

TROTHER

A partnership founded on four generations of family farming and 29 vintages of making wine in Washington has produced one of the northwestern state's most exciting new wines in years: Trothe

STORY CLIVE PURSEHOUSE

In the 1940s, Jeff Andrews' great-grandfather arrived in the area where the Andrews Family Vineyards stand. Today, aside from row after row of grapevines, only a few buildings break the horizon line. There are a couple of farmsteads and the family's wine production facilities. It remains a very uninhabited part of eastern Washington, rising between the Yakima and Columbia rivers.

It was all sagebrush and arid desert back in those days. Shortly after Andrews' great-grandfather George Smith had broken the ground and planted dry-land wheat, the US military seized his land. It was soon after America had entered into World War II. His farm and most of the area in the high, rolling hills above the Yakima river were used as a bombing range by the US Navy throughout the war.

WHERE CABERNET IS KING

Today, much of the former bombing range is known as the Horse Heaven Hills AVA, one of Washington state's most significant wine-growing

regions. These hot, windswept hills produce much of the state's most outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon, often including fruit from Andrews Family Vineyards.

Ray McKee has made wine for almost 30 vintages in Washington state. He knows Washington's vineyards and AVAs as well as anyone making wine here. His decision to partner with Jeff Andrews' vision for Trothe was an easy one. 'Having made wine at Chateau Ste Michelle for nearly 10 years, I've known for a long time that the quality of fruit produced by the Andrews family is at the highest levels in the state. It's about the Horse Heaven Hills, certainly, but it's this site. It's what they've got going on here specifically.'

While they grow 26 varieties, a select group of Washington winemakers have come to the Andrews family year after year for their Cabernet. So Andrews and McKee decided that instead of selling off all their choicest blocks of fruit, they would keep much of it for the Trothe wines. ▶



Below: the Trothe team – proprietor Jeff Andrews (third from right) with (from left) his brother Macauley Andrews, their father Mike Andrews, wife and proprietor Jani Andrews, vineyard manager Todd Chapman and winemaker Ray McKee



‘Here we are gifted with such fine, elegant tannins – I build layers on top of each other to create richness through maceration’

————— Ray McKee, winemaker (right)

Jeff Andrews’ decision to launch the Trothe brand was based on faith in his family’s work over the decades and what the evidence was showing him. Many of Washington’s top-scoring wines have been Cabernets, made from grapes which many of those wineries purchased from his family’s vineyard. It wasn’t simply a case of hubris – Andrews knew they had something special.

A SPECIAL PLACE

Washington state wines are not new any more. As they’ve been discovered a time or two by now, they’ve begun developing their reputations and hallmarks. A number of wines from Washington have scored 100 points in different American wine publications or made the annual top 100 wine lists of those same publications. For many, Washington wines have drawn comparisons to a middle ground. It’s a wine somewhere between the fruit-driven nature of Napa wines and the textured, mineral-laden wines of Bordeaux.

That texture comes from tannin, a consistent signature of Washington wine – the wines from Washington all have it, but it is especially notable in the Horse Heaven Hills. This is owed in large part to the AVA’s nearly constant wind. ‘The skin tannin is developing in the spring, and we have 30% more wind than the rest of the state’s growing regions do,’ says Trothe vineyard manager Todd Chapman. ‘So, as the skins develop, we’re getting a constant 8-25kph wind every day.’

‘Across all varieties in the Horse Heaven Hills, you have tannin,’ McKee explains. ‘I like to make Cabernet with plenty of it, and here we are gifted with such fine, elegant tannins. I build layers of that tannin on top of each other to create richness through maceration. So the texture goes all the way around and envelops the wine so that it is elegant. But elegant like a fine, expensive, 1,400 thread-count sheet: elegant but weighty and full.’

A SPECIAL SELECTION

The Trothe Cabernet is a product of some of the most select blocks in the vineyard – three in



Trothe at a glance

Established Andrews Family Vineyards established in 1994 with the planting of 8ha of Cabernet Sauvignon; the Trothe brand launched with the 2018 vintage by Jeff Andrews to highlight the quality of his family’s vineyard

Area planted 526ha

Winemaker Ray McKee

Trothe Cabernet annual production

2018 1,752 bottles; **2019** 2,460 bottles; **2020** 3,000 bottles

Origins 1941 George Smith (Jeff’s great-grandfather) purchases the land that would become Andrews Family Vineyards for dry wheat farming.

1942-1945 US Navy commandeers the family’s land as a bombing range through much of World War II. 1978 Mike Andrews (Jeff’s father) raises Hereford cattle on the land that would become Andrews Family Vineyards. 1994 Mike plants his first 8ha of Cabernet Sauvignon

particular, each numbered for the year they were planted. Block 98 sits atop a rise in the vineyard. While the oldest estate Cabernet was planted in 1994, those vines have since been removed, making 98 the estate’s old-vine block. This block sits at an elevation where the ice-age floods that carved Washington state up crested – resulting in a rocky soil deposit that gives this block a unique terroir. It is the backbone of these exceptional Cabernet wines.

‘Block 98 gives these wines a tremendous amount of structure,’ McKee tells me. ‘The berries are small, and it’s an older vine, so it doesn’t ripen to super-high sugars. I can get a lot of hang time ▶

PRODUCER PROFILE: TROTHER

without the ripeness getting out of hand.' Each vintage of Cabernet has featured these old vines as the predominant source of the final blend, and McKee emphasises that the older vines give the wine both complexity and structure.

The remainder of the Trothe Cabernet blend has come from Block 03. 'Block 03 adds nuances of sage, cherry fruit and currants – more typical of Cabernet grown in cool sites,' says McKee, 'all with an elegant tannin profile and acidity that energises the Trothe blend and balances the power of Block 98.'

As the Trothe Cabernet program develops, winemaker McKee is excited to integrate some of the vineyard's youngest sites. In addition to the old-vine Cabernet, the Trothe Cabernet will incorporate one of the youngest Cabernet blocks on the estate, coming from site 16 (planted in 2016). This block is at the highest elevation on the Andrews estate, planted at 442m. McKee is excited about its potential to continue to shape the Trothe Cabernet program. 'Block 16 reminds me of mountain Cabernet, with finely packed and



dense tannins, lively acidity and deep colour. This block will become more prominent in the Trothe blend over the next 10-15 years as the vines grow up and settle into their terroir.'

RUGGED BEAUTY

Many parts of Washington's wine country can be surprising for the uninitiated. The area around the Yakima Valley, including the Horse Heaven

Hills just to its south, is a desert. Something in the region of 22cm a year of rain falls here. Rough, rocky canyons, sagebrush and tumbleweeds mark the land. And yes, they actually tumble.

Jeff Andrews, though, sees the beauty of the region he calls home. 'The Horse Heaven Hills is vast, rugged and incredibly remote, but its wines can be exceptionally harmonious and elegant,' he says. 'Since the region lacks the infrastructure to support tourism, many will never have the opportunity to visit in person. Part of crafting a wine like Trothe is a hope to transport people, if even for a moment, to the sagebrush-covered canyons and windswept ridges of the wide-open Horse Heaven Hills.'

'Trothe is part of our family's continuing farming and wine-growing evolution,' Andrews continues. 'We've invested 80 years and four generations in nurturing our corner of the Horse Heaven Hills. With Trothe, we are laying down a marker to let wine lovers know that the Horse Heaven Hills deserves a place on the world stage among the most renowned wine-growing regions.'

PHOTOGRAPHS CAMERON KARSTEN FOR TROTHER

Trothe revealed: seven from Horse Heaven Hills

Availability of Trothe wines is limited: for membership and allocation details, go to trothe.com/allocations

① Trothe, Sauvignon Blanc 2021 92

A very limited edition, launched with the 2021 vintage, this Sauvignon Blanc saw plenty of lees stirring during production in 100% concrete. The aromatics offer gooseberry, lemon zest and wet stone in a wine of a bright yellow hue. The palate offers rich, round tropical fruits balanced with a thirst-slaking acidity. Flavours of key lime, grapefruit pith and chalky minerality are finished off with zippy acidity and a long, bright finish. **Drink** 2023-2026 **Alcohol** 13.8%

Trothe, Cabernet Sauvignon 2020 96

US\$239 trothe.com

The third release of Trothe's flagship is now at 10 barrels of Clone 8 Cabernet selected from its older 98 and 03 Blocks. A streak of graphite cuts through the dark violet and ripe blackberry aromatics, the palate undeniably fresh despite the wine's ripeness, grip and power. Tangy blackberry and cherry fruits mingle with cedar and pencil shavings. There is undeniable elegance in this wine made in a warm year that is delightful and, hopefully, instructive. **Drink** 2023-2040 **Alc** 14.5%

② Trothe, Cabernet Sauvignon 2019

96

US\$234 trothe.com

Captivating aromas of dried violet, tobacco and sagebrush give way to red berries and mocha. Sappy blackberry and dusty cherry flavours balanced by savoury herbs, streaks of graphite and a cocoa nib touch. Lush yet layered, with lingering acidity, all framed by fine tannins that are a hallmark of this region's windy conditions. This is a beautiful wine that exemplifies the potential of Horse Heaven Hills Cabernet when picked for complexity and harmony rather than ripeness and opulence. Shows the elegance of the 2019 vintage among Washington's top producers. **Drink** 2023-2040 **Alc** 14.7%

Trothe, Cabernet Sauvignon 2018 95

Only five barrels of 2018 were made for the brand's inaugural release. Opting for a style that accents fresh and savoury rather than ripe opulence, aromatics of smoke mingle with dried violets and hints of darker blue-fruit elements of boysenberry and blackberry. The palate is lush yet lively and fresh. Flavours of coffee beans, dried thyme and sage give way to a plush core of

fresh blue and red fruits; pomegranate, mountain huckleberry and crushed stone lead into a finish that delivers fresh minerality. **Drink** 2023-2035 **Alc** 14.5%

Trothe, Limited Red Wine 2020 94

A Bordeaux-style blend, two-thirds Cabernet Franc with Cabernet Sauvignon. Dusty black fruit aromas come to the fore, with intense notes of crushed basalt, hints of espresso bean, cocoa nibs and just a touch of sage, freshly crushed. Crystalline blackberry and intense baking chocolate lead into a touch of leather as graphite lingers long into the finish, framed by those classic tannins from Horse Heaven. **Drink** 2025-2038 **Alc** 14.8%

③ Trothe, Limited Malbec 2019 94

100% Malbec with two years in neutral, fourth-fill French oak barrels. Depth and complexity from a variety often known for straightforward fruitiness. Aromatics of bright, early-season blackberry, mint and substantial fresh green herbs. The palate is intense, balancing savoury characters with great depth of fruit. Notes of coffee bean mingle with black fruit that's marked by

freshness, fig, blackcurrant, and bright blackberries. **Drink** 2023-2030 **Alc** 14.8%

Trothe, Syrah 2020 93

Unoaked Rhône-style blend of 93% Syrah with 7% Viognier. Aromas centre on dried violets, figs and hints of black olive. The palate emphasises fruit but hints at the savoury character that will develop with time. A good tannic grip frames flavours of redcurrant and ample fruit vibrancy. Black cherry and fig are underlined with hints of meatiness and white pepper.

Drink 2023-2035 **Alc** 14.3% **D**

