block. The Chardonnay was planted in 1983. Four years later came Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

“We did a major replanting in 2001,” he said. He’s emerged with a fascinating vineyard (2,300 feet elevation) that includes Barbera, Blauer Zweigelt, Orange Muscat, Tempranillo, Touriga Nacional and Rhône varieties Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre. The passion for experimentation continues as he explores possibilities for the Austrian variety Grüner Veltliner and the Italian white Vermentino.

“I really like Malbec,” he said. “I think it will be a great grape for Idaho. It’s a middle-to-late ripener and a good, hardy plant.”

And, of course, there’s Riesling — Idaho’s most abundant variety.

“I ramped up production in 2012,” DeSeelhorst said. “We’re going to be bottling that in a couple of months, and it’s going to be awesome. It got extra hangtime in the fall, so the grapes got nice and golden. We’re doing 2,000 cases of Riesling, which is a BIG step for us, but it’s been selling.”

“The growing year was good as I’ve seen straight across the board — phenomenal,” DeSeelhorst said. “We had early bud break, a good spring and everything ripened 100 percent. I’m really excited about the 2012 wines.”

He and several other Treasure Valley winemakers are a bit worried about the potential of bud damage in 2013 as a result of a long stretch of single-digit temperatures in January.

He’s learned about winemaking and grape growing via UC-Davis course work and tips from Idaho winemakers, but DeSeelhorst’s appreciation for food and wine developed while he graduated from the Scottsdale (Ariz.) Culinary Institute. Business acumen came as a commodities broker in Chicago, and he continues to serve as a manager in his family’s Solitude Mountain Resort near Salt Lake City. Traditionally, the ski resort comes to life about the time DeSeelhorst puts his newly crushed wines to bed.

“Once pruning starts, I spend quite a bit more time at the winery,” he said.

Meanwhile, his wife, Susan, a Boise native, oversees the Snake River Winery tasting room in the vibrant BoDo district near the state Capitol.

“My wife is a retail genius, and she’s done very well with the couple of ski shops she runs in Solitude,” he said.

A handful of smartly priced gold medals makes sales a bit easier, too.

### **Snake River Winery**

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