



**AXEL SCHUG**  
**MANAGING PARTNER**

To Axel Schug, growing up the son of a winemaker in Napa Valley never seemed any more special than, say, growing up the son of a logger in the redwoods. “My classmates included kids from Duckhorn, Grace Family, Stag’s Leap, Spottswoode... as far as we knew, we were a dime a dozen,” remembers Axel. “But today, when I see my own son wrap his small hands around a bottle his grandfather made for his birth year, I realize being a part of a winemaking family offers a degree of perspective I can’t imagine experiencing any other way.”



With a wife, two children and the family’s hilltop winery overlooking their Carneros vineyards, Axel is finding it more difficult to leave on his frequent trips to the numerous markets he has worked to build over the years. Since Axel joined the winery full time in 1990, Schug Carneros Estate has seen its production and sales increase ten-fold.

Axel’s German heritage led to a bachelor’s degree in International Relations from the University of California, Davis. Following an internship with a customs brokerage firm specializing in the importation of winemaking equipment, Axel worked for Hyatt Hotels where he managed restaurants in Lake Tahoe and Long Beach. Then in 1989 his parents purchased 50 acres of land in Carneros to plant their new estate vineyard and build a winery. With the family business about to get a lot bigger, Axel returned to Sonoma and began pitching in everywhere.

“At the time, our winery was relatively small – only 4,000 cases,” recalls Axel. “We didn’t even have a Northern California Distributor. That meant I worked the crush and in the cellar, bottled wines, and made deliveries. It was a great way to jump into the business.”

In 1991, when a new California Distributor was engaged, Axel began working in the market overseeing sales for the brand. Over the next ten years, he would play a key role in expanding the winery’s domestic and export sales. In particular, he focused on smaller markets that responded well to his personal attention. These efforts have paid unexpected dividends, with sales in the Carolinas alone exceeding California in recent years. Today, sales and production are steady at 40,000 cases annually.

“Originally our goal was to reach 10,000 cases,” says Axel. “But we had the demand, and thankfully the production opportunities as well, so we shot right past that goal.”

With growth no longer Axel’s primary concern, he focuses a great deal of his energies refining the winery’s relationships with its customers in markets across the country.

Though travels still keep him busy, more often these days Axel stays close to his home with his wife Kristine, son Stephen and daughter Elisabeth. When he does travel, he’s almost certain to have his fly rod along. Is it any wonder then, that the Southeast and Southwest are two of Schug’s strongest markets?