



## Two Shepherds 2011 GRENACHE BLANC, SANTA YNEZ, CALIFORNIA

### Blogger Becomes Fruit-focused Winemaker Passionate About Rhône Wines

Like many in the wine industry, **William Allen** of **Two Shepherds** started out as a keenly interested wine consumer, learning about wine, wine regions and winemaking as a hobby. What is unusual was Allen's move from a wine consumer to a popular wine blogger to a winemaker with a successful, attention-commanding brand in just four years—and he still has his day job in technology sales and marketing.

What started as an interest in Russian River Valley Pinot Noir grew to encompass Viognier, then Marsanne and Roussanne and other Rhône varietals. "Then I found Grenache Blanc from a producer in Paso Robles. It was my epiphany wine. It was like, 'Okay, this is the wine. I have to make this,'" he said. He moved from consumer to student, immersing himself in classes, training and education. He'd been a garage beer maker for several years, and that grew into home winemaking, too.

After moving permanently to Sonoma County four years ago, friends encouraged him to share his love for wine, particularly Rhône varietals, with a blog. Called "Simple Hedonisms," Allen said he wrote about his wine passions: Rhône varietals and balanced, nuanced wines made in an Old World style. He focused his homemade wines on the beloved Rhône varietals, particularly his favored white, Grenache Blanc. He even planted a vineyard.

The blog quickly established Allen as a leader in social media in the wine industry, a position that found him being invited to give lectures and lead industry seminars to help guide wineries on the subject. It also afforded him the opportunity to make connections with and learn from the winemakers and industry leaders he respected and admired.

His garage winemaking project also grew, to the point where he realized he needed more space, help and equipment than he could manage on his own. Moving to a bonded winery for custom crush, the brand has grown from 175 cases in his first commercial vintage to 600 cases now, his third. Each year has found Allen making Two Shepherds at a new winery. "It's a chance to work with different winemakers, learn different things and different equipment," he said.

Over the next five years, Allen plans to slowly increase production to settle in somewhere between 2,000 and 5,000 cases.

"I wish I could say I had this big master plan, but I think part of the reason the brand has launched so fast is that I was well known already from the Rhône industry and the blog. People already knew and trusted

my palate," he said. "I think social media is a big asset to the wine industry. To a little guy, it's a chance to look much bigger than you are and to extend your reach much broader. It would have taken me five to 10 years without social media to get where I've gotten in a year."

As a winemaker, Allen chooses to be as "minimalistic" as possible. "No interventions. I make a decision on what I'm going to pick, and I take the gift that nature gave me. I don't add water, I don't add tannins, I don't add color. No yeast, unless I have no choice. I generally try not to filter," he said.

Allen works with seven Rhône varieties: Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne and Grenache Blanc on the whites, and Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre in red. "I'd love to branch out into more things over time, but I am trying to stay focused in those—if you can call seven varieties for a 600-case winery focused."

Though most of the grapes are sourced from the Russian River Valley, Allen looks to the Saarloos Vineyard in the Santa Ynez Valley for his Grenache Blanc, his largest case production.

"One of the things that differentiates the brand is that all the vineyards I source are from cool climates," he said. "It really helps me go get grapes with proper hang time. The cool-climate Russian River Valley or Santa Ynez, with their long hang time, cool nights and high acidity, you can make wines that are very bright and fresh and very age-worthy and food-friendly." Up to this point, Allen has sourced much of his Russian River Valley fruit from Saralee's Vineyard, which was recently sold by owners **Richard** and **Saralee Kunde** to **Jackson Family Wines**. Though the company does appear open to working with him for future vintages, Allen is also looking to secure other Russian River and Sonoma County fruit sources.

Beyond an annual Grenache Blanc release, Two Shepherds' production will vary from year to year. Allen begins by crafting two proprietary blends, Pastoral Blanc, which uses all four white varieties, and Pastoral Rouge, a Grenache-Syrah-Mourvèdre blend. "I use what fits into the blend and what makes the blend great," he said. Beyond that, Allen will only sell the wines that he would personally buy. The rest is poured down the drain—regardless of cost concerns. "I won't put my label on it and I won't sell it. I think when you're starting out and establishing yourself, this is important." **WBM**



TWOSHEPHERDS  
GRENACHE BLANC

Saarloos Vineyard 2011 Santa Ynez Valley

Price	\$24
Case Production	100 cases
Blend	100% Grenache Blanc
pH	3.3
TA	0.6/100 mL
Brix	22.9°
Residual Sugar	N/A
Alcohol	13.90%