

a modern blend

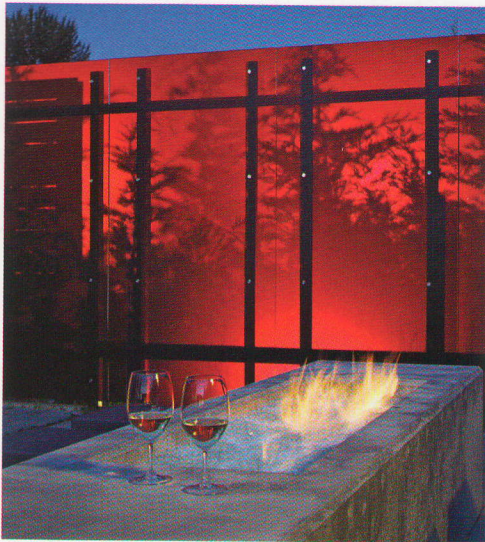
At JANUIK WINERY and NOVELTY HILL in Woodinville, you'll get a taste of *artisan wines* in a graceful contemporary setting flowing perfectly *together*

WRITER *Steve Roberts*



The Northwest design is a fusion of glass, wood, stylish concrete and outdoor landscaping to match, even a bocce ball court.

Soothing tones and an airy spaciousness in the tasting room puts visitors in a relaxed mood.



I heard Mike Januik say something about the grapes from Block One and Block Three and note that, “We could use more of the cab.” We were sitting near the fireplace inside the tasting room of Januik Winery and its partner winery Novelty Hill. He was on the phone with Paul Champoux of Champoux Vineyards in the Horse Heaven Hills area of Washington’s Columbia Valley. Mike needed to nail down the tonnage needed for the 2010 fall harvest.

Cowboy James Kinney christened the name Horse Heaven Hills in 1857 after discovering his herd of horses eating the native grasses on the hillside. Proclaiming this as “Horse Heaven,” it is today one of Washington’s 11 designated American Viticultural Areas (AVA) checking in at 570,000 acres, a fraction of which is dedicated to premium wine production. Champoux Vineyards is but one of a long list of renowned vineyards in the Horse Heaven Hills with its first planting of Cabernet Sauvignon in 1972.

For over 25 years, Mike Januik and Paul Champoux have collaborated to make premium wine—Paul growing the grapes and Mike making the wine. Mike also sources his fruit from a number of other who’s-who vineyards in Washington including the likes of Seven Hills Vineyard in Walla Walla, Klipsun and Ciel du Cheval in Red Mountain, and Weinbau in the Wahluke Slope. Such is the case with most vintners in Woodinville where the winemakers don’t grow the grapes, but rather get their grapes from vineyards on the drier, eastern side of the Cascades.

A different sort of ambiance

Inside the contemporary tasting room, the sun was busy throwing a lot of light into the spacious tasting room as the staff prepared for the day. The doors would open at 11am and the staff was busy preparing. Soon their daily dose of thirsty wine tourists would be arriving—bearing different accents, expectations and possessing a wide range of wine tasting experiences. And because each visitor is unique, it makes the job of the wine tasting pourer more interesting. Pouring wine is not robotic; one must listen, educate and ultimately please.

Opened in the spring of 2007, Januik Winery and its winery partner, Novelty Hill, occupy more than 33,000 square feet on 3.1 acres in Woodinville. The challenge for the Januik Winery design team was to create an inviting space that would differentiate themselves from other Woodinville wineries.

They wanted a style true to the Pacific Northwest featuring native materials, colors and textures. The result was a fusion of glass, wood, stylish concrete and outdoor landscaping to match, which stand in stark contrast to nearby neighbors Chateau Ste. Michelle with its iconic chateau and Columbia Winery with its charming Victorian style residence.

With its modern Spartan-like feel, this is a relaxed setting where visitors are encouraged to sample wine, order from a small plate menu (featuring among other tummy pleasers, thin crust pizza), meander around the grounds and play a round of bocce ball on the outside court.

Beyond the inviting structure, visitors have a number of “touch points” to further experience their wines. There are several meeting rooms for private tasting and events varying in size to fit a range of needs.

The full-size kitchen serves up delicious fare for corporate and family retreats. They host weddings from rehearsal dinners to the reception.

With each event, visitors have one thing in common—the fine wines of Novelty Hill and Januik Winery. Many become fans and spread the word to friends and family. Not surprisingly, others end up joining the ever-growing wine club with all its membership privileges, including access to their “Cellar Manager,” a secure private online wine inventory system. Very cool.

The secret sauce

However, the success of the winery goes beyond the ambiance of the tasting room. Ultimately,

it's about the quality of the product in the bottle. That's what spells the difference between a winery that merely limps along and one that thrives. Put Novelty Hill and Januik Winery in that “thrive” category with sales that continue to climb year after year.

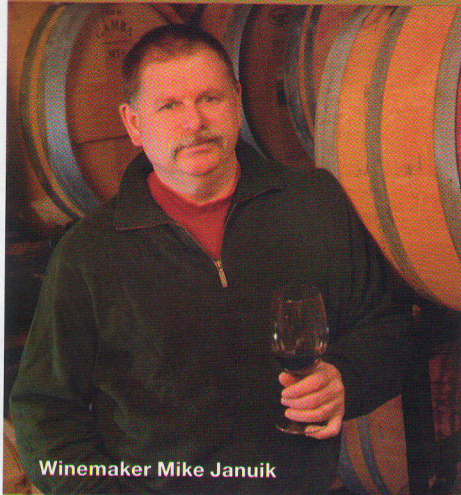
“What's your secret sauce?” I asked Mike. In response, he noted, “We strive for consistent quality across all our wines. You may not be a lover of Viognier, but the Viognier we pour you will have the bright floral notes of this variety. Across all our wines, you experience high quality that's true to each varietal's character.”

At age 50-something, soft-spoken Mike Januik knows a thing or two about making premium wine. Possessing a master's degree from the University of California Davis famed Viticulture & Enology program Mike learned from the best, including Drs. Ann C. Noble the creator of the “aroma wheel” and Roger Boulton, a leading

Winery visitors can gaze through a glass wall into the cavernous barrel room to watch the production activity at hand.



JANUIK TASTING NOTES



Winemaker Mike Januik

2007 Januik Red Wine Dark and vibrant, this medium-bodied red blend reveals layers of juicy raspberries, plums and currants with a touch of chocolate. Dark fruit and soft tannins lead to a rich, complex finish. **\$20**

2007 Januik Merlot (Columbia Valley) This lush Merlot shows lots of raspberry, vanilla and spice notes in the nose that complement rich black fruit and cocoa flavors in the mouth. **\$25**

2008 Januik Chardonnay (Elerding Vineyard) Spice-scented pear complements melon, tropical fruit and a hint of grapefruit, with a long elegant finish. **\$25**

2007 Januik Cabernet Sauvignon (Ciel du Cheval Vineyard) Richly aromatic, this wine is loaded with blackberries and dark plum fruit, cinnamon and spice. This one will leave a lasting impression! **\$40**

educator and researcher in fermentation science.

Mike's own thesis dealt with the use of gas chromatography to detect sulfur molecules in the headspace of a wine glass. While maybe not a page-turner to others, his thesis really speaks to Mike's vision of producing clean wines for consumers.

Translation: you won't find faulty wines at Novelty Hill and Januik Winery, the kind that smell of stale sweat, cabbage or skunk. His science background won't allow that. Nor would his ten years as the chief winemaker for Chateau Ste. Michelle prior to launching his own winery. It's there where he honed his winemaking production skills on a big scale.

Early on Mike developed a winemaking philosophy that simply entails making the wines you like. That is, don't make wines for what the public likes—there's already enough Yellow Tail for everyone and their brother. He believes that if you are passionate about your wine and strive to make the very best, it will win over fans. It's the "build it and they will come" philosophy.

From inside the tasting room, a glass wall permits visitors to peer down into the football size barrel room and production area. Everything is organized and stowed for easy access. It's so clean you could eat off the floor of this winery and not worry about getting sick. (Not that I suggest doing that, mind you, but it does speak to Mike's attention to detail.) And having personally visited hundreds of wineries throughout the Northwest, I can assuredly state there is a direct correlation between a winemaker's attention to detail and the quality of their wine.

Drink now or hold onto it

As we talked, a busload of tourists entered the winery sporting cameras and wide eyes. All seemed to pause shortly to take in the ambiance of tasting room—it's light and airy feel, high ceilings, art bedecked walls and generous size wine bar at the center of the room. Whatever reticence they might have felt quickly melted in response to the friendly manner of the tasting room staff. I watched one visitor, nose in glass, about to sample something dark red. I drooled as I imagined the aroma of this wine, swirling with notes of blackberry, plums and currants and perhaps some unnamed spice. With a touch of wine envy, I fought the urge to grab that glass from him.

Fortunately, Mike broke my wine-glass-stealing-fantasy with another salient comment. He noted that Paul Pontailier, CEO of Bordeaux's Château Margaux, once told him that great wines are enjoyable when first released, but have the structure and complexity to last 25 years without giving up their fruit character, complexity, or long finish. Mike thinks of that comment often and feels that his wines can easily be stored for that long, and still enjoyed.

It starts with Washington's premium quality grapes, the judicious use of oak and ongoing quality control measures that leads to long lasting wines. Of course, I could never keep a bottle of his wine that long—a bottle of 2007 Januik Winery's Cabernet Sauvignon lasting in my diminutive cellar until 2032 is simply not possible. There are just too many natural country beef dishes, good friends and Seattle sunsets to pair with this luscious wine. 🌿