

Chris Dowsett
Winemaker, Buty Winery

In 1983, Chris Dowsett made his first vintage of wine using grapes from his family's small vineyard in Oregon's Willamette Valley. It was a mere ten gallons, and Chris was only in the tenth grade. Since then, Chris has seen over thirty vintages come and go, making wines in Oregon, Australia, California, and for more than fifteen years in Washington's Walla Walla Valley. Along the way, Chris has gone from being a "rising star" (*Review of Washington Wines*) to "Washington's Best Worst-Kept Secret" (*Seattle Weekly*) to one of its most accomplished and respected winemakers. As a winemaker for Buty and his own Dowsett Family Winery, Chris has helped craft numerous wines that have earned spots on prestigious annual Top 100 lists. He has also established a reputation for his masterful blending, his focus on complexity and his belief in making wines that "show their source" and "have something to say."

Though Chris began making wine at a young age, his early years were spent more on the vineyard side of operations. When his family purchased a near-abandoned vineyard with some of the oldest vines in the Willamette Valley in the early '80s, Chris helped his father revitalize the property, nursing the old vines back to health and nearly doubling the plantings. This early experience led him to study horticulture at Oregon State University. While earning his degree, Chris spent a year abroad attending the renowned enology and viticulture school at Roseworthy Agricultural College in Adelaide, Australia. There he worked in both the school's winery and lab, making small-lot wines, and running experiments for noted wineries like Penfolds. "In Oregon, the winemaking was very traditional, but in Australia there were no rules. They were doing so many different things, in many different ways. It opened my eyes to numerous possibilities."

After university, Chris spent five years in California expanding his knowledge and honing his skills working vineyard and lab positions at Robert Mondavi Wines, Domaine Chandon, Schramsberg and Stonestreet. In 1996, his love of the Pacific Northwest led Chris to move his family to Walla Walla, where he took a position at Canoe Ridge as the assistant winemaker working alongside John Abbot (later the winemaker at Abeja). At Canoe Ridge, Chris spent five years specializing in Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay, before becoming the winemaker at Latitude 46°, where he developed his own style while focusing on Rhône-variety and Merlot-based blends. Prior to joining the Buty team in 2008, Chris was also the winemaker for Artifex, Walla Walla Valley's noted custom-crush winery.

Since joining Buty, Chris has helped to define a rich, aromatically driven style that emphasizes balance, lower alcohol levels and subdued tannins. These qualities have established Buty's wines—both red and white—as benchmarks for creativity and quality, and as some of the Washington's defining blends. Building on his three decades of experience, and his extensive viticultural roots, Chris champions the complexity of the great vineyards Buty works with. To achieve this, he applies a natural approach, focusing as much energy in the vineyards as he does in the winery, where he avoids winemaking additions or enhancements. "I work from the ground up," says Chris. "I think about individual rows and blocks, and what makes them distinct, and I then I try to preserve those elements all through the process. While there is no recipe for Buty's wines, those who know us, know that they can have faith in the quality of any bottle, in any vintage."