

## Brogan Cellars

Case production: 1,250-1,600

Planted acres: 0 (all fruit is purchased)

Grapes purchased: Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Syrah, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc

Employees: Family and friends

Contact: 3232B Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg, CA 95448. 707-473-0211. [www.brogancellars.com](http://www.brogancellars.com)

Margi Williams-Wierenga absolutely loves what she does. You can tell just by looking at her. She has the glow and the infectious charm of someone who's truly happy. And why not? She's doing what's always come naturally to her—making wine in her self-described “velvet-lined fist” style. Her wines are sexy and silky in more ways than one.

When asked if she had a favorite among her wines, her response was, “It's like having babies. You can't pick a favorite!” But she did say it's her Buena Terra Helio Doro Block Pinot Noir that usually ends up coming along on special occasions. “My customers commonly refer to it as ‘sex in a glass,’” she says. “It's so supple and beautiful. To me, it's Russian River Valley. It reminds me of my father's Rochioli vineyard, which was my favorite that he did.” Her father being Burt Williams of Williams Selyem, that is.

Margi was in her teens when Burt began making wine. He started Hacienda del Rio Winery in 1981 and was crushing and storing barrels wherever he could. In 1982, he moved his equipment into a garage behind a house off Fulton Road. For nine years he worked full-time as a proofreader while making wine on the side—a man after my own heart! Then in 1990, he partnered with Ed Selyem and went full-time into winemaking. Margi worked with them through 17 harvests before they sold the winery in 1998.

There was only one answer when she asked herself what she'd do next. “Once you've worked with your family for such a long time, you develop this love for what you do,” she says. So when a friend offered a garage behind her bed and breakfast (called the Irish Rose on Dry Creek Road), Brogan Cellars was born. Named after Margi's paternal grandmother, it's a winery that very closely resembles her father's modest beginnings.

“When I first started, I was scared,” she says. “Dad was always there before.” And since through selling his winery he'd signed a non-compete clause, he wasn't able to be there anymore. “But I was so stubborn,” she says. “I wanted to do everything myself, and I didn't want to ask questions. I ended up producing a Zin that was 18.3% alcohol that first year. I thought it was going to be horrible—but it turned out great! I had people calling and begging for it because of the way the fruit balance kept the alcohol in the background.” While her Zins today hold less alcohol, their character is similar to that first batch. The 2003 Mendocino County Zinfandel practically punches you in the nose with blackberry and earthy aromas. But in the mouth it's velvety smooth and lush.

“My wines are very forward,” says Margi with a big smile and terrific laugh, “much like sluts.” And yet each one has its own distinctive character. “We try to capture each vineyard to let it speak for itself,” she continues. “They all have a special meaning to me. Each has its own personality, and knowing the people who own the vineyards is a big part of it too.” Some of her current releases include the 2004 Lingenfelder Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, which took gold at this year's Sonoma County Harvest Fair, and a 2004 Summa “Young Vine” Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. “The Summa vineyard is made up of young

vines that were planted only seven years ago,” says Margi. “But the fruit is so distinctive. It has an orange zest quality on the nose, which is very unusual. I had a wine writer come out here from Germany, and this is the one he bought to take back.”

Her 2004 Anderson Valley Pinot Noir from Mendocino County has a jammy, berry nose and is very fruit-forward. It's made of vines from Burt's vineyard in Philo (he's a grower now—something he never thought he'd be) which was planted from a clone he bought from Rochioli. In Spring 2006, Margi will release a Pinot Noir that is 100 percent from this location and call it “My Father's Vineyard.”

“All my wines are unfinned, unfiltered and have 100 percent malolactic fermentation. Even the whites,” says Margi. This isn't common for whites, especially Sauvignon Blanc, because people don't always like the richer flavor. But Margi has her own style, and she's sticking to it. It's a good thing, too, because her style is world-class.

So what happens when word spreads worldwide (and it already has) about this tiny, garage-based winery? “I do need to grow,” says Margi. “And I hope to get all of my family involved eventually.”

Right now she works with her husband Mike, who owns a refrigeration business, and their oldest son, James. She also hopes their youngest son, Bobby, will be able to join in at some point, and says he's certainly interested. “We all have good palates,” she says. “I think it's in the genes.” Around harvest time, a group of friends, family and even some customers all help out too.

In the meantime, the winery is growing slowly. Margi and Mike purchase a new piece of equipment each year, and have expanded into a facility in Hopland (about 30 minutes north of Dry Creek) where they live and do some of the production. “We bottle and label everything by hand,” says Margi. “It's the same way my dad did it years ago. It might be more labor-intensive, but it's so much fun. We nurture the wine into the bottle. We love the harvest. We get tired ‘cuz we're tired. But we love what we do.”

You can find Brogan's wines at a multitude of upscale local (and not-so-local, including Vegas and Southern California) restaurants. There's a list of them on their website. Otherwise you'll need to sign up on their mailing list to get your hands on a personal stash.

“When I go to work in the morning, I have no bad feelings,” says Margi. “I grew into it, and now my son has grown into it too.” Sounds like a family tradition of the best possible kind.

