

Observer Interview – July 2014

Answers to your questions ---

Although we didn't open the tasting room until 2009, we planted the vineyard in 2000 and had our first harvest in 2002, which is also the first time I made wine. So, 2014 was my 12th year of making wine.

It all started when I fell asleep on a train going from Germany to Italy- I know that sounds like a Bob Dylan song, but it is where it started. I woke up and looked out the window and there were vineyards as far as I could see, and it was beautiful. My husband and I had always been interested in wine, so when we came home and were sitting on our deck in Bluemont, I said, "I have to have a vineyard." And then the fun began!

We planted the next spring, and since have expanded the vineyard twice so that I now have 3 acres in vines- Chardonnay, Cabernet Franc and Merlot. I made wine for the first seven years for parties and friends and then we got a license in 2008 and opened the tasting room in 2009. Since then, I have expanded the winery, processing center, decks, vineyard and parking lot. It is a never ending task.

The hardest thing about growing grapes is avoiding fungus- which is out there just waiting to happen. With humid summer weather and wet summers, it gets very challenging. The biggest challenge in selling wine is making good wine that people want to drink, and getting them to come to our place to taste it and buy it.

My big award winners have been Chardonnay, Raven Rocks Red (our Bordeaux-style blend) and Norton. We have won big accolades from the Beverage Tasting Institute in Chicago and, in addition, 12 medals from various competitions.

My philosophy is that you have to get very personal with your wines, and devote yourself to coming up with the taste you want. I like to make wine that I like to drink.

The county could publicize that fact that with all the existing farmland, there is open land for a lot more wineries. It's hard to make money on the old-fashioned crops and vines are one of the few that are worth growing where land is as expensive as it is here.

While we bought our first house in the area in Loudoun County in 1986, we bought our present home Twin Oaks Tavern (it had been an inn many years ago, and it is now the name of our label) in 1998.

A perfect grape growing year would have some rain early in the summer and then once every 10 days until harvest, and lots and lots of sunshine.

I think they are all pretty hard to cultivate. You can get good wine from grapes in the second year, but it gets better as time goes on.

You have to tend the vines for the first 3 years before you get grapes.

I think the wines from our area are getting better and better, and most parts of Clarke have a lot of nice limestone in the soil which is good for the grapes and the mineral flavor in some of the grapes.

Our winery is special because we are at 1150 feet and have a beautiful view of the Shenandoah Valley, gorgeous sunsets and three decks, pretty architecture and landscaping.

My favorite wine is Chardonnay from Meursault in Burgundy. And a hundred other wines, too from all over the world! There are so many Virginia wines I like, I would have a hard time choosing.

My favorite wine that I make is Chardonnay.

Donna Evers