

Speaker 1:

Stay tuned for Wine Crush, northwest wine stories, uncorked.

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Welcome to Wine Crush, where wine makers tell the stories behind the vine. Thanks for joining us here on Portland Radio Project. Today, host Heidi Moore will guide us through two distinct wine stories. The first has its roots in something all of us here at PRP love: music. The second truly demonstrates how with the art of wine comes family, friendships, and good times.

Heidi Moore:

We're talking with Dave Specter from Bells Up Winery today. Welcome to the show.

Dave Specter:

Thank you for having me.

Heidi Moore:

I had the pleasure of coming up to the winery a few months ago, pre-harvest for sure, and-

Dave Specter:

Back in better weather days.

Heidi Moore:

I don't know. This is pretty awesome right now.

Dave Specter:

That's true. You can't complain.

Heidi Moore:

The weather is pretty fantastic right now. But I sat down with you and your lovely wife, Sara. You told me the story of Bells Up.

Dave Specter:

Yes.

Heidi Moore:

I want you to tell us the story now.

Dave Specter:

Oh, Absolutely.

Heidi Moore:

All of us the story of Bells Up.

Dave Specter:

Bells Up Winery actually started back about 12 years ago, back in 2006, at a time when we were not expecting to someday have a commercial winery. We started making wine as a hobby project. We were living in Cincinnati, Ohio, back then. My wife had her own business as a freelance marketing consultant and I was working as a corporate tax attorney doing mergers and acquisitions.

Heidi Moore:

Which sounds super, fantastically fun every day.

Dave Specter:

Oh my gosh. It's a laugh a minute. You can imagine how much fun I was at parties back then. Funny when you start making alcohol, how much better you're received just in your own friends and social circles. It's been a great step upward. But we just kind of started it.

Dave Specter:

It was our five-year wedding anniversary. We were just kind of looking for a couples project to do. We started by, of all the dumb things, by going to a supply shop and getting a kit in a box. You follow the step-by-step, simple instructions. I'll be darned if I just didn't start getting hooked. It didn't take too long before I was ready to start working with actual grapes and we would get grapes from wherever we could. When you live in Ohio, getting grapes isn't always terribly easy, but we were able to get some from some nice vineyards in the northern part of the state, as well as Finger Lakes, New York, and then some from California. I just became more and more fascinated with the idea of, how do you do this? How do you make these amazing wines that we've always been drinking and admired, but never really at the time thought about how you actually construct them?

Dave Specter:

Then we started taking wine vacations. Then in 2008 was our first visit to the Willamette Valley. We spent four days roaming around and just taking all of the amazing scenes and wines. We really fell in love with it. It felt more like home than anywhere we'd ever been. Back then, there were probably 250, 300 wineries, half the number of wineries that there are now. But what you really got the opportunity to do back then was talk to the people that owned it, that did all the work. For somebody who is just getting started, it was just an amazing opportunity to expand my own knowledge and then to see, hear their stories, and what they had been doing before that. For a lot of people, it was second careers. Kind of based on that, after that trip, Sara and I thought it might be fun to do some day in 20 years when we're ready to retire. We never thought it was going to be this soon.

Dave Specter:

But within a month of getting back, Sara's professional mentor at age 40 was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. With three young children and a husband, we saw this just amazing woman just fade away over the next few months. We came to realize very quickly that life is too short; way too short to spend it doing a career that you hate. I loved the people where I was, but I wasn't happy with the work. We made that decision that we were going to at least give it a shot and try and see what we could do.

Dave Specter:

But we also understood, getting into this, this was going to require a lot of upfront work on our part. I spent the next three years working for a little urban winery in Cincinnati, learning how to scale up what we were doing. That's kind of how we got our start. After that, we moved here to the Valley and bought a little property up on Bell Road just outside of Newberg and started producing our wines in 2013 and opened the doors in 2015. Been rolling forward ever since.

Heidi Moore:

That's fast. You didn't waste any time starting and moving and vacationing and everything you did. All of a sudden, you're up and moving and going forward. I want to talk to you a little bit more about the Bells Up in just a moment and we'll come back and talk about your wines, too.

Speaker 1:

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Heidi Moore:

When we started, we talked about what Bells Up means. Coincidentally, you moved to Bell Road, as well. Tell us what Bells Up means because it has a musical background.

Dave Specter:

Sure, exactly. I suppose I should just go back real quick and start with our idea of branding was obviously based around the music theme. I was a French horn player for about 20 years. Started in junior high, played all the way up through college. I was in the symphony and the wind ensemble, and yes, marching band too, which is why my knees are shot after all these years. But anyway, that became our way of branding it. We didn't want to name it after ourselves. That was sort of the big thing because we see all the time so many wineries are after the owners and we thought, just from a marketing standpoint, it's the easiest way for people to forget who you are, name it after yourself.

Dave Specter:

Fortunately, the music theme has that benefit of being a big part of our story. I think most people can identify, even if you're not a big classical music fan, the idea of music and wine are certainly universal. I think folks can identify with that. That was our theme.

Dave Specter:

We didn't have the name picked out until we ended up on Bell Road. Then once that happened, I thought back to my musical days. I remember that the term, bells up, is a term. Because normally when you're playing the horn, you're in a seated position, the bell of the instrument sits on your right leg and you play with the valves from your left hand. But every so often, you get this moment when the composer wants to create a little dramatic flourish. There will be a little notation in the horn score that'll say bells up. It's at a time when the music's getting louder. When you hit this point, from the audience's perspective, you'll see the horn players lift their bells in the air. It's the horn players time to be the front and center and the focus of attention, which we don't get very often. Normally, we're sort of the soft, mellow middle of the symphony. But in those moments, you really get that opportunity to shine.

Dave Specter:

It was just such a wonderful opportunity to use that as our name. It's short. It's catchy. It ties in perfectly with the location and the road. We then carried that theme through all of the names of our wines are four pieces of music that are, shall we say, French horn heavy. A lot of horn featured in every one of them. We have used the names like Villanelle, and Titan, and Firebird, and I think a lot of the music people have probably heard at some point, even if they don't necessarily recognize the names off the top of their heads. But like I said, I think it gives us a nice little advantage.

Heidi Moore:

It gives a great visual. The whole visual of the symphony and the flare that's going into your wine is just... It is. It's perfect. It's a really nice meld of two or three pieces of your life all coming together.

Heidi Moore:

Speaking of the wine, you brought us a really nice pinot. It's the Titan. It's the newly released 2016 that have. It's a beautiful wine, a beautiful color. It is tasting fabulous.

Dave Specter:

Thank you.

Heidi Moore:

Let's carry into the rest of your wines.

Dave Specter:

Yes. We've always said from day one that the pinot was going to be the most important thing that we did, but it was never going to be the only thing that we did. What I brought you today was the Titan, as you mentioned, which is our flagship. It's our blend of two very small vineyards. At this point, our estate vineyard, we are only using, starting last year and then again this year, to do rosé because the vineyard's very young. It's only five years old.

Dave Specter:

Now, Next year when that vineyard hits its sixth year, we're going to start doing estate pinot as well as the rosé. In the meantime, the other wines that I make right now, we do a pinot blanc. We do a rosé of pinot noir. Right now... Well, forever now, that's the one that's going to come from our estate. Then we do a syrah on the other side for reds. We pull that fruit... That's the only one where we don't get the fruit locally. We go to northeastern Oregon, Milton-Freewater. Literally right across the state line from Walla Walla, Washington. Our syrah's pretty special because I don't make a syrah for syrah drinkers. I make a syrah for pinot drinkers, so it's lighter and more elegant. The other thing that we're very excited about is we brought a grape with us in from Ohio called seyval blanc. It's a white grape. We are the only planting of that grape here in the Valley. I would have brought some today, but the 2017 harvest only made two cases. Young vines.

Heidi Moore:

Oh, no.

Dave Specter:

Well, no. It's okay. They're young vines. They've got some room to grow. This year, it looks like it's going to make about fifteen cases. It looks like we're going to be able to do a club only release with that one, so we're very excited. That'll get released coming up here in the spring. I'm still working on it, but it looks great. Tastes great. Flavors are awesome. We're excited.

Heidi Moore:

Perfect. Well, thank you for talking about the wine. I'm really excited about the new one. I'm going to have to join the club or at least maybe talk you out of a bottle, one way or the other, come back up to the winery.

Dave Specter:

Awesome.

Heidi Moore:

We will be right back with more of what Bells Up is up to.

Speaker 1:

You're listening to the PRP Podcast Co-op on Portland Radio Project at 99.1 in the heart of Portland and streaming worldwide at PRP.fm.

Heidi Moore:

We were talking about Bells Up wine and what the name means, but now I want to get into how you visit and the difference in your tasting room versus some of the others.

Dave Specter:

Sure. We are very, very small. In fact, this is going to be our highest production year that we've done. That's up to five hundred cases, which may sound like a lot, but it makes us the smallest winery in our area that has its own tasting space. Because we're so small, we are not open regular hours. We're open by appointment. What we see sometimes is that there are some folks that get a little nervous or a little freaked out about calling a winery and making an appointment or emailing a winery. They may have the idea that there is some sort of secret exclusive thing or that they have to be some sort of a wine expert.

Dave Specter:

It's just the opposite. I would say for folks that are listening, please don't ever be afraid to call or email a place if you're interested and make an appointment. You are going to have the best experiences at those places because you are going to be taken care of by the people that are actually doing the work. It's harder and harder to find those places these days. It's rare when you get a place that's open regular hours nowadays where you're actually getting to meet the folks that are heavily involved in the creation of the products and of the brand. For us, being open by appointment really gives us an opportunity to sit down with everybody that comes into our place and really get to know them on a one-on-one basis.

Dave Specter:

The way we do it, it's very simple. You call me, you email me, [info@BellsUpWinery.com](mailto:info@BellsUpWinery.com) or 503-537-1328, just check the website. Just tell us when you want to come in and we'll get a spot for you. You will be the only people there. I don't double book appointments. Part of what we've said from day one is

we're not going to say we're going to book three groups in at once and combine them together. We want everybody to have their own time and attention and the opportunity to ask a million questions. It's okay. That's what we're here for. When we visited here, there were a lot of wine makers that listened to my very newbie wine questions and were amazingly supportive. Never made me feel like some kind of a dope because I didn't know as much as they did. I really took that to heart and we pay that forward for everybody that comes in and sees us.

Heidi Moore:

I will say, from my own experience, it was very intimidating when I first did that the first time. But it is the most fantastic experience. When I came and saw you and Sara, it was the same way. We sat down. We had beautiful table setting. We went through a ton of wine. We talked about everything under the sun. I learned a lot, which I think is super important when you are in wine country. Everybody does things a little bit differently and it's nice to hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

Dave Specter:

Oh, absolutely. We've said from day one, our goal in this was when people come in, we want you to feel like you're coming to visit friends that just happen to have a winery.

Dave Specter:

The other thing the by appointment model does is it gives us the opportunity to not talk over your head. We see so often you can go to a tasting room and you can be presented with all kinds of technical information, which if you're into it is really interesting. But for most folks, they're at very different points on where they are in their wine journey. We can talk to you on whatever level you're on. As I say, we encourage it. Part of our job is to help. It's not so much education but to fulfill your curiosities.

Heidi Moore:

Is fantastic. And I want to wrap up really quick and make sure we talk about your events because you always have something fun up your sleeves.

Dave Specter:

Oh. Well, as we get through the holiday seasons, we start looking forward to next year. We will be taking appointments all through the winter. Of course, weather permitting. But as we get into spring, we'll be looking at starting up things like wine maker dinners next year, as well as some great club events, and some good release events as we get into the spring. But our winery has an amazing view looking south throughout the Valley. Panoramic as you can get. Even in bad weather, you can see the sites and the overall experience, because we have our tasting tables set up right in front of the windows, the panel windows to the south. You'll get an amazing view no matter what the weather. We have a lot of great red wines to pour for you right now. I can pour you a few special things. We'd love to see you.

Heidi Moore:

Perfect. So excited to come back up. Thank you for joining us, Dave. We'll be back up to Bells Up soon.

Dave Specter:

My pleasure. Thank you.

Speaker 1:

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