

Wine Spectator

At Home with Chris and Thea Upchurch

DeLille's founding winemaker built a rustic-modern haven on his Washington vineyard property



The 18.5-acre Upchurch Vineyard consists of Cabernet Sauvignon and a small percentage of Merlot wine grapes.

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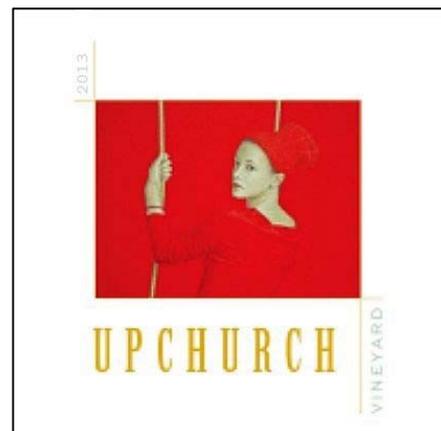
Four years ago, Chris Upchurch was spending too much time on the road, making seven-hour round-trip treks between his home near Seattle and his vineyard in southeastern Washington's Red Mountain AVA.

He was exhausted. But to Chris and his wife, Thea, the solution was clear: They could build a home and cellar right there at the vineyard and have a place to stay during harvest and winemaking seasons.

This wouldn't be any old crash pad, however. "We're certainly gonna make it a unique place in the world," Chris reasoned at the time. And so the wheels began turning.

The winemaker co-founded DeLille Cellars, in Woodinville, Wash., in 1992, and the producer distinguished itself early on for crafting noteworthy Bordeaux-style red blends.

In 2007, Chris bought the 18.5-acre property that is now Upchurch Vineyard, where he grows Cabernet Sauvignon and a small portion of Merlot for DeLille and for his namesake family wine label.



UPCHURCH VINEYARD



"Everything has fallen in place with us," Chris says. He and Thea met in 1995 at the opening of the DeLille château and were instantly smitten. Soon afterward, Chris flew to France and sent Thea a postcard with a line from a Bob Marley song: "If you feel it, you know it."

Their marriage in 2001 was a working wedding. Thea, a longtime restaurateur who was then at the Four Seasons Seattle, catered the affair, and Chris created an impromptu Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah blend the morning of, inspired by a trip they had taken together to Aix-en-Provence. At the ceremony, his hands were stained with the first batch of what would become DeLille's Doyenne Aix blend.

In 2013, the couple began working with a local landscape architect to build an American-style barn at the vineyard, with an 1,800-square-foot lofted living space. Construction was finished in the fall of 2014. "It's basically a post-and-beam design that [Thea] converted into a new urban industrial look that really works," Chris says.

"I've renovated and decorated homes my whole life," Thea says. "But this was a new one." For one thing, they didn't have limitless resources. "When you have a certain budget," she notes, "you get really creative."

They also knew they wanted the building and interior to be sustainable, not unlike the vineyard. Thea sourced the apartment floors from old barns in New England and repurposed century-old shutters from Yakima Grill, one of her former restaurants, for the kitchen's pantry doors. The kitchen cabinets are distressed ash that she and a carpenter friend picked from a local lumberyard.

They installed a walnut-topped center island in the kitchen, with locally handmade distressed iron pendant lamps glowing above. To anchor the eclectic collection of wood styles, she chose a stainless-steel refrigerator, cooking range and dishwasher from KitchenAid. A subway-tile backsplash lends an urban touch, and a 36-bottle Fagor wine fridge is tucked away at one end of the island. The majority of the couple's wine collection is stored in the downstairs cellar.

"We drink wines from all over the world," Chris says, though his most prized bottles reflect an admiration for French styles, with producers ranging from Château Lafite Rothschild to Domaine de la Romanée-Conti to Jean-Louis Chave. For everyday drinking, they keep lots of Grüner Veltliner and Chablis on hand.

In October 2015, the Upchurches finished a new frontier on their home: an outdoor kitchen. The cedar-and-concrete space feels like an extension of the rustic-modern interior, with clean lines, warm tones and a sliding barn door that opens onto the vineyard.

The outdoor pizza oven is one of the couple's favorite features. Ever eco-conscious, they often use old vines as kindling. "People pull out their vines, and we let them know we can use them. We cook on them," Thea says.

"I've always said that my biggest goals are to do cool things," Chris remarks. At his Red Mountain home, it's evident that he does.

