

WINE

Meet Paul Hobbs 2.0

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A winemaker of uncommon renown, who has made coveted wines from Napa and Sonoma under his own name since 1991, Paul Hobbs isn't the likeliest of producers to have launched a second brand geared to a younger generation of wine drinkers.



ALVIN JORNADA/PD

Winemaker Paul Hobbs in the barrel room of the Paul Hobbs Winery in Sebastopol on March 8, 2013.

A one-time pre-med student at Notre Dame, Hobbs fell in love with wine and in time switched his focus, attending UC Davis and then learning the ropes of winemaking at Robert Mondavi Winery, Opus One and Simi before becoming one of the most sought-after wine consultants in California and around the world.

In 2000, he launched CrossBarn, a separate winery based in a former apple-packing warehouse in Sebastopol, with its own vineyard sources and the intent to make approachably delicious wines at lower prices than the vineyard-designated Paul Hobbs Winery cabernet sauvignons, pinot noirs and chardonnays.

Hobbs' wines, made from organically farmed grapes, are known for their richness and complexity as well as vineyard-specific intensity. The demand for them has always exceeded supply, which averages about 15,000 cases a year.

"There is an entire generation of younger wine drinkers interested in tasting high-quality, balanced wines that are expressive and represent their terroir well, but they don't have the budget for the Paul Hobbs Wines," Hobbs said, "so they turn to CrossBarn."

To make the CrossBarn wines -- a lineup of chardonnay, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon from the Sonoma Coast and Napa Valley -- Hobbs in 2008 tapped Northern California native Scott Morrison, his former assistant winemaker for four years at Paul Hobbs.

"At Paul Hobbs, we had the luxury of being able to be patient and allow the wines to slowly ferment," Morrison said. "Keeping the same focus and restraint when it comes to crafting the CrossBarn wines while shortening the aging period dramatically has been interesting."

Having trained alongside Hobbs, Morrison aims now to continue to find exceptional fruit, treat it gently and make it into great wine sold at fair prices. That Morrison is within the same age group as the target audience for the wines helps, too.

"My father might sit down and enjoy a glass of Paul Hobbs," Morrison said. "I am going to enjoy a glass of CrossBarn. We are seeing a younger crowd starting to enjoy (these) wines."

Named for the central barn and gathering place on the Hobbs family farm in upstate

New York where Hobbs and 10 siblings were raised alongside apple trees, CrossBarn also produces in the range of 15,000 cases a year.

It is a wine often poured by the glass in wine bars and restaurants, sold by the bottle for \$25 to \$45 a bottle depending on the variety. A rosé of pinot noir will be released for the first time this spring.

Tyler Balliet, the president and founder of Second Glass, a company that runs the educational and interactive Wine Riot events across the United States, geared toward Millennial wine drinkers, thinks when reaching out to new consumers, especially younger ones, producers need three important things: good pricing, availability where younger people buy wine and quality in the bottle.

"The wine has to be good," he said. "If it sucks, we see right through it."

CrossBarn hopes its focus of making quality wines at fair prices with a pedigreed name behind it will continue to connect.

"Millennials are wine savvy and thirsty for knowledge and good wine," Morrison said.

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