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Captain Vineyards - A New Commercial Winemaker in Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Sal and Susan Captain in their Moraga cellar Photo Sophie Braccini

Business," says Captain with pride, "EBMUD noticed that our water use was decreasing dramatically and gave us an award; we were the first private business to get it." Captain says that they have trained their vines to use less and less water, cutting their needs by 30% this year, after a dramatic 75% cut the year before.

When they saw that their grapes were turning into prize winning wines made by other wine makers they decided to do it themselves. According to Captain, growing great fruit is a necessity for great wine, but it is not enough. Their next job was to learn wine making. "That's my husband Sal's job," says Captain, "I registered him at the Napa Community College to learn wine chemistry. Being an engineer, he loved to learn all the nuts and bolts of the alchemy of wine." The meticulous Sal Captain brought additional benefits to the production. "When it comes to sanitation, for example, he goes overboard," says his wife, "the result is that we need very little sulfite in our wine."

When they were ready to take the next step, to the commercial level, Captain set about becoming educated on the compliance process. "I took a compliance class," she explains, "You have to know what it takes." Their first stop was with the Town of Moraga and it proved quite painless. "They were very supportive," she says. The total time spent navigating the administrative process to get their facility bonded and be able to sell under their own label was about a year. But now it is done. The wine from their grapes is available for sale behind an artful and cheerful label created by local artist Anna George of Lafayette. "It depicts a pear and a glass of wine, two of Moraga's unique natural gifts," says Captain. Their five different reds can be ordered online at www.captainvineyards.com.

Lamorinda's

Independent Wine Makers

As of today, there are three fully bonded, independent commercial winemakers in the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association - Parkmon Vineyards of Moraga, Deer Hill Vineyards of Lafayette, and Captain Vineyards. According to Dave Parker of Parkmon, a few others will be joining them soon. The Association's next project is to get a "Lamorinda" appellation for the wines (they are now sold as Contra Costa County wines). For that to happen the zone has to be declared an American Viticultural Area (AVA). "We are getting there," says Parker, "and the Captains having their own independent label and bonded facility is helping."

"We won't be like a Napa," adds Deer Hill Vineyards' Bill Scanlin, "but more like a Livermore Valley, with a tour map and people coming and tasting our production." For now the wines are sold over the internet and by select local retailers, and can be found on the tables of local restaurants.

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