



Diamond Series



Hunnicutt

Justin Hunnicutt Stephens prefers to use the word *accessible* whenever describing his emerging Napa Valley wine operation. He feels that such a descriptor adequately describes his ingenious winery that has been turning wine industry heads for the past few years.

"We want *Hunnicutt* (not *Hunnicutt Winery* or *Hunnicutt Vineyards*, but simply *Hunnicutt*) to provide a special interaction between a winery and its customers," he explained. "We do everything we can to involve our customers and friends in all aspects of our operation. We feel it is simply a means of communicating our sincerity and dedication to produce the finest wines possible in the best possible setting."

That setting is a smallish sylvan location in Napa Valley, just off the Silverado Trail on the valley's Eastern side. Large pine and fir trees highlight Hunnicutt, which is just down the road and on the other side of the highway from its nearest neighbor, Rombauer Vineyards. From the inset, it is evident that Hunnicutt is indeed a labor of love.

For Justin Stephens, 36, his wine odyssey began in his early twenties. "I grew up in and around Napa Valley and there were two types of people; those in the wine business and those not. One night a friend brought a special bottle of Zinfandel and described what it took to make it come out like it did. That friend was Kirk Venge and we had been friends since we were four. I listened and became fascinated with the whole process. I started buying wines and even collecting them. I guess you could say I became hooked. In the back of my mind I guess I intended to do something like this after I retired. Then I realized I just couldn't wait that long to take on something I loved."

Stephens had worked in the commercial real estate

field until the call of the grape drew him into the wine industry. Thus began the process that would evolve into the modern day Hunnicutt.

"Our first release of 231 cases came in 2004," Stephens continued. "I was able to talk Kirk (Venge, the son of legendary Napa Valley winemaker Nils Venge and an acclaimed winemaker in his own right) into making our wines, and the rest is history. We have managed to do all right for ourselves and will produce almost 2,500 cases this year."

Justin Stephens feels that the company's decision in 2008 to build a new winery facility lent the credibility needed for the project's ultimate success.

"A sense of place is critically important to the overall success of the winery," he added. "We were blessed with a nearly primeval location, a location that required a great deal of planning and innovation. We decided to bore out some caves into the mountainside that was mostly unlevelled, and, from a topography standpoint, practically useless. When we were finished, we decided the caves made sense and we bored even more caves. Now we have almost 15,000 square feet of caverns that allow us to produce our wines in the manner we wanted to in the first place."

While Stephens gained experience as a cellar rat early in his career, he was also fortunate to glean marketing expertise from another of his jobs.

"In my mind, I am still something of a neophyte in the wine business," he declared modestly. "I never expected for things to turn out like they did. I am extremely pleased with our success but I am also aware that I have had some excellent help along the way."

While Hunnicutt is distributed in California and several other states, Justin Stephens is equally proud of his brand's efforts in Europe. A Swiss distributor offers



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Justin Hunnicutt Stephens
— Owner



Hunnicutt in both Switzerland and Austria, giving the brand international exposure.

Will this successful run for Hunnicutt continue well into the future?

“We are still an extremely small brand,” Stephens replied. “Our

inventory seems to always be absorbed and that’s a plus for any winery. When the time comes that I have to start making deals to sell our wines, it will be a signal to me that I have produced too much wine. Also, whenever I can plainly see that our size has begun to compromise our quality, well, that will be an important red flag to all of us.”

Justin Hunnicutt Stephens seems to have his feet squarely on the ground and his prospects seem endless. His winery’s wines are in high demand and their quality has produced numerous accolades.

Accolades and Tasting Notes



Hunnicutt 2009 ‘9-3-5’ Cabernet Sauvignon
94 Points, Wine Enthusiast — “This barrel selection aptly defines Hunnicutt’s style of ripe, sweetly concentrated fruit. Its enormous in blackberry and cherry notes, yet has layers of herb, spice and oak that prevent it from being a mere fruit bomb. Sourced from St. Helena, Rutherford and Oakville grapes, it’s a fancy wine to drink over the next eight years with great beef entrees.”
Double Gold Medal, American Fine Wine Competition
Winemaker Kirk Venge’s Notes — “This is opulence in a bottle, a true WOW wine! Bold aromas of black fruit, vanilla and baking spices dominate. This wine coats your mouth with blackberry, black cherry, and toast wrapped in milk chocolate and offers incredible length and breadth. It displays beautiful balance of acidity and fine-grained tannins creating a seamless experience.”
The name ‘9-3-5’ has special meaning to owner Justin Hunnicutt Stephens. It not only symbolizes the date he and wife Seana were married (September 3, 2005), but by pure coincidence, it also represented the number of Cabernet barrels included in the inaugural 2005 vintage – 9 from St. Helena, 3 from Rutherford, and 5 from Spring Mountain. Given the coincidental events, the name has stayed in place ever since.

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