



Rob Griffin

In the late 1960s, young Rob Griffin fell in love with winemaking as children often do... he was lured into the life of a vintner by witnessing the burgeoning northern California industry, fancying himself a bit of an alchemist, and thus he took himself to the Contra Costa County library to further illuminate such a calling. He found a book written by elderly English women, detailing how to make “hedge row wines”; a slice of bread and a vat of tomatoes later (tomatoes were easier to obtain than grapes), he’d made his first “wine”. It was somehow less legitimate than his British mentors, but what did that matter? A future winemaker was born.

He enrolled in the University of California, Davis, declaring his interest in the Fermentation Science program straight away. Some of his classmates had last names that were mounted on cellar gates and written on countless bottles through out Napa, but Rob was undeterred by such proximity and relative anonymity. After graduation he worked production around Sonoma, traveling to Washington state to see if a Northwest tractor salesman was really serious about starting his own winery.

Though Rob landed in the midst of a typical Tri-Cities’ dust storm, he decided making wine in Washington (a place his professors and industry comrades warned him could produce nothing but swill) was a reasonable choice, air quality notwithstanding. He’d spend a few seasons in Washington, gain some experience, and return home as a tenured winemaker- primed for a respectable California position. In the spring of 1977, he made the move, and by fall was bringing in his first crush as head winemaker at Preston Wine Cellars.

In 1983 he took the GM/Head Winemaker job at The Hogue Cellars in Prosser, a move that coincided with the beginnings of his own project, a wine brand he started with his wife Deborah Barnard, aptly named: Barnard Griffin.

By the early 90s, Rob left Hogue to focus completely on Barnard Griffin. The winery itself was built in 1996, and Rob, along with his wife Deborah and his daughters, has spent his life growing the brand into one of Washington’s most acclaimed.

Rob holds an unrivaled knowledge of the region’s various terroirs, and with the wisdom that comes from working 50 consecutive harvests in the Columbia Valley he has seen almost everything (yet, mother nature and the wine industry continue to surprise him to both his delight and detriment). Still a fixture on the crush pad and in the lab, Rob is integral to the Barnard Griffin wine program and is a diligent teacher to his daughter, second generation winemaker Megan Hughes, who has spent 15 harvests alongside him.

“The whole process is infinitely fascinating to me. I’m out here dragging hoses around and killing myself during harvest, complaining about it, but I still like it.”
— Rob Griffin

Rob Griffin, pictured here with his personal-best Counoise pull, a two-pound triple cluster