

# Playing a large part in north state wine map is Lassen Peak label

It's full speed ahead at Lassen Peak Winery, the Shingletown-area operation that has played a big hand in putting the north state on the winemaking map.

"The winery is growing by leaps and bounds," said Mike Boehlert, who operates the winery with his wife, Deanne, and sons Shane, 12, and Brian, 18. In addition to renovating a 150-year-old pioneer ranch home into a tasting room he hopes to open this fall, Boehlert and his wife, Deanne, are planting different types of vines and experimenting with new blends and varietals.

"We're trying to widen the breadth of our offerings. It's fun for me as a winemaker to work with different varieties and flavors," Boehlert said.

Lassen Peak Winery is situated on 42 acres in Inwood, a historic farming community nestled in a valley near Shingletown, perfectly positioned at about 2,500 feet elevation to benefit from valley heat and cool mountain evenings. Rich volcanic soil helps the cause as well.

Boehlert is busy establishing a second winery on land he purchased about 2 miles from his existing operation. The new winery, which currently has three acres of vines, will be the home base for a pair of new

labels. One will be a limited-production premium wine – planned offerings include a Bordeaux-style red – that will sell for about \$20 a bottle, primarily through sales at the adjoining tasting room.

The other label will feature lower-end Cabernets, Merlots and a Gewurztraminer that will retail for about \$8 a bottle, "for the thriving varietal market," Boehlert said. Lassen Peak wines are priced "in the middle of the road" at about \$10 a bottle.

Boehlert started 25 years ago by planting about 17 different varieties in a test plot of about a third of an acre. He pared down his offerings based on what grew well and what varieties wineries wanted to purchase.

For a number of years, Boehlert was strictly a grape producer, selling his grapes to a prominent Mendocino County winery. Lassen Peak's first vintage from Shasta County grapes was in 1985.

In the ensuing 21 years, Boehlert has added and deleted varieties as he continued to experiment. Lassen Peak currently offers Merlot Rose, Estate Viognier, barrel-aged Chardonnay, barrel-aged and reserve Merlot and their flagship, gold medal-winning Tres Rojas – a blend of local Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon from Alexander

Valley and old-vine Cabernet Franc grapes from Lodi. For the 2006 vintage, Boehlert expects to bottle close to 5,000 cases in total.

Lassen Peak also recently introduced Kay's Syrah Shiraz, a blend Boehlert named after his wife, Deanne, whose middle name is Kay.

Boehlert said one of the many challenges in the wine business comes from trying to match production with what sales will be like three years down the road when the wine is ready.

"We won a couple of golds and best-of-shows for Tres Rojas in our first year and it sold out unbelievably quickly," said Boehlert, who handles all of Lassen Peak's marketing, sales and distribution chores. "When you finally gain some shelf space at markets, they get upset if you can't keep it filled the whole year."

Boehlert admits that in the grand scheme of things, having occasional difficulty keeping up with demand is not the worst problem a business can have. With new varieties and labels coming out soon, Lassen Peak is sure to be busy meeting an even larger demand for its quality wines.

*-Jon Lewis*



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Inwood Springs Vineyards -- Lassen Peak Winery

Location: 7878 Oak Lane, Shingletown, CA 96088

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Varieties: Chenin Blanc, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Roussanne, Zinfandel, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon (1/2 acre)

Viognier (1 acre), Chardonnay (3 acres), Merlot (39 acres)

Total vines: + or – 35,000 (42 acres)

Note: soon to decrease Merlot acreage by 7, and increase Chardonnay, Viognier, Syrah, as well as add Pinot Grigio, Albarino, Verdejo, and Grenache.