

Fantesca

ESTATE & WINERY

Duane Hoff

Taking a Hands-On Approach

Duane Hoff may likely be one of the few winery owners who has worked every day of his first harvest. He laughingly refers to himself as “Fantesca’s unpaid intern – willing to do anything, but pretty hard to fire”. Duane’s willingness to get his hands dirty, learn from the bottom up and do everything from pulling hoses to sorting grapes to scouring Napa looking for potential vineyard land, is a far cry from his previous life working as a busy executive for the Minneapolis Fortune 100 Company, Best Buy.

Duane had spent 13 years with Best Buy, starting as an assistant store manager. When he left the company in the summer 2005 to concentrate on Fantesca, he was vice president of Strategy and Business Development, where he was responsible for creating and acquiring new businesses. By then, he had already led the Best Buy’s Audio Team, and started Best Buy’s Digital Imaging Department, and spearheaded the development of Best Buy’s small market store concept. Today, Best Buy’s stores do more than \$400 million in sales. In 1997, Best Buy exploded its profitability through better inventory management, smarter goods assortments, and higher sales. In that same year, Duane was named “Merchant of Year”.

While working to create new businesses for Best Buy, Duane experienced the passion that drives every entrepreneur, and wanted to share that passion with his family. Together they had been looking for a simpler way of life—and one they could share as a family endeavor. After starting Fantesca, yet still working at Best Buy and commuting from Minneapolis to Napa, Duane realized quickly that the wine business was a complex one, and a six-month leave of absence from Best Buy convinced Duane he was needed at Fantesca full time.

Always ready to learn, Duane can be found in the winery, working and learning from Winemaker Heidi Barrett and Associate Winemaker Tony Arcudi. Or, perhaps you will find him in the vineyard, meeting with Fantesca’s vineyard management crews. Duane’s focus has been on investing in the land, equipment and people to maximize quality. An extensive soil-mapping survey to better understand the vineyard’s complex soil convinced Duane of the need to add a second irrigation system to the vineyard with which to precisely control the flow of water and liquid fertilizer. Duane has also charged the vineyard team with a strategy of aggressively thinning to maximize the intensity and maturity of the remaining fruit.

In the winery, Duane purchased three new fermentation tanks that enhance Heidi and Tony’s ability to control critical fermentation processes. Fully insulated and jacketed for precise and dependable temperature control, these tanks reduce stuck fermentations, produce better wine, and allow the winemaking team to have a third tank-size option. Duane’s research led to Fantesca being one of the first wineries in Napa to have a state-of-the art Le Trieur sorting system that allows Fantesca to triple sort fruit. Duane’s overall philosophy is to invest for the future to allow Heidi and her team the maximum flexibility in order to make the best wine possible.

2009 will mark Duane’s Sixth harvest at Fantesca, and once again, Duane plans on having a hands-on role during the busiest time of year. Duane feels a sense of pride when he “commutes” back through Fantesca’s wine cave to his home, washing the grape stains off his hands and settling in for a game of bocce and dinner with his wife, Susan, and their children, Chelsea and Taylor.

A native of Crookston, Minnesota, Duane attended North Dakota State University and the University of Minnesota, where he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science. He is active in a variety of community organizations, including the Children’s Hospital, Boy Scouts and Minnesota 4-H Clubs. Growing up on a farm throwing hay bales, Duane stays strong by lifting weights and climbing the vineyard’s steep grades. He is happiest when he is with his wife and two children, who he says “are simply a blast to be around.”



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