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Davis Creek Cellars

Caldwell, Idaho

BY ERIC DEGERMAN

Gina Davis harvested experience and gleaned expertise from several of Idaho's largest wineries and most respected winemakers.

The University of Idaho graduate has grown into her own as a winemaker, and her Davis Creek Cellars emerged as Wine Press Northwest's 2010 Idaho Winery to Watch.

Her resumé shows vintages with Koenig Vineyards, Ste. Chapelle and Sawtooth Winery. The first releases under her label revealed influences from all three, particularly Sawtooth.

"I worked with Brad Pintler at Sawtooth for three years, and that's really where I got my hands dirty, learned how the process works and

how to make wine," Davis said

It would seem as though they've all taught her well. Her medal count from the 2009 Idaho Wine Competition hints at a harbinger of consistency. She entered nine wines, eight of which garnered a medal.

Her 2007 Malbec impressed every judge, receiving a coveted double gold. The 2007 Tempranillo also won a gold medal. The showing was remarkable considering 2007 was the first harvest for Davis Creek Cellars.

She also displays skill with her white program, earning an "Outstanding!" rating from Wine Press Northwest in 2009 for her Pinot Grigio.

That time with Sawtooth and Pintler — one of the Northwest's most adventurous winemakers and growers — helps explain why the

1,200 cases produced at Davis Creek Cellars incorporates 14 varieties.

"We were doing 26 varieties (at Sawtooth). Eventually, I'll end up getting close to that," Davis said with hearty laugh.

Davis took viticulture classes at Washington State University, but she received degrees in horticulture and crop science in Moscow. She wears her University of Idaho Vandals colors and stays true to Idaho fruit — when she can.

However, that delicious 2007 Pinot Grigio came off Pontin Vineyard in the Yakima Valley. For years, that site factored into Hogue Cellars' award-winning Pinot Grigio.

"In Idaho, we had a bad frost in 2007, and we were short on most of the whites," Davis said. "Someone that I know suggested that we give that vineyard a try, and we've been really happy with it."

Davis Creek Cellars also makes a Pontin Vineyard Malbec, and she

sources Tempranillo and Touriga from Washington's famed Red Mountain appellation.

"We're getting a little short of Tempranillo in the Snake River Valley because too many wineries want to make Tempranillo," Davis said. "It's the same with Malbec."

Last year, her largest bottlings were of Pinot Gris and Viognier, both at 140 cases. This year, she expects Tempranillo to surpass them both.

"Most of the varieties that I do, there's less than seven acres of them planted in the valley," she said. "Malbec and Tempranillo, Touriga, Syrah and Merlot do well here, they just don't have the acreage to support everyone."

There's a sweeter side to Davis as she makes two dessert-style wines. There's the Boise Blanco Late Harvest Riesling and a Late Harvest Syrah, which she calls Up A Creek!

And she also kicks back with her hobby — quilting.

"There are a few of us in the industry that quilt," she said. "We call ourselves 'The Quilting Winos' because we're either quilting or making wine — and that's about all we seem to get done sometimes."

Aside from her parents, Davis works Davis Creek Cellars by herself, too.

"My dad is basically my cellar rat," she said with a smile.

Her operation also involves some travel. Besides trips to the vineyards, there's her tasting room in Marsing. Her parents pour for her at the farmers market every Saturday in Boise, and her wines now are made in Caldwell at the new University of Idaho business incubator. In 2007 and 2008, she crushed at Koenig.

"The university is going to give us either two bays or one giant bay that's all joined together," Davis said with a smile. "They came in and said they didn't realize a winery needs this much space." 🍷

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