

# COLUMBIA · CREST

JUAN MUÑOZ OCA

HEAD WINEMAKER



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Juan Muñoz Oca is the head winemaker at Columbia Crest Winery in Paterson, Washington. Columbia Crest is recognized as the leading producer of acclaimed, high-quality wines from Washington state.

As Head Winemaker, Muñoz Oca is responsible for producing the winery’s portfolio of Reserve, H3, Grand Estates and Two Vines wines. He joined Columbia Crest in 2003 and was named head winemaker in 2011. Prior to 2011 he was dedicated to the winery’s red wine program where he worked alongside Ray Einberger whose 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon became the first Washington wine to be named ‘Wine of the Year’ by Wine Spectator in 2009.

Raised in Mendoza, Argentina, Muñoz Oca came under the tutelage of his grandfather, cellar master at Bodegas Toso winery, at a young age. The older man instilled in him a love and respect for wine, as well as for his family’s Spanish culture, that was to become the root of a lifelong passion for winemaking. He picked his first grapes at the age of eight, later took an after-school job in a wine cellar, and spent his vacations helping his grandfather with harvest.

“I’ve been involved with grapes since I was a little boy – my grandfather was in the industry and his father was in the industry – it’s all I’ve known,” says Muñoz Oca. “Winemaking has been in my family, it’s in my blood, it’s what I do, and it’s who I am.”

During his college years, Muñoz Oca gained more wine industry experience during stints at various wineries in Argentina. After graduating with honors from Argentina’s National University of Cuyo with dual degrees in agricultural engineering and winemaking, he studied viticulture in Ribera del Duero, Spain and joined the winemaking team at Terrazas de los Andes, an Argentine premium winery owned by Chandon.

Though Muñoz Oca planned to further his experience with an internship at a California winery, in 2001 a meeting with the legendary Dr. Robert Wamplé, then a top viticulturalist at Washington State University convinced him to head further north to Washington. In the summer of 2001, he began interning with the viticulture team at Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, and in 2003 began working at Columbia Crest. With time out for stints at Bleasdale Vineyards in Australia and Bordeaux’s Chateau Puy Guilhem, he’s been at Columbia Crest ever since.

Although his winemaking experience stretches across the globe, it is his time at Columbia Crest that has been the most meaningful.

“Washington state is a very special place to grow grapes for many reasons,” says Muñoz Oca. “The perfect grape-growing climate, the best viticultural practices and people committed to crafting the best bottle of wine vintage after vintage is what Columbia Crest’s winemaking is all about. My time in Washington has been the most meaningful to me, I fell in love with the wine and the people, and that’s why I’ve been here since.”