



## Tastemaker: Bryan Forbes, 7 Vines Vineyard

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Lenn Thompson



When I wrote my short piece for Wine Enthusiast Magazine about the exciting things happening in the Minnesota wine industry, I tasted a lot of wine from as many places as I could. You've seen several of the reviews here on the site. Thankfully, I'm still getting to taste more of these uniquely delicious wines made from grapes unique to North America's northern climes.

But, it wasn't until well after my story was filed that I really got to dig deep into the wines that Bryan Forbes is making at newcomer 7 Vines Vineyard in eastern Minnesota, not that far from the Wisconsin border.

Putting aside the wines he makes from West Coast fruit from Napa Valley, Santa Barbara and elsewhere (that's another discussion for another day), his Minnesota-grown wines are some of the best being made in "The Land of 10,000 Lakes" and some of the best wines I've had from anywhere made from the cold-hardy grapes developed at the University of Minnesota.

You won't find oak-bludgeoned Marquette or syrupy-sweet La Crescent. Bryan has an inquisitive-but-confident winemaking style that focuses on balance and letting these unique grapes show off what makes them, well, unique.

As Minnesota earns more attention from a wider audience, it will be people like Bryan leading the way. He's a true tastemaker in a region that needs more of them.

Plus, I like his diverse taste in music as you'll read about below.

7 Vines Vineyard's Bryan Forbes (Credit: James Ramsay Photography)

**Location:** 7 Vines Vineyard, Dellwood, Minnesota

**Title:** Director of Winemaking & Viticulture

**Before I Became a Winemaker:** Long story sort of short, I grew up in Minnesota, studied environmental chemistry, hydrology and GIS in college out in Washington and planned to go masters, PhD and then teach at a university somewhere.

I basically wanted a job where I could ski and flyfish and still call it work somehow. Before that happened, I ended up getting sidetracked in Japan for a couple of years. That's when I started drinking and appreciating wine, and then everything went a bit wonky.

**How I Ended Up Where I am Today:** After coming back from Japan, I dipped my toe into wine production in 2007 across the river in Wisconsin volunteering to help with harvest at a winery. I went to New Zealand in 2008 on a working holiday visa and spent a year in a vineyard in Central Otago. That's when the wine thing really got it's damn dirty hooks into me. At the time, I was planning on going into precision viticulture, remote sensing vineyard management and planning stuff based on my background. That year, I ended up being a vintage lab tech and cellar rat to round out the year in the vineyard. I gathered that this whole winemaking thing was probably a pretty cool gig.

After 2008, I bounced around mostly chasing pinot noir and riesling in Australia, California, New Zealand, Alsace, and then more New Zealand where I grabbed a graduate diploma in winemaking and viticulture. Then more New Zealand, Burgundy, Oregon and eventually back to Minnesota in 2014.

I more or less got lost hemisphere hopping and somehow found my way back home.

If you had asked me in 2010 if I'd be making wine back home one day I would have laughed. But Minnesota has a large pull for me, I love it here despite the lack of proper mountains. The

developments in the wine grape world of Minnesota have certainly been intriguing. I see a lot of potential in some of the grapes grown here and there is something very enticing about trying to carve out a new niche in the world of wine. Since I've been back in Minnesota I've consulted for a couple places, worked for a supplier, moonlighted as the interim winemaker for the University of Minnesota and then started with 7 Vines in 2017. Things all just kind of happened.

**What I'm Drinking Right Now:** 2016 Gobelsburg Zweigelt. One of my go-to reds. Kind of like a Marquette honestly. So good and damn cheap for the quality.

**The First Bottle of Wine I Remember Drinking:** First one I remember drinking was some sauvignon blanc in Vancouver with my mom and dad (despite their protests about my age at the time). I was 19 (and I) had it with halibut. It was glorious. No idea what it was, something Kiwi I'd guess. My first 'a ha' wine was Baumard Quarts de Chaume 2002 and the first red that blew my mind was Cayuse Bionic Frog 2003. I drank that in Kobe over a week in 2007 and the way it changed day by day was enthralling.

**My Winemaking Style:** Get good fruit and don't mess it up. I try to be on the minimal intervention side of things as much as possible but I'm willing to do some chemistry gymnastics if necessary (around here it's mostly just ripping acid out and dealing with silly amounts of protein).

I like keeping lots separate as long as possible, trying to appreciate the differences in sites and ferments. I get annoyed when things are out of balance. I also don't like much new oak impact, I want the fruit characteristics to come through first and foremost. I tend to go for longish skin contact, as much whole cluster as I can get away with, lots of aging on lees, and co-inoculations if I pitch yeast.

Ideally, I'll get to feral ferments for everything here. I hope to one day do some Vinothek type whatnot with La Crescent in puncheon for like 5+ years on the lees...could be fun. My goal is to keep pushing things further and further down the rabbit hole to make something really interesting and enjoyable.

**My Mentors — Wine and Otherwise:** Wine wise, I've been very fortunate to have some really good people help me along the way. Jenny Dobson, Jeff Pisoni, Olivier Humbrecht, the Seysses family, Tim Heaton...there's more for sure. I've picked up a lot of good things along the way from people who've forgotten more about wine than I can ever hope to know.

**The Music Playing in the Cellar Right Now:** It's usually a constant barrage of Neurosis, Cult of Luna, Isis, Clutch, High on Fire, Gojira, Meshuggah, Candiria, Nailbomb, Yo Yo Ma, If These Trees Could Talk, All Them Witches, Solstafir and Pink Floyd.

**My Favorite Thing About the Minnesota Wine Industry:** Carte blanche. No substantial history for varieties, for sites, for styles so it's all throwing darts based on (somewhat) educated guesses and trial and error.

**What I Wish Was Different About Minnesota Wine:** It needs more collaboration, more cohesio, and more cooperation. That and some changes to the laws like allowing for contract winemaking as well as having a state wine association with funding.

I don't care about the 51% rule that causes a bit of consternation here, makes no difference to me, though it would be nice if people got past it as there is way too much energy wasted on it. And I wish we didn't have insane amounts of trunk disease.

**On a Random Thursday Evening, You'll Find Me Drinking:** I'm a total riesling junkie. I tend to go for all things German, Austrian, Alsatian and Finger Lakes. I get all giddy when I dig out a Heymann-Loewenstein or Diel or Weinbach or a bottle from Nathan Kendall in the Finger Lakes in my little stash.

When not riesling, it's typically high-acid whites, Rhone-ish Syrah, Nerello Mascalese, Austrian reds....I still adore pinot. My beer consumption has gone way down recently, but if that's happening, dark stuff, sour stuff, German stuff....pretty much anything not hoppy. And cider.

**My Last Meal on Earth:** Start off with Selosse. Because why wouldn't you?

Zind-Humbrecht Clos Windsbuhl Riesling 2010. My favorite vineyard anywhere.

Raveneau Les Clos 2010. The wine that got me into chardonnay (not the 2010 mind you).

Pisoni Pinot Noir 2009. One of my favorite harvests and just delicious.

Dujac Chambertin 2012. Unicorn I had the good fortune of digging out. I can still smell it.

Chave Hermitage 1990 or something similar. No brainer cause damn do I love the Rhone.

Zind-Humbrecht Pinot Gris Clos Jbsal SGN Tres Special 2010. A true unicorn from the moment it went into foudre. Just insane nectar of the gods.

Talisker 10. I've loved single malts since I was 13 (toured Glenlivet, I can still smell it) and Talisker has been a part of every significant moment with my wife.

Oh, right, food too....huh. I dunno, probably some green lipped mussels, wild rice chowder with a proper baguette, lake trout, a bunch of comte and epoisses, then some Ben and Jerry's Phish Food (really wish it wasn't named after that band...).

It would be nice if all this happened on Artists Point on Lake Superior.

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