

HAVENS



For immediate release

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The story of **Havens Wine Cellars** [www.havenswine.com] is one in which love, passion, and art intersect with apple trees, flatbed trucks and Friday night brown bag dinners. A colorful tapestry of events led Michael and Kathryn Havens to found and develop their winery, and today the result is a collection of graceful wines that reflect Napa Valley's uniquely blessed geography and climate, capturing and expressing the nuances of this area's character in each bottle. Michael Havens crafts Albariño, Merlot, Syrah and Cabernet Franc into what he describes as "a style of wine that wants to be clearly California, but is elegantly understated."

Michael and his wife Kathryn, with a small group of enthusiastic friends as partners, co-founded Havens Wine Cellars in 1984, yet their tale begins well before that, in the late 1960's in an ancient Swiss mountain town. The two met as traveling college students, and thus began the twin love stories of the Havens' own romance, as well as their shared passion for wines. Neither came from a winemaking background, but the accessibility of good wines throughout Europe provided early education and inspiration, and upon their return to America, they began trying to recreate wines in the spirit of those they had sampled.

They lived throughout the United States, following Michael's pursuit of advanced degrees in Theological Education and Language Theory, while Kathryn studied Art History. In each new city, they immediately took to making wines with the materials at hand. First, in Seattle, a nearby apple tree provided the ingredients for an eau de vie; in Boston it was cranberries; and in Syracuse, Riesling and Chardonnay grapes from the nearby Finger Lakes region.

Serious autodidacts, the Havens gathered education where they could. Few entry-level books on winemaking existed in America, so they turned to Europe, uncovering myriad texts, one even instructing on making "wine from turnips." Of course they would also engage any vintner they came across on the finer points of the craft. The two also shared a tradition of Friday night dinners during which they took turns pouring a wine cloaked in a paper bag, creating blind tastings.

Michael accepted his first professorial job at UCLA, choosing it in part for its proximity to the grapes and winemaking activity in Northern California. As the Havens' winemaking efforts

turned more and more serious, they decided to move to Napa Valley, and Michael took a teaching job at UC Davis, while also stepping up his winemaking efforts.

In 1984, Havens Wine Cellars was officially incorporated, with the first crush performed in the back of a flatbed truck. “We were gypsies,” recalls Michael of the couple’s efforts to make wines at borrowed winery facilities. At one of their weekly Friday night “brown bag” dinners, Kathryn served a bottle of California Merlot that Michael was convinced was a St. Emilion. Bolstered by the potential shown in this wine, he decided to create a Merlot in the tradition of some of his favorite Right Bank Bordeaux. Thus the Havens brand was launched with what is now known as the Napa Valley Merlot.

The wines needed a label, and Kathryn, who today runs her own wine label design company, stepped in to create her first design, seamlessly combining her loves of art and wine. Depicting the instance of bud break on the vine, she captured that moment, as Michael describes it, “when everything that is beautiful and wonderful and delicious is about to emerge.” With constructive critique from legendary artist Chuck House, a timeless label featuring a single, sinuous, vine emerged.

In 1988, Michael quit his job at UC Davis to focus on his winemaking full time. Coincidentally, that same year, Robert Parker gave the Havens Merlots an enthusiastic review, bringing the winery to a new level of recognition. In 1995, Havens Wine Cellars purchased the current 10-acre location of their winery.

Like the Havens logo that is beautifully ethereal yet just off center, the Havens have followed their own unconventional path to achieve quietly stunning results. An early focus on the Carneros region for Merlot, an area known mostly for its Chardonnay and Pinot, was revolutionary, producing an acclaimed wine. Their *Bourriquot*, takes its name from the French slang for a stubborn horse, giving a nod to Michael Havens’ own obstinacy in merging Cabernet Franc with Merlot, while acknowledging similar wines of Bordeaux’ Right Bank, notably the Cheval Blanc. An unorthodox choice at the time in the US, the masterful blend ultimately won over critics and gained a loyal following. Havens’ *Albariño* was inspired by a trip throughout Spain, and with it the Havens blazed a trail as the first-ever to produce the varietal commercially in the New World. The *Black & Blue* estate wine features a deft blending of Cabernet and Syrah, created not in the style common to Australia, but rather crafted with an eye toward the exotic, taking inspiration from an unassuming yet powerful wine they drank in Provence.

Throughout the years, the Havens have continued to collaborate in their passion for wines. They travel to both the established and obscure wine regions, seeking inspiration from an international group of winemakers. And they still relish the task of walking through the vineyards, tasting the season’s fruit. Ever the philosopher-winemaker, Michael approaches his craft with an intellectual as well as a scientific methodology. He takes a highly active role in every moment of the grape-growing process, having distinct opinions on everything from watering to trellising. This hands-on approach is of course continued in the winery where he aims for a moderate-alcohol, food-friendly wine. A great lover of music, peculiarly jazz, Havens compares his wines to music, saying, “I don’t like music that plays loud all the time. I like changes in tempo, harmonics and mood, and I like that in my wine and food too.”

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