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*The Men Behind  
Passing Time Winery*

# From Quarterbacks TO CABERNETS

By Risi Hirsch | Photos by Randall Wilson

What do Damon Huard and Dan Marino have in common? Besides being former NFL quarterbacks—give up? Wine. Really, really good wine. Damon and I met at Tully's to talk about his adventures in winemaking over a Caffè Americano. I would have preferred a nice glass of cab, but the Tully's menu selection is somewhat limited. Normally I would've peppered Damon with questions about his college football days at the UW or his long career in the NFL, but today was all about wine...lovely, delicious, bottled goodness.

Damon, along with Dan Marino, Kevin Hughes (our local Points resident) and a few others, just released their first vintage from their Passing Time Winery. It's a 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon... and it's fantastic! It's not easy to make the connection between great wine and former NFLers, so for those of you sensing a vanity project - think again. With a Wine Advocate score of 92-94 and a Wine Enthusiast rating of 93 under their belt, believe me,



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these guys are the real deal. With stellar fruit and Wine Wizard Chris Peterson concocting your cabernet, you can set your expectations high that this wine delivers... even if he does make Damon listen to the Grateful Dead during 6a.m. road trips to Eastern Washington!

As we began our conversation, Damon's genuine passion and excitement for the Passing Time project filled the room. Besides being so down-to-earth and friendly, the man knows his grapes. He was clearly beyond some professional athlete dabbling in the wine biz - he was authentic and knowledgeable. You could tell he was the type of guy who's on-site, hands in the dirt, picking fruit, collaborating with Washington winemakers, and immersing himself in this endeavor.

How do you go from NFL QB to wine purveyor? Good question! It goes back to Damon's days with the Miami Dolphins and his friendship with Hall-of-Famer Dan Marino. "I would go over to

Dan's house and he would pull out these great Washington wines from his cellar," Damon said. "His collection included so many Washington wines, like Col Solare and Leonetti." At the time, Damon was a youthful 23 and lacking any real level of wine expertise but Dan told him, "These wines are in your backyard!" At the end of each season Dan would send him home with the mission, "Go find us a vineyard, find us some good fruit." So, eventually that's what Damon did.

With some hard work and resourceful connections, the stars aligned and the dots connected. Damon was introduced to Chris Peterson through a mutual friend who knew of Damon's longstanding interest in starting a winery. With Chris Peterson's expertise from Avennia and his winemaking days at DeLille, Passing Time was able to procure tasty fruit from some of the best vineyards in the state like Klipson on Red Mountain, and Champoux and Discovery in the Horse Heaven Hills. With Chris

on board and great partners like Kevin Hughes - the rest, as they say, is history. "Kevin Hughes is huge wine enthusiast who may have the greatest collection on the planet," Damon said. "He's a great partner, a good friend and awesome to have on the Passing Time team."

The decision to use local fruit goes beyond the outrageous Washington wine selection in Marino's cellar. The love of purple fruit runs deep in the Huard family. Damon's dad grew up near Horse Heaven Hills and his grandparents were some of the first Concorde grape growers in Washington State. You could say the perfect storm had been brewing for generations and coming full circle with the creation of the Passing Time Winery.

Passing Time has thrown down the gauntlet with their mission to deliver the best Washington State cabs. That's the only varietal you'll see coming out of these vintner's barrels. "Imagine having a dinner party, three wines, same varietal, same vintage, same maker," Damon explained, "with one from Red Mountain (red label), one from Walla Walla (blue label), and one from Horse Heaven Hills (black label)." Uh, I'm in! My only question is do I really have to share with the other people at the dinner party? This is the lineup you can expect to see in the 2014 vintages, plus a planned increase from 500 to 1500 cases. Damon eloquently describes their cabs "...they're big, they're bold, they coach your palate, but there's still this floral finesse element to them that make them beautiful." Doesn't that sound heavenly?

If you want to partake of this delicious vin, I suggest you get on their mailing list pronto! However, if you miss your procurement window, don't cry in your cab! Several local restaurants, like El Gaucho, The Met, Daniel's, John Howie, Bellevue Club, and Seattle Golf Club will have the

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Passing Time cabernet proudly listed. While I'm more of the "what's good to drink on Thursday with a Lean Cuisine" kind of gal, I've tried the barrel tasting for the 2013 and 2014 vintages and they are delicious!! The 2014 Horse Heaven Hills barrel sample was my favorite.

As we finished our coffee, I asked Damon my final question. Could I completely leave football out of the discussion? No... no, I couldn't. I had to find out which NFL defensive players made him a little jumpy at the line of scrimmage. But without giving away all the dirt, let's just say I left knowing that making wine is significantly more fun than spending a Sunday across from Bruce Smith from the Bills or Jevon 'The Freak' Kearse from the Titans. Since we're talking football, Damon did mention we could expect to see some Cougar/Husky hijinks between Passing Time and Drew Bledsoe's Doubleback Winery. I'm anticipating the perfect wine infused Apple Cup.

As the sunshine rolls into the Northwest, it's the perfect time to hijack your friends and head out to the Passing Time tasting room in Woodinville. You can check out their new event space and tasting room in July or peruse their website [www.Passing-Time.com](http://www.Passing-Time.com) for some killer cab and get on the mailing list.

Cheers!

The recent release party was a wonderful gathering of friends, food and fine wine. Life is good!



Warren Moon and "Kippy," Damon and Dan's coach back in the day



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