

World traipse

Emerge from under the low arbor of twisting vines that leads to the entry of Mediterranean Cellars in Warrenton, and take in what winery owner Louis Papadopoulos calls "the distinctly Greek" ambiance that surrounds you.

Despite having been constructed only three years ago, the winery situated before you has an old world feel to it. Curling painted vines wind their way around the walls of the spacious interior; outside, there's ample uncovered seating space looking out onto the rolling vineyards. The ambiance is appropriate, given that Papadopoulos, who's produced homemade wines since 1961, is a third-generation wine maker.

With wife Katie and children Louizos and Matina in tow, Papadopoulos immigrated to South Carolina as a jewelry maker in 1964, settling in the Commonwealth 20 years later. The family planted its first Virginia vines at Mediterranean in 1989.

"All my life I make wine," explained Papadopoulos. "I also have a farm in Greece; I make wine over there, along with apricots and olive oil."

"But my life is here now," the estate owner added.

The family currently grows nine varieties of grape and manufactures 13 different kinds of wines, including the Greek-influenced Rechina, Romance, Sweet Romance and Sweet Lucia - "all wines you won't find anywhere else in Virginia," says Papadopoulos.

"Wine is a hobby and a passion for him that became serious," Louizos Papadopoulos said of his father's business. "I would like eventually to be more of a part of it."

Currently, all members of the family are involved in the business in some capacity and have been since the opening of Mediterranean.

"We're family-run here," said Louis Papadopoulos. "That's important."

Piedmont Vineyards and Winery

Owner Gerhard von Finck can't quite put his finger on the reason why, eight years ago, he made the major decision to take over Piedmont Vineyards and Winery, an estate three miles south of Middleburg.

Simply: "It just came up; it was out of the blue, more or less," said the German native.

Nestled in the hills of Hunt Country, Piedmont was established as a winery in 1973 after having operated as a dairy farm since the early 1940's. Von Finck and his wife spent their first two years of ownership streamlining winery operations, altering the composition of the wines and performing major construction on the establishment's buildings, adding an outdoor patio and remodeling the tasting room.

"I had no experience making wines or running a vineyard," von Finck admitted openly.

What he does have is a clear passion for his products; the owner strongly encourages tasters to sample Piedmont's 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon.

"It's a fantastic wine," he said with a note of pride in his voice. "An outstanding wine."

More celebrated than its Cabernets, however, are Piedmont's flagship Chardonnays; the winery was the first in the state of Virginia to plant the grape back in the early 1970's.

"That's been Piedmont from the very beginning," says von Finck regarding the vineyards' affiliation with the grape. "It goes very well with the soil here; it's very suitable for that."

"Of course, when they planted it back then, they didn't know it'd do so well," he added. "Now it's our specialty."

Three Fox Vineyards

John and Holli Todhunter only purchased the land for their vineyard and winery five years ago; the married couple's vision of the establishment, however, has been two decades in the making.

"It's a dream and also our passion," said Holli Todhunter regarding her now-thriving Delaplane business. "We've been married 20 years now, and this has always been our plan."

In preparation of their retirement project, the Todhunters studied wine making under local Linden Vineyards owner Jim Law and made several trips to California and Italy to taste and research the region's wines.

"We knew we wanted to raise Italian grapes," explained Holli Todhunter, who noted that they bought this particular site because it reminded them of Tuscany, as well as for its excellent soil conditions.

"We just love the Italian food, wine, lifestyle," she said. "After traveling abroad for so many years, we just fell in love with Italy."

The couple said that they attempt to capture the country's culture in their wines - their Sangiovese took the silver medal at the 2005 Midatlantic Seaboard Competition - as well as their venue's atmosphere.

"It's warm, it's friendly here," said Todhunter. "Most of our customers will bring a picnic or purchase our foods, sit down and spend time with their dogs and children here. They just feel comfortable."

Holli Todhunter is the vineyard manager at Three Fox; her bio-chemist husband plays the role of wine maker. Neither owner believes they'd be where they are in their business, however, without the help of their large volunteer staff, some of whom have been helping the Todhunters since the very beginning. "We couldn't do any of this without them," said Holli Todhunter. "It's a big family; it's one big party here."

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