

BACKGROUNDER- August 2018

THE TIGHTROPE WINERY: It's all about balance

Tightrope Winery burst out of the gate with its very first vintage, winning six medals in three competitions, including a double gold for its 2012 Rosé at the Northwest Wine Summit. Since then, its wines have been honored internationally, most recently at the 2018 WineAlign National Wine Awards of Canada, with two gold medals, four silver and one bronze. This followed on the heels of a ten-medal performance at the California-based Dan Berger's International Awards.

What makes this perennial success all the more remarkable, is the passion of co-owners Lyndsay and Graham O'Rourke. They are formally educated in the science and art of wine: they studied viticulture and oenology at Okanagan University College (as it then was), in the heart of BC's famous wine-growing country. They continued their studies at Lincoln University in New Zealand, which is internationally recognized for its Viticulture and Oenology program. Lyndsay was top of her class among the women in the Bachelor program and had the highest mark in the Wine Chemistry final.

The couple have had to overcome numerous challenges to get to where they are: they returned to the Okanagan as newcomers in a small industry; natural conditions changing year by year, requiring constant adaptation; and it's rare to find a woman vintner in the wine industry. It took people who were willing to give them a shot – like Prudence Merher at Ruby Blues, who took Lyndsay on as vintner and John Simes at Mission Hill, who hired Graham as a viticulturist. As they honed their crafts, they planted their own ten-acre vineyard in 2007 on the rolling hills of the Naramata Bench, overlooking Okanagan Lake in British Columbia. The Bench's complex soil and many micro-climates make for perfect conditions to grow a wide variety of grapes.

At first, they sold their grapes to other vineyards, then in 2012, they produced their first vintage – and that was the award-winning Rosé. In 2014, they turned Tightrope into their full-time project. This is their life, their passion -- not a hobby or side-hustle in retirement – and their gift is to share incredible wines with others.

With their formal education in viticulture and oenology, they understand the science behind growing wine grapes and making wine. Out of the science comes the art: making wine simply, with minimal intervention.

Graham makes sure Lyndsay has the grapes that she needs. Wine, he'll remind you, is made in the vineyard, and he ensures the grapes have the right sugar content and acidity to become the award-winning Riesling ("Best of Class" at the Cascadia Wine Competition, 2016 and 2018), Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Rosé and all the other varieties that make Tightrope a Label To Know for wine lovers.

Another key ingredient in Tightrope Winery's recipe for success is **sustainability**. Graham sat on the committee writing guidelines for the vineyard portion of the [Sustainable Winegrowing BC](#)

program, developed by the BC Wine Grape Council, which assesses vineyard and winery practices for sustainability. A solar panel electrical system has recently been installed at the winery by [Powermax Electric and Solar](#) of Penticton. The 50-panel array can develop 17.25kw. As well, the winery is lit by LED lights to reduce energy consumption and has also invested in an under-vine mower, to eliminate the use of herbicides.

Tightrope wines can be found in private liquor stores around British Columbia; or visit the shop at the Winery, 1050 Fleet Road in Penticton (Naramata). The wine shop is open April through Thanksgiving (second Monday of October). Wine lovers can also join the [Walk the Wire Wine Club](#), and order a dozen bottles of hand-selected whites, reds or an assortment, to be delivered twice a year to their door. Club perks also include preferred access to exclusive, new and limited-production wines.

Every year is an exercise in walking the tightrope. “We start with the wine we want to make,” Lyndsay says, “and to get it to that end point, the other end of the tightrope, you have to balance all the variables along the way. These variables can include the weather, crop load, picking dates, winemaking decisions, business and financial hurdles, and, of course, the most exceptional grapes. We currently make 4500 cases of wine per year and we want each bottle to be memorable.”

The science. The art. The sacrifice. The earth. The tannins. The minerality. There’s a bit of Graham and Lyndsay in every bottle of Tightrope, and you can taste it.

www.tightropewinery.ca

About Tightrope Winery: *Tightrope Winery sits on 10 acres on the Naramata Bench in British Columbia’s Okanagan Valley, where the complex soil is ideal for growing Riesling, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Barbera, Viognier, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir. Supplementing its own grapes with those from other vineyards on the Naramata Bench, Tightrope produces up to 4,500 cases of wine a year.*

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