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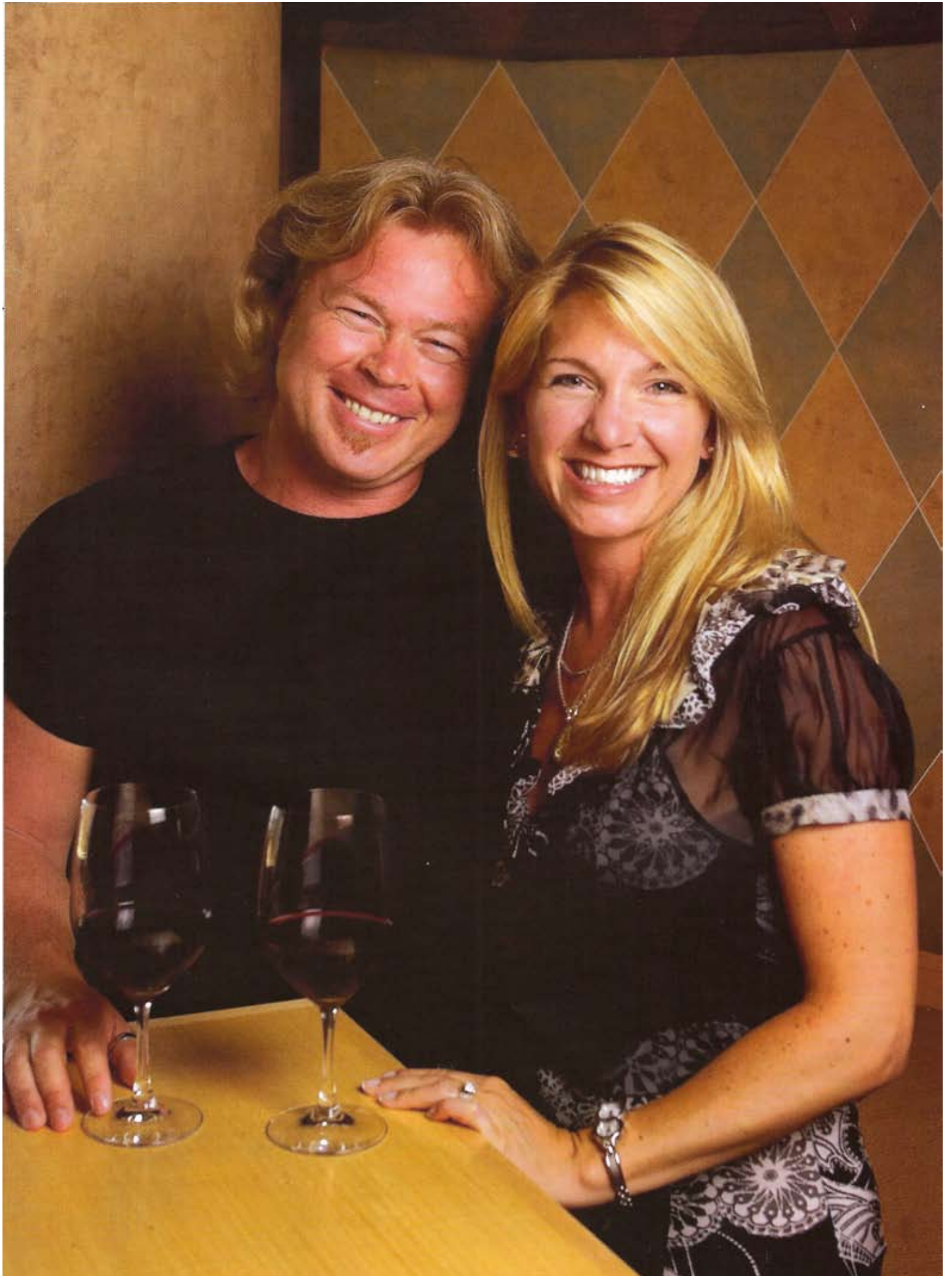
Duane and Susan Hoff
grow the family business

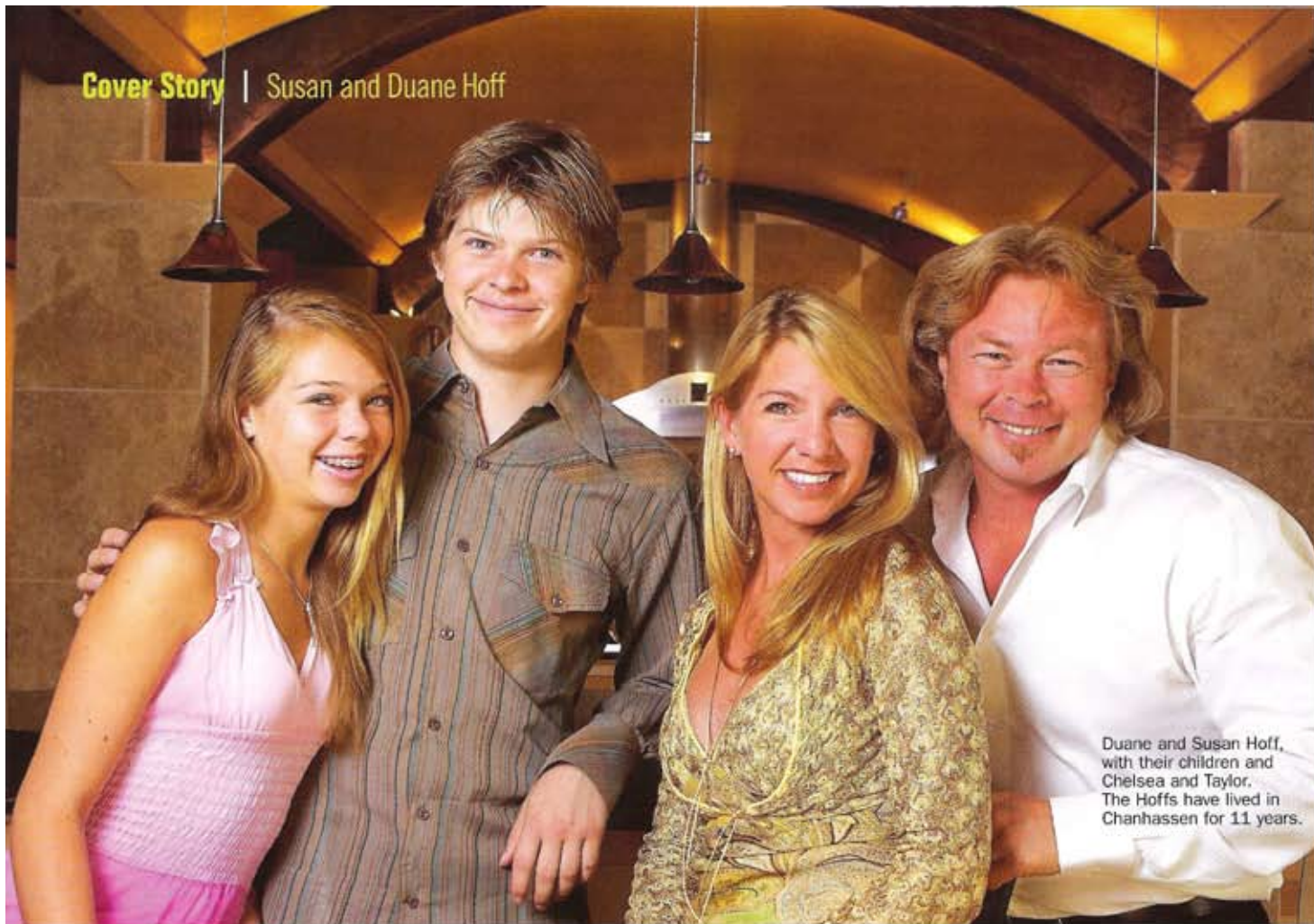


Fruits of their Labor

By Jennifer Day Photos Todd Buchanan

Growing the family business becomes a lifestyle for Susan and Duane Hoff





Duane and Susan Hoff, with their children and Chelsea and Taylor. The Hoff's have lived in Chanhassen for 11 years.

High above Napa Valley, on Spring Mountain, the Hoff family sits on flipped-over buckets and laughs while they crack, separate, measure and add 30 cartons of eggs to barrels of wine. In the process called fining, egg whites soften the wine by pulling out some of the tannins and astringency, and it's not without a bit of a mess. The family project of having great fun while doing good work continues with Fantescia Estate and Winery.

The winery that Susan and Duane Hoff began with a whimsical idea celebrates its second release this fall. The Fantescia cabernet is already acclaimed, and enjoys a quiet buzz from New York restaurants to Axel's to the Napa Valley tables where the Hoff's have become regulars. Since beginning this dream in 2004, they continue to live most of the year in Chanhassen, where their children—Chelsea, 13, and Taylor, 16—go to school when they're not wrangling kitties around the farm or serving as technology consultants to the winery.

The Hoff's were after the kind of meaningful work they'd carried through their Best Buy careers. And they had the glimmer in their eye that their children could be part of it.

Years ago, business frequently took Duane Hoff out to Silicon Valley, and Susan was kept busy traveling in all directions. They'd meet in Napa for the chance to be together. Susan vividly remembers one visit, sitting in the back of an open-air car, taking in the surrounding beauty, when her mind started spinning about all she had to do the next day at the office. She turned to Duane: "I said, 'I'd be happy at Best Buy for the rest of my life. There's a ton of wonderful things we could do. But what would you think, since we're out here like every other month now, rather than having this just be kind of this romantic getaway, what if we got into the wine business?'"

Susan knew herself. As the daughter of Best Buy founder Richard Schulze, she inher-



The Hoff's vineyard boasts nine acres of vines. Fantescia cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay can be found throughout restaurants and retail outlets throughout the metro, including Axel's and Byerly's in Chanhassen.

Vineyard photos courtesy of Fantescia Estate and Winery

RIGHT: The Hoff's California home is accessible from the vineyard through a charming cave. BELOW: Chelsea's inspiration for Fantasca's signature fortune corksies has become an obsession for collectors, which bear 10 new and memorable quotes each year.



ited his hyper-industrious work ethic and developed her own marketing savvy and the drive to prove herself. Looking ahead, she knew retirement wasn't really an option. She and Duane knew their best, most exciting times at work were when they were developing Best Buy and crafting the vision. She got energy from the side of the business that never really stops: meeting people, community events and entertaining.

After working at Best Buy from its infancy to its stake as a Fortune 100 company, the Hoff's knew the work and the fun of building a business. With Fantasca, they felt the same excitement Susan had years before, creating the little yellow tag for the consumer electronics giant. Duane, having grown up in Crookston, was game to get back his agrarian roots. The Hoff's have turned the winery into their craft, from creating the name to the bottle design and such individual touches as fining and hand-bottling their magnums.

When Susan joined Best Buy directly after high school, there were only six stores in Minnesota. She worked her way through college, during which time she met Duane. She began working full-time after college and was part of Best Buy's growth as she learned by trial and error. The company was tiny, she says, and full of opportunities. So many opportunities that Duane began to wonder just what is was all about. "She wouldn't come home," says Duane. He wondered, "What is so engaging that you have to be there all this time?" Before long, he knew. Hoff joined the company as an assistant store manager, and by the time he left, 14 years later to focus on Fantasca's operations, he was vice president of strategy and business development.

Partly, his position at Best Buy brought them in range of a new vision. The couple's trips to California showed them an amazing contrast to their hectic lives. "It was very competitive, and to be in a place where not only was it physically beautiful, but that people were generous with their time and generous with their knowledge, it just was really a great experience for us," Duane says.

They played around with the thought of buying a winery in Napa, and eventually

"These are probably the wines that we'll be serving at [our kids'] weddings. This is their winery as much as ours."

— Duane Hoff

began their search, believing it would take 10 years to find the perfect spot, at which time their teenage kids would be grown and out of the house. It took three years to find an impeccable plot and a vineyard with a great legacy. "You can fix a house, you can fix a barn, you can't fix dirt," Duane says. The land had great dirt. And besides, they could access their beautiful home and its massive gardens straight from the vineyard through a charming cave.

The people who accompanied their new operations, including winemakers Kirk and Nils Venge, were impressive at every turn. Last year, a strong first release for their cabernet sauvignon scored a head-turning 90 points from influential critic Robert Parker, Jr.

The wine business has its glamour, but at root, Duane says, Napa is a farming community. "It's just people worrying about

their grapes and they don't make a big fuss about it," Duane says. "Napa has this attitude of abundance. People there know they're lucky to be there. There's just this generosity of spirit that's there that is really healing for us."

GROWING TOGETHER

Mission has long been essential to good business, but it's more real than just a statement to the Hoff's. "No. 1 on the mission statement at Best Buy is to have fun while being the best," Duane says. "We thought that was something that we really wanted to tap into with the winery. We're doing this





Susan and Duane Hoff at Fantesca Estate and Winery 2005 Harvest.



Vineyard photos courtesy of Fantesca Estate and Winery

because we love what we're doing, not because we want a headache."

Their daughter, Chelsea, already seems to be a brand expert in training, in addition to having the strongest nose in the family, even though she can't yet taste the fruit of the family business. As they were eating Chinese food one night, Chelsea came up with the idea of putting a small fortune on each cork and calling them fortune corkies. They went ahead with the idea and Fantesca now issues 10 new fortunes each year on its corks.

After having the satisfaction of building a business with Susan's father, now the Hoff's are participating in the buzz of a fresh process, hard work and its rewards with their own children. When they're knee deep in egg whites, barrels and wine, "One of the things that just comes across your mind as you're doing this is—the kids are 13 and 15 right now—these are probably the wines that we'll be serving at their weddings," says Duane Hoff. "This is their winery as much as ours."

Duane Hoff remembers hearing Barbara Carlson say, "Nobody looks at an Olympic athlete and expects an Olympic athlete to have a balanced life because they're so focused on being the very best at what they do. And yet, people will look at business people who are running top

"What we're going to be known for is our cabernet. The cabernet is just this amazing, big, expressive, beautiful cab, but this is a family wine. It's something we enjoy."

— Duane Hoff

corporations and expect them to have balance in their lives," he says. "It's a very hard thing to have that kind of balance when you're in the corporate world at the very highest levels. And one of the great things about the winery for me has been the opportunity to be more balanced." The Hoff's say their children have been the great recipients of the revived balance afforded by their Fantesca venture.

This spring, Susan stepped down chief communications officer for Best Buy. She's stayed on as president and CEO of Best Buy Children's Foundation, which she founded in 2004 and raised \$2.6 million last year. On another smart whim, she was accepted as one of 12 students in a wine MBA program through the University of Bordeaux. As her time remains ever busier, she still has more access to her favorite activities. "As much as we love wine, we also love food and gardening," she says. Provided her BlackBerry is strapped to her hip, she's able to find her own time tending to her six garden plots, including her favorite—the roses.

WINE TRUMPS TENNIS

Years ago, the Hoff's received a great gift when they took an eye-opening cooking class, in which they tried 12 different wines, each one something new. They remember the wine steward saying, "Wine is food. You have to find something that you like and drink it." It became a connection point for them as they traveled to Napa and followed its path. "God bless couples that both can play tennis together and not fight," Duane Hoff says. "But for us, we can have a bottle of wine and enjoy it and want to know more about it and want to know more about the story behind the wine. We love a good story, so that really got to be something that drew us in. We were curious about the winemaking and the process."

Now, they enjoy sharing with others. As Duane acknowledges, sometimes wine is about more than just wine. "There's a type of person who loves the journey and loves learning new things constantly," he says, "and wine is perfect for that kind of person, because there's an infinite amount of things to learn and understand." □

