



BLACK SEARS

HISTORY

Joyce Black and Jerre Sears chose to make their home in this wild, remote place high atop Howell Mountain in 1979 with the desire to commune more directly with the natural landscape through a combination of stewardship, agriculture, and contemplation. Driven more by a philosopher's quest for the hidden truths of the natural world than a desire to become renowned vintners, they soon realized that the path to the enlightenment they sought would grow more apparent as they worked the land they now called home. Like the Cistercian monks who helped define wine in France centuries ago, farming and ultimately winemaking became for them the quiet meditation of a life lived deliberately, spiritually, and in harmony with their environment.

Having acquired a diseased, run-down Zinfandel vineyard planted on top of a former apple orchard, they spent their first decade in their new home growing grapes for well-known wineries throughout Napa Valley. As the health of the vineyard improved and the character of the site became more apparent, and as Joyce and Jerre honed their craft and planted seven additional acres of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, the fruit from "Black & Sears," as they were then known, became highly lauded and sought after for single vineyard designate wines from some of Napa's top producers. And thus, "Black Sears" was born.

It wasn't until the mid 80s, however, when Joyce and Jerre partnered with fellow Howell Mountain pioneer, Mike Beatty, and winemaker Ted Lemon that they began to produce their own wines from their Black Sears Vineyards. With the goal of producing wines that were an uncompromising expression of the terroir of Howell Mountain, they bottled their first vintage for "Howell Mountain Vineyards," a Zinfandel that blended Black Sears and Beatty Ranch in 1988.

Nearly a decade later, Joyce and Jerre decided that they wanted to put their names on the highest possible quality expression of the land they called home. Hand selecting fruit from their very favorite sections of the vineyards, in 1997 they also began to bottle a few hundred cases per vintage of "Black Sears" Estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel along with the Howell Mountain Vineyards bottlings.

With 25 years under their belts as vintners, in 2004 Joyce and Jerre decided it was time to slow down and enjoy the fruits of their hard work and dedication. They sold the Howell Mountain Vineyards label, and when winemaker Ted Lemon left Black Sears after the 2006 vintage to pursue his own project with Littorai, they decided to retire.

In 2007, Black and Sears outsourced the farming of their vines and sold the entire production to other local wineries, putting nothing from one of Napa's great vintages into their own bottles. And they discussed selling the 420-acre ranch high atop Howell Mountain as it was simply becoming too much to manage.

But the very next year, their daughter Ashley Sears and her fiancée Chris Jambois decided to take a chance and see if they couldn't foster a next generation of what Joyce and Jerre had created, a true legacy. Though they had little experience with fine wine production, what had originally drawn Joyce and Jerre to this diverse, wild, natural place – the quest to find meaning and expression through the land and through farming – was the very same thing that beckoned Ashley and Chris. And in 2008, they left their careers and lives behind in Seattle, and re-located to the top of Howell Mountain to build a new generation for Black Sears--one that is at once an expression of their own philosophy and communion with the land, as well as a celebration of the winegrowing traditions entrusted to them by Joyce and Jerre.