

Boosting Brooks



Marcus Larson/News-Register

The spacious Brooks tasting room opens to a large deck featuring a panoramic east-facing view.

SEP 19, 2014

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The compelling story of Jimi Brooks, who passed away much too young, but left behind an amazing legacy, has been 10 years in the making. Though written about many times over the course of those years, it merits recounting and updating.

Earlier this month, Brooks Winery unveiled its handsome new 12,000-square-foot winery, which commands a sweeping view from the Eola Hills. Designed by Portland architect Richard Brown, this state-of-the-art facility is the crowning achievement to date in a triumph over adversity that has both touched and impressed

everyone.

When Jimi died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 38, on the very eve of the 2004 harvest, the ensuing surge of support and assistance was nothing short of awe-inspiring. It reflected the closeness of Oregon wine people and the high regard in which this talented young man was held.

Jimi's sister, Janie Brooks Heuck, proved the driving force during that first difficult year, when she came up from her home in Pebble Beach, California, to do what she could to keep things together. Her roster of more than able associates in that endeavor reads like a list of Oregon wine luminaries.



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Janie Brooks Heuck has managed Brooks Winery since Jimi's death in 2004. The winery logo, an Ouroboros, is a mythical dragon symbolizing re-creation, which her brother wore as a tattoo.

It includes Harry Peterson-Nedry, Laurent Montalieu, Josh Bergström, Sam Tannahill, Cheryl Francis, David Autrey, Amy Wesselman, Luisa Ponzi, Steve Doerner, Jim Prosser, Patty Green, Jay Sommers, Tad Seestedt and Chris Williams.



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Wineries that helped Brooks after its owner's death are honored with embossed barrel staves on the tasting room walls.

All of them volunteered their time and skills to help see to the vinification of fruit from 11 different vineyards, ensuring the continuation of the Brooks brand.

Jimi's son, Pascal, was just 8 when he lost his father. As the only heir, it would be several more years before he would fully appreciate the meaning of having become the youngest winery owner in America.

The implications and opportunities of that inheritance were recently recounted in "An American Wine Story," a documentary film

featuring the Jimi and Pascal story as the centerpiece of a story focusing on what compelled people around the country to become winery owners.

After being invited to attend a preview showing, Heuck termed the film “the most amazing tribute to my brother and his legacy that we will probably ever know.” She said, “It is honest, it is direct and it is beautifully done.”

The Fox Business Network is currently in production on Pascal’s story, featuring it as an episode in a new TV series titled “Strange Inheritance.” The crew was on location at the winery during its Sept. 9 grand opening.

Pascal is still in school, but listing “winemaker” on his online bio as his future career gives an indication of where he seems to be headed.

Right now, however, it is the noteworthy and admirable efforts of his aunt that continue to carry Brooks Winery forward.

A decade ago, Jamie Brooks Heuck never dreamed she would be running a winery, much less be spending a considerable amount of her time some 700 miles from her home.

Living in a place many people would call one of the most beautiful on Earth, Heuck has led an active and pleasurable life. Her husband, David, is a senior executive at the Pebble Beach Company, owner and operator of three, high-end resort hotels on the Monterey Peninsula.

However, as Janie became increasingly involved, the Heucks decided to make a serious commitment aimed at ensuring the winery’s long-term success.

Building a showcase winery will elevate the public profile of Brooks to the level of its most prestigious peers. It is already known for the consistent high quality of both its rieslings and pinot noirs, and can now pair that with a pride-evoking, physical presence.



Submitted photo

The newly completed Brooks winery sits on a southeastern slope of the Eola Hills.

Adjacent to the new winery are 40-year-old vines that bring a legacy of their own to the estate portfolio. They were planted by wine pioneer Don Byard, whose former winery had served as Brooks' home since 2008.

Of course, the infrastructure of any business is no better than the people who make it come to life. Slowly but steadily since 2004, Heuck has undertaken a carefully considered plan to enhance and expand the winery.

Two years after taking the reins, Heuck hired Chris Williams as her head winemaker. He had become friends with Jimi when they worked together at WillaKenzie, then went on to hone his skills at Maysara before accepting the position at Brooks.

Contracted vineyard relationships were reconfirmed and the little

business moved forward, making some outstanding wines in the process.

The move into the former Byard winery in 2008 allowed the enterprise to substantially increase and more directly control production. By last year, its volume had grown to 12,000 cases.

Heather Byard Kirk, daughter of pioneer grower and winemaker Don Byard, is serving as the winery's marketing and direct sales coordinator. That's fitting, as she literally grew up around these vines.

Heuck noted that the winery's 2013 output could well be exceeded in 2014, thanks to a prolific harvest.

"Between breaking ground in April and now, everything is in place for processing at our new facility," she said. "We could do as much as 14,000 cases."

To accommodate an anticipated increase in winery visitors, as well as expand marketing and promotional efforts, Heuck has brought a new staffer on board.

Jess Pierce, the winery's director of wine education and communication, recently spent a year in Germany's Mosel region acquainting herself with the nuances of the world's greatest rieslings. She is now imparting that knowledge, as well as expertise gained at the Domaine Serene winery and Ned Ludd Restaurant, to winery visitors.

She is currently adding to that by undertaking an intensive study of how the winery's rieslings evolve during vinification.

Adding another dimension to the Brooks brand, a thematic imagery is being emphasized that people who knew Jimi said he would have been delighted to see.

Jimi had developed a fascination for Greek mythology.

He bore the tattoo of an Ouroboros, a dragon encircling itself to bite its own tail. It symbolizes cyclicity or something continuously re-creating itself.

The graphic of his striking Ouroboros tattoo has been carried out as the identifying logo for the Brooks winery and its wine labels. It's all part of carrying on the legacy which falls to family, with sister and aunt Janie Brooks Heuck to be followed by son and nephew Pascal.



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Up to 50,000 gallons at a time can be processed on the main fermentation floor.

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