

COLUMBIA · CREST®

KEITH KENISON

WHITE WINEMAKER



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Keith Kenison is the white winemaker at Columbia Crest Winery in Paterson, Washington. Columbia Crest is the leading producer of premium wines in Washington state.

As white winemaker, Kenison leads the team creating Columbia Crest’s acclaimed Reserve, Grand Estates, H3, and Two Vines white varietals. His specialty is wines that are stainless-steel fermented and blended with little or no oak aging. “The goal,” says Kenison, “is to create expressive wines that are true to variety and offer a sense of place. If the wines don’t explode with Washington state fruit characters, I haven’t done my job.”

Born and raised in a small farming community in Oregon, Kenison attended Eastern Oregon University and graduated with a degree in Psychology. These days, he laughingly uses this education to keep himself sane during the long hours of harvest.

His interest in winemaking brought him to Washington state. In 1992 he joined the staff of the Ste. Michelle Wine Estates facility in Grandview, Washington as a cellar worker, learning the craft of winemaking literally from the ground up. In 1997 he moved to Columbia Crest, first as a quality assurance technician, then as an enologist. He was promoted to assistant winemaker in 2002 and white winemaker in 2006. In his many years of experience, he has worked alongside some of the best winemakers in the state and, arguably, the world. Keith has a practical, hands-on approach to winemaking and proudly pronounces “I guide the fruit to its final destination with as few manipulations as possible, making every decision by taste.”

Kenison says the small-winery mentality of Columbia Crest is part of what sets it apart from other larger wineries. “A good portion of the work is still done using traditional winemaking techniques,” he explains. “Sure, our tools may be bigger than many Washington wineries but we’re still getting dirty in the cellar.” Teamwork, says Kenison, is another reason for Columbia Crest’s success. “We all work together to make the best wines we can.”

“Oh, and one more thing...” Kenison adds, “It’s easy to look good when you work with a legendary winemaker like Ray Einberger.”