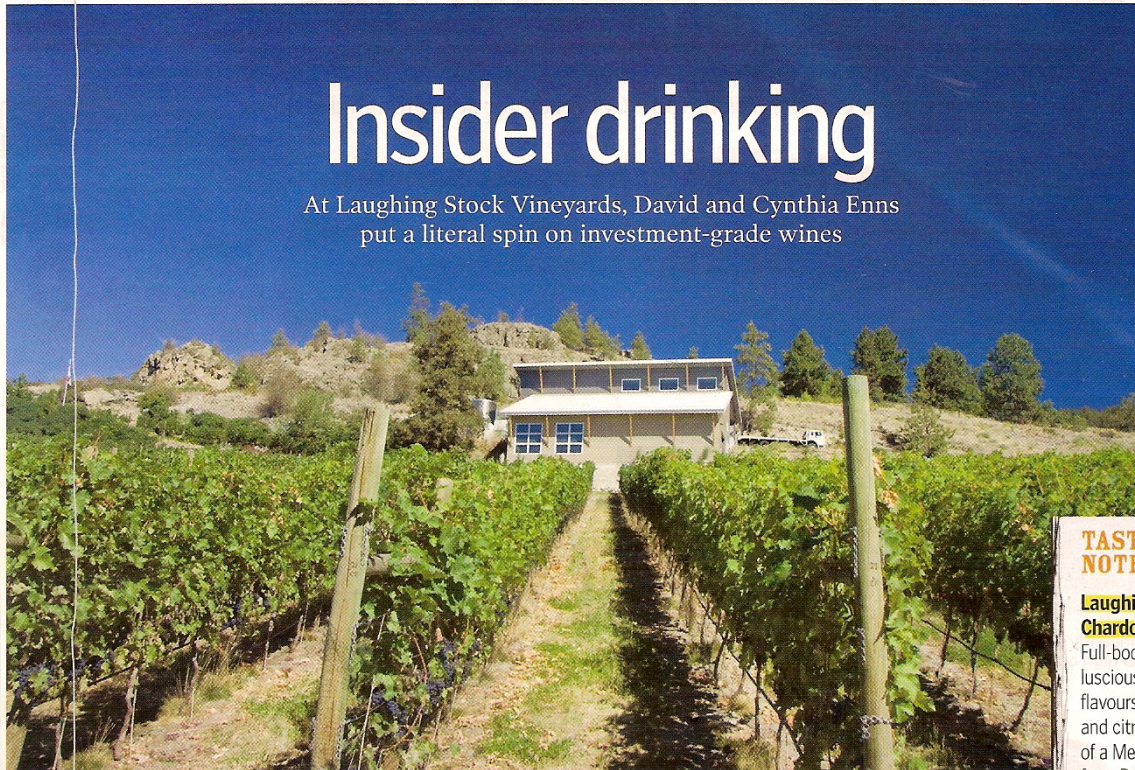


★ WINE

Insider drinking

At Laughing Stock Vineyards, David and Cynthia Enns put a literal spin on investment-grade wines



David and Cynthia Enns don't foresee ever taking their tiny Okanagan Valley winery public, but should the need present itself, they've already got a ticker symbol picked out: LFNG.

The acronym—a playful contraction of Laughing Stock Vineyards, their boutique estate on the Naramata Bench, north of Penticton, B.C.—has also been their brand identity from the get-go. It's a graphic allusion to the word "stock" and an inside joke to friends and former colleagues of the finance-industry veterans.

This past March, after five years of increasingly intensive dabbling, the husband-and-wife team finally cut the safety net, selling off their successful institutional research boutique, Credo Consulting, and plunging headfirst into the business of winemaking.

"This is it; we actually have to sell wine now to live," says Cynthia, sounding more facetious than fearful on this clear September afternoon as she shows off the winery's chic tasting room designed to evoke a New York lounge. The sharp-dressed duo, who could be stunt doubles for Matt Damon and Uma Thurman, are clearly having fun with their fruit pursuit. The winery's name occurred to David while crafting his first vintage in a Vancouver garage in 2001. "Everybody in the neighbourhood thought I was crazy," he says. "If I wasn't going to make good wine, I would have ended up being the laughingstock of the neighbourhood."

With some initial help from star B.C. wine consultant Ian Sutherland of Poplar Grove Winery, they launched three wines: a chardonnay, a pinot gris and a flagship red called Portfolio, blended from merlot, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc. The latter, in particular, was a critical success and an instant cult hit, notably among business folk, who were drawn to the novel label designed by Bernie Hadley-Beauregard of Vancouver's Brandever Strategy Inc. Each bottle is wrapped in a swirl of ticker tape quoting actual stock prices from the day the grapes were harvested. The recently released 2005 Portfolio, for example, tracks such equities as Research In Motion and Westjet.

Though Laughing Stock's products tend to sell out within a month of release, mostly to restaurants and through the winery's mailing list, the couple are cultivating an efficient sales business that should appeal to corporate clients interested in using the wine in their gifting campaigns for private-banking customers. (Hey, it beats a toaster!) On the day I visited, Cynthia was busy working the phone, making "initial public offerings" to CFOs whose companies appeared on the 2005 label. "We're having a bit of fun right now, letting the companies know they're on the bottle and saying, 'Check it out. By the way, you're up 60% from when we harvested.'"

—Beppi Crosarol

TASTING NOTES

Laughing Stock Chardonnay 2006, \$25

Full-bodied, round and luscious, with rich flavours of pineapple and citrus. Think of a Meursault from Burgundy.



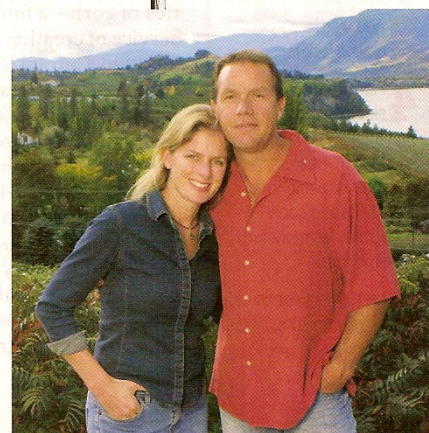
Laughing Stock Pinot Gris 2006, \$20

Barrel-aged and buxom for a pinot gris, with nuances of pear and toasty spice.



Laughing Stock Portfolio 2005, \$37

A Bordeaux-style blend of merlot, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc. Rich, impressively complex and velvety, with notes of cassis, blackberry, dark chocolate and vanilla.



PHOTOGRAPHS (TOP): CHRIS MASON STEARNS; (BOTTOM): MELISSA BARNES