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Craig and Kathryn Hall pen a business love story about winemaking

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When Craig and Kathryn Hall decided to write a book about their winemaking journey, the couple agreed that every word, every passage had to be blessed by both of them.

Craig, the 66-year-old Dallas real estate developer, tends to wax verbose.

Kathryn, the former ambassador to Austria who grew up with winemaking in her blood, had to remind him that they really did want people to read, and savor, their business love story.

As a result, *A Perfect Score*, which will be officially released next Tuesday in Dallas, is much shorter than it could have been.

"The unabridged version had a lot of Craig-isms with Kathy strikes," he says.

"You were telling stories that needed to be told in a different way," she says.

"Or better not told at all," he concludes.

In 198 pages, the couple — no ghost writers here — traces how they've gone from newly rooted vintners 20 years ago to proprietors of Hall Wines and Walt Wines, which have earned two perfect scores from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate.

"For us, wine is so much more than what's in the glass," Kathryn says, sitting in the conference room of the Hall Group in the Dallas Arts District. "It's about this love of a winemaking area, this love of the experience and memories that you create. That's been absolutely essential to grow our brand over a 20-year period. We thought, 'We can tell this story. The book is a new window.' "

They got a "a respectable six-figures-plus" from the publisher, Hachette Book Group. It took a year and a half to write and about a year to get through the publishing process.

Craig thought the book's title was slightly ostentatious. Kathryn and their book agent, Jan Miller, disagreed.

"I was outvoted," he says. "We toned it down with the subtitle: *The Art, Soul and Business of a 21st-Century Winery*."

In an interview, the Halls banter good naturedly with a slightly competitive bent. There are no small personalities here. But that is also the tie that binds.

"We balance each other," Craig says. "We are totally different in our styles. And it does cause stress and isn't 100 percent smooth. But stepping back a bit, this made [the book] better."

"The book is about our experience: my love of wine and the business. Craig's love of me. He's learned to love wine and love the business," she says.

"The book got to a point where it had a life of its own," Craig says. "It became part memoir, part cathartic and emotional. It was like putting a ribbon around an important gift box."

Craig sloshes some of the 2012 Hall Coeur cabernet sauvignon, which has a 94-point rating, as he pours samples.

That reminds Kathryn of a tale that's not in the book about the first time she let Craig handle wine at a tasting. And it wasn't just any tasting.

In 1997, Kathryn was serving Hall wine at a benefit at the United Nations in New York to ban land mines. She left him manning the bottle for less than five minutes, only to return to a table soaked in red and Craig's blue dress shirt looking like tie dye.

"I had trouble getting the cork out of the bottle, and it went boom like this," Craig says, demonstrating his struggle. "I was a little freaked out. There were heads of state who'd come there to drink our wine."

"You can't take him anywhere," she says.

"I'm going to think about a story like this to tell about you," he says to Kathryn. After looking at each other knowingly, they decide to reveal a mistake in the book.

Craig doesn't have a middle name, but Kathryn gave him one years back: *Risk*.

He plans to legally change his name and use Craig R. Hall to differentiate himself from the 25-plus other Craig Halls on Twitter.

But it wasn't until she was reading the passage about that for their audio version that she discovered the book says her middle name for him is *Leverage*. It's kinda like risk but not really. Kathryn has no idea how that happened.

Kathryn's favorite recollection from their journey makes her tear up.

Her family owned a vineyard in Mendocino County, Calif., north of Napa, that she ran for 10 years while it was being held in a trust after her parents' death. When the trust dissolved, the vineyard unexpectedly went to her brother.

"I was very, very sad," she says. "So Craig said, 'It's going to be fine. We will find a vineyard, but it's going to be ours. And it's going to be better than ever.' That was very moving for me. It still is. It was life-changing. Here is Craig, who never liked wine, and he's willing to make a commitment that's crazy for him."

Craig says he watched her reading that passage from the sound studio and saw the tears. "That made me feel pretty darn good."

The Halls now own just under 4,000 acres, but only about 600 are planted with vines. The rest are pretty much left to nature. The wine is made from a 50-50 split of their grapes and those they buy from 130 other vineyards.

Included in the 4,000 is 2,300 acres zoned for agriculture that the Halls bought in 2005. Some locals are up in arms now that the Halls have shown intentions to build a winery on part of it. The controversy has the couple dumbfounded.

"Kathy and I think of ourselves as environmentalists. Our Texas friends think of us as crazy, tree-hugging, liberal Democrats," he says.

"I'm totally OK with that moniker, by the way," she says.

Craig launches into why the protesters are completely off base.

Kathryn rolls her eyes. "This is a part that I cut in the book. Who wants to sit

through this long story?"

Craig continues with his story unabridged.

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