

Kingston Family Vineyards



Syrah grapes shortly before harvest at Kingston Family Vineyard in Chile's Casablanca Valley.

Andy Pflaum '91 Chile

A week before leaving for a 2001 trip to Chile with a few Carolina classmates, Andy Pflaum '91 met Courtney Kingston in San Francisco. It just so happened that she would be at her family's Chilean farm at the same time, so she invited Pflaum and his friends to tour their new winery.

"Best vacation ever," quips Pflaum, who married Courtney two years later. Today, he is general manager of Kingston Family Vineyards, where his wife is managing partner.

Chile's Casablanca Valley, about 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean, beckoned his wife's great-grandfather in 1906. Carl Johnson Kingston journeyed there from Michigan to mine copper and gold. Raising cattle on a 350-acre farm turned out to be a better bet.

It wasn't until the late 1990s, when Courtney came to the U.S. for graduate school, that the idea of turning part of the farm into a vineyard took hold. Kingston boldly planted pinot noir and syrah vines in a cool, rugged region then known exclusively for white wines. They released their first wines in 2003, a small batch of just 400 cases.

"At the time, Chile was best known for jug wines sold in grocery stores," says Pflaum, who hosted a GAA tour group in March, when Kingston's harvest began. "But these wines were different. Overnight, our position in the industry was boosted. It showed that we could grow grapes that could compete with top California wines, but which were much less expensive to produce."

Kingston wines continue to earn high marks for their value. *Wine Enthusiast* magazine praised a 2013 sauvignon blanc, noting it "overdelivers on its price by a factor of two or three times." Kingston also grows grapes for other wineries, including Concha y Toro, one of Chile's largest producers.

With the 2015 harvest pressed and fermenting in barrels, Pflaum feels good about the future. "We're still a small producer, but we have a loyal customer base," he said. "About 90 percent of our wine goes straight to the homes of U.S. buyers."

