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WINEHAVEN

WINERY AND VINEYARD

by David Scheller

I nearly canceled my Sunday trip owing to thunder and lightning, but instead left in hope that the sun would be shining on Chisago City. It is there that WineHaven does the best thing that it's possible to do with sunlight, which is turn it into wine.

WineHaven started out decades ago as the Peterson family's apiary. The bees were happy to shack up somewhere so replete with flowers, and rewarded their landlords with oodles of honey. The Petersons sold this by the drumload, but when commodity prices tanked in the 80s they sought a way to add greater value to the syrup. So they made honey wine -- even if hard times were predestined, they'd at the very least have had the wine requisite for dealing with them.

“We worked with a retired University of Minnesota researcher to breed special grapes just for WineHaven”

Honey wine wound up keeping things afloat nicely, so the Petersons branched out into growing the fruits needed to make a number of other wines. That their 50 acres are socketed in between three lakes, which blanket the land in protective fog to extend grape growing season by nearly one month, proved felicitous. Still, a berry so delicate as a grape needs a little more than fog to flourish in Minnesota. It's got to have the fortitude to tough out hellacious winters as well.

“We worked with a retired University of Minnesota researcher to breed special grapes just for WineHaven,” said Kyle Peterson, who along with his father Kevin and brother Troy runs the vineyard. “We took a grape that was naturally resistant to Minnesota’s weather and diseases, and crossed it with a pinot noir strain from France. We now grow our own two patented varietals, Chisago and Nokomis.”



Kyle is no neophyte when it comes to patenting things. He is a recently retired patent attorney, and the shiny red Porsche he drove me around his vineyard in demonstrated that he likely helped to patent at least a few winners. “This is a patent money Porsche,” he confirmed. “The only way to make a million in the wine business is to start with two.” I was grateful for the car’s soft leather seats, and for its windows that kept the mosquitoes hungrily eyeballing me at bay.

Kyle drove off road to show me trellis after trellis of hearty green vines, each bursting with trails of round fruit. He pointed out one hillside that he and his brother used to snowboard down when they were kids, now covered in grapes. I saw how only 50 acres could contain several microclimates, each one conducive to its own specific plants. The Porsche startled one of the bunnies that necessitated the collars which the younger plants wore around their bases.

We arrived at the production center next to the house Kyle grew up in.

Because the grapes arrive there within only hours of being plucked, their flavors translate especially well to WineHaven's libations. Inside, Kevin's rock tumbler rhythmically plinked away at polishing agates. A mounted fish that the old man had pulled out of a lake years ago supervised the machine. Kyle led me to a tremendous tank where honey was fermenting, and cracked it open so I could smell its delicious smell. We went over to another 400 gallon vat and sampled rhubarb wine from it directly. (Drinking from a vat of wine is undoubtedly one of the most aristocratic pastimes. I understand the practice contributed directly to Alexander the Great's death.) I am pleased that rhubarb can do something more productive than topping vanilla ice cream.

Kyle showed me his pride and joy, a \$150 thousand machine that yields full, capped, and labeled bottles. No wine was being bottled in July, so we watched a video of its flurry of stainless steel parts on Kyle's phone. I looked up at the 1,200 gallon tanks where grape juice would ferment. These are nothing compared to the size of the great Californian vineyards' tanks, but they are better because they are Minnesotan. Finally I inspected the bright orange tractor that Kyle uses to trim the vines. It is enclosed and air conditioned, because Kyle especially enjoys not being miserable while at work. It is possible that that quirk is part of the reason he left the law for viticulture.

I'd have gladly camped out in WineHaven's tasting room for a while, but I didn't want to be mistaken for a member of the wedding party that was setting up there and given a job to do. Kyle was gracious enough to send me home with a couple of bottles for research purposes. The honey wine carries a symphony of floral notes, a hodgepodge of the tens of thousands of blossoms that must have gone into it. Its crisp finish felt like a bell ringing in my mouth. A sommelier would deride me for saying that the raspberry wine tastes like raspberries, but it is not so bad a thing to taste like raspberries. It had certainly better with the pound and a half of fruit pressed to make one bottle. This is a wine that begs to be paired with cheesecake.

WineHaven's wines are no closely guarded secret. You can find over one dozen of their labels at nearly any of the Twin Cities area's myriad bottle shops, including Cub Liquor. To learn more about the vineyard and where to purchase their wines, please visit winehaven.com.



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