

# Family reunites for harvest

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In last Sunday's crisp September air, family members and friends dispersed among rows of grapes under a clear blue sky at Mediterranean Cellars Winery. Those in the know tasted grapes from different parts of the vine, letting the flavor linger on their tongue for just a moment, before determining if they were ripe. As the sweetest and deepest in hue were clipped, the once unbroken silhouette of grape clusters began to change shape.

Like the bees who return to Mediterranean Cellars each fall to pollinate the grapes, the Papadopoulos family reunites annually at the family's Warrenton vineyard for the autumn harvest. An old-world gem tucked behind winding back roads and rolling green hills, the spirit of the vineyard evokes the rich history of the Papadopoulos family and their enduring passion for wine.

The owner, Louis Papadopoulos, his wife Katie, and their now grown children, Matina and Louizos, are originally from Kifisia, Greece, a suburb just three miles north of Athens between Mount Penteli and Parnes. Louis grew up surrounded by centuries-old vineyards. His grandfather, George Papadopoulos, owned a 6,000-square-foot wine store, at a time when customers still brought in ceramic jugs to fill with wine.

Louis tried his hand at harvesting grapes at the age of 7. The German occupation of Greece in 1941 had forced schools to shut down, and Louis began working with his father on their 10-acre vineyard in Kifisia. In addition to forming a close bond with his father, Louis developed an enduring penchant for grapes.

"My best memories are of working in the vineyard," says Louis. "During the German occupation there were no candies, no toys. The most wonderful memory I have is the sweet taste of grapes."

Despite the bleak conditions of the occupation, Louis's father made every effort to restore the magic and hope that typically accompany childhood, including promises of a majestic horse that awaited Louis in the United States. "He always tried to comfort me during that time," said Louis. "We would all be sitting around a wood stove in the winter, and my father would say, 'We'll go back to the U.S. someday, and I will buy you a nice black Arabian horse.'"

Louis's father passed away before he could bring his family to America, however, Louis remembered his father's dream, and in 1964, at the age of 27, immigrated to the United States with his wife and two children. In the tradition of his grandfather, who made all of the gold and silver for King George II's palace, and his father, who ran his own gold business, Louis went to work hand-making gold jewelry for a jeweler in South Carolina. After 15 years, he and his family moved to Virginia, where he started his own jewelry store, Louizos E.L.P. Goldsmiths, which he still runs with his son.

A decade later, Louis planted the first grape vines on his property, gradually adding more and more over the years. "I always tell people that before this was a wine vineyard, it was just a farm with grapes on it," said 15-year-old Evy Papadopoulos, one of six Papadopoulos grandchildren, as she fetched eggs from a chicken thatch on the back of the property.

Today, Mediterranean Cellars has nine varieties of grapes, which produce six different varieties of red wine, five varieties of white wine, as well as a rose wine.

For all of the members of the Papadopoulos family, the autumn harvest offers a return to the core of life. It is a day to reconnect with family and friends, and the earth through an age-old tradition.

"Every year, we all come back. No one ever objects," said Matina, who works as a researcher of Byzantine art and a professor at George Mason University. "In our own lives, we all have cerebral jobs, and are pursuing our careers. We have all become part of a mechanical process in some way. But, here, it's very organic. Everything you do is your own. You get an immediate award, the satisfaction from work that we've all lost. The grapes we harvested today are the grapes you see being crushed for wine. The wine we are drinking is the grapes we picked last year."

Last weekend, the family harvested Chambourcin grapes, which produce a smooth, full-bodied wine with a spicy flavor and a long, lingering peppery finish. In order to ensure the best quality of grapes, a wine maker must be in tune to the cycles of nature and know exactly when to harvest the grapes. "The grapes dictate the wine. If you don't have good grapes, you won't have good wine," said Louizos, who runs the vineyard with his father.

After the grapes are picked, they are poured into a de-stemmer, which separates them from the stems and crushes them. Then, begins the chemical process. If the grapes are red, the juice, grape resin, seeds and skin are filtered into a large bin, where they soak to absorb flavor. After a few days, the juice is transferred to oak barrels, where it ferments and absorbs the flavor of the wood. White grapes are immediately pressed into juice and poured into stainless steel fermentation tanks, with some juice occasionally being reserved for aging in oak barrels.

"Ultimately, you're looking for the perfect blend," said Matina. "Making wine is like cooking. A good wine maker doesn't just follow the recipe. It's a chemical process that involves creativity. Growing up amid wine vineyards, my father learned that culture of making wine."

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