

WINE

Double Gold at Grove Winery

J. Michael Welton

Ten years ago, down near Gibsonville in rural Guilford County, North Carolina, just seven miles north of Greensboro and 1,000 yards west of the Haw River, Max Lloyd planted his first grape vines in a patch of sandy-clay soil that once had nurtured tobacco, wheat, corn and soybeans. He didn't sell his first bottle of wine until 2004. But today his Grove Winery and Vineyards produces 25 excellent European-style reds and whites. Every year, he pushes 3,100 cases out the door.

His wines have won more gold medals at the North Carolina State Fair than any other winery in the state. Two of them – the blush and the Cabernet Sauvignon – won double gold medals, a testament to the fact that every judge thought them deserving of the gold. Their quality also meets the rigorous standards of Greensboro-based Fresh Market; the upscale grocer stocks Grove Wines in each of its 15 stores across the state.

“We want to grow the best grapes the world has to offer right here,” the winery owner and self-proclaimed grape farmer at Grove Winery said. “Our focus is absolutely on the European-style wines. Even the sweet wines are in the German or French style.”

All his equipment – the sprayers, pumps and tanks – are imported from Italy, though he does buy from North Carolina—his bottles from Henderson, his corks from Zebulon and his labels from Durham. His ambitious operation at Grove, with six full-time employees and nine more during peak season, is akin to a little slice of Tuscany





the heavy side offers flavors of tobacco, cocoa and coffee.

But he credits his Carolina location, with its 11 additional growing days over Virginia, as most critical to the success of his wines. “We’re exactly halfway between Bordeaux and Napa, so the Haw River Valley is the perfect place to grow a Cabernet Sauvignon.”

And others as well:

The 2007 Sangiovese is the famous Italian grape of Chianti, and it makes a big, unfiltered super-Tuscan-style wine blended with 9% Cabernet Sauvignon. It pairs well with rack of lamb, sausages and steaks.

The 2008 Nebbiolo is the same grape that goes into Italy’s famous and expensive

The Cabernet Franc is estate grown, fruit-forward and aged in French oak barrels. It pairs well with pork, barbeque and roasted root vegetables. Wine critic Jane Garvey said it “reminds one of the versions found in Chinon, in the Loire Valley, France. Showing a bright cherry red color, the wine exhibits aromas and flavors of cranberry with a delicious fruit-driven finish. Oak is completely integrated, and tannins are soft and supple. Evolves well in the glass, gathering character in mid-palate.”

The Cabernet Sauvignon offers nuances of black cherry, tobacco and coffee. It’s estate-grown and a full bodied wine with firm tannins. The 2008 vintage took Double Gold Medal award at the 2010 NC Wine Competition and a medal at the 2010



grafted onto the Piedmont of Carolina. “We want to stay true to the flavors of our farm and make world-class wines,” he said. “We don’t want them to taste like Southern California, France or Italy. We want them to taste better.”

All of Grove’s reds are aged in French and Hungarian barrels, and its Chardonnays in Kentucky oak. “Because of the heat here, we get some pretty bold wines,” Lloyd said. “We get the bigness from the field, and the nuance from the barrels.” For that reason, he’s careful with the barrels used for each wine. Once a cooper has crafted a barrel, it’s placed over charcoal for a light, medium or heavy toasting. On the light side, a hint of tropical fruit or pineapple is the result; a medium toast yields touches of cinnamon and vanilla; and

Barolo wines, resulting in a big, robust red. This very dry, deep red wine starts with hints of cherry and cream and finishes with spice and roses with a nice balance of acid and fruit. It pairs well with grilled meats.

The 2008 Estate Tempranillo is the main grape in Spanish Rioja wines. This big red grape has grown well in the Haw River Valley, breaking bud late to avoid spring frosts and reaching an early harvest date that avoids a large block of the hurricane season. The Grove Tempranillo always sells out quickly.

The 2009 Merlot is estate-grown and barrel-aged. It’s a smooth, light Merlot that’s velvety soft with a bit of black cherry. The 2009 vintage took silver medals at both the 2010 Mid-Atlantic Wine Competition and the 2010 NC Wine Competition.

Mid-Atlantic Wine Festival.

The Reserve Estate Chardonnay is hand-harvested from estate-grown grapes and aged in American oak barrels to give it notes of butter, oak and vanilla. The current 2007 vintage was barrel aged for 18 months. It’s an excellent wine with seafood like tilapia.

For additional information:
www.grovewinery.com.

J. Michael Welton writes about wine, design and architecture for national and regional publications and publishes an online design magazine at www.architectsandartisans.com.