

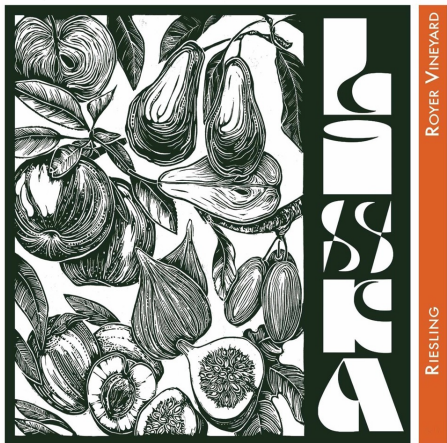
Liska Wines

Oregon

(Washington DC, Maryland & Virginia sales only)



At our first harvest we did together in Germany, that's where my true love of wine happened. I had a lot of German Rieslings, a lot of acidic wines, and I was like, okay, this is what I like and what I want to make in the future. --Draga Zheleva



Chris Butler and Bulgaria's Draga Zheleva met at UC Davis, where they were in the same viticulture & enology masters program. Chris got the wine bug through home brewing in California's bay area, which led him down a rabbit hole of science studies and a double major in food science and microbiology at Oregon State. After harvests in Washington and New Zealand, he got into UC Davis. Draga grew up surrounded by home winemaking in Bulgaria and came to the US on a student visa, where she studied marine biology in Juneau, Alaska. Her real love was agriculture, however, and a professor in Juneau encouraged her to apply to Davis. It was a propitious decision.

Following the masters program, they worked a summer at the lower Mosel's Heymann-Lowenstein winery, which proved to be foundational in terms not just of a style of wine that spoke to them—acid driven and lower alcohol—but of the role of wine in culture, society and family.

After Germany, they worked at wineries in western Australia before deciding that Oregon and its cooler climate was where they wanted to put down roots. Once there, they split up, with Chris taking a harvest job with Chehalem Winery in the north while Draga took one at Wooldridge Winery in the Applegate Valley in the south to see which area would best suit the style of wine they wanted to make. The Willamette Valley won, and they moved to McMinnville

Just before the 2019 harvest, Chris joined the winemaking team at Cristom, headed up by Dan Estrin, who himself had only started a month earlier after a 7-year stint at Littorai Wines. The two men were highly conscious of the fact that Cristom was a successful winery with an established style, and from 2019 onward they have worked together to fine tune that style and its success. In 2024, Chris became Associate Winemaker.

It was during Lockdown that Draga and Chris conceived of Liska, a Bulgarian term of endearment for a female fox and the name of their rescue German Shepherd. Cristom offered its facilities, and with the '21 vintage Liska took flight: 450 cases of Riesling, Gruner, Gewurtz, Gamay and Syrah. Originally, they had only contracted for Riesling and Gamay, and when in July the other varieties unexpectedly became available, they gulped and said yes, which terrified Chris and further enlivened Draga. She was pregnant at the time, and it was the busiest harvest either of them has ever worked.

These days they work with just over half a dozen vineyard sources, mostly in the Eola-Amity AVA. All are dry-farmed and most are no-till and farmed organically. Pick dates are chosen with an eye for acid-driven wines with lower ABVs, while cellar practices are very much hands off and dictated by good science.

By vintage 2024, production reached just over 1,000 cases, which is about as big as Chris and Draga want Liska to be for the near term. The labels are Draga's—they are based on her linocuts, or relief prints carved out of linoleum blocks, and each has a relationship to its wine.

<https://liskawine.com/>