

Nurturing potential

Tapping into the Lake Huron region's grape growing legacy, an entrepreneurial couple savors the fruits of diligent efforts.

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY CAROLINE J. BECK

WHEN CONNIE CURRIE and Steve Velloff of Blue Water Winery started hunting for an ideal place to plant a vineyard, they may have well stretched their imagination back 334 years. In 1679, French explorers sailing the first tall ship to the area found an abundance of glorious wild grapes growing along the banks of the Detroit River and Lake Huron, where they made the state's first wines.

Continuing a centuries' old tradition, the adventurous couple from Chicago planted the award-winning Blue Water Vineyards only 1,500 feet from those same shores. Currie, the vineyard's winemaker, shares insights.



tasting room

How did you first get into the wine business? After a few years of research, we found the perfect spot about one-hour north of Detroit in the harbor village of Lexington. In 2005, we took the leap — left our high-tech professions in Chicago and created the business from the bottom up. It was a lot of hands-on work: clearing acres of overgrown land, planting the vineyard and learning commercial wine making.

Over the past eight years, we've planted a whole host of cold-climate varietals, including Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Pinot, Riesling, Gruner Veltliner, Zwiegelt, Gewürztraminer, Chambourcin and Seyval Blanc. In 2013, we even planted hops for our newest venture, the Lexington Brewing Company, where Steve serves as brewmaster.

What varietals are your customer favorites? Strictly by the numbers, Sunrise Coast Red (Red Blend Semi-dry) and Unoaked Chardonnay, hands-down!

As a wine-making region, what's special about Michigan's Thumb? All



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LEARN MORE ABOUT BLUE WATER VINEYARDS (INCLUDING MAY WINE CELEBRATION, HELD MAY 3-4 IN SYNC WITH THE COMMUNITY'S LEXINGTON IN BLOOM FESTIVAL, AND 2ND ANNUAL SOLSTICE THUMBFEET FUNDRAISER ON JUNE 21) AT BLUEWATERWINERY.COM.

the premier wine growing regions in the north are on the Great Lakes. The lakes provide the delayed spring and extended fall ("lake effect") that grows grapes so highly valued by the industry. This Lake Huron region has been simply untapped until now. And we're happy to see a few other new wineries starting.

What is your favorite food and wine pairing? Dry Riesling and Grilled Pork Loin with Rosemary.

What is your most satisfying achievement? The two Gold Medals from the San Francisco International Competition for two of our dry red wines were truly gratifying and proof for those who might be dubious about quality wines from a northern climate — that we



can make world-class wines in Michigan.

Do you celebrate any special springtime traditions? We love to celebrate with wine, beer and music at the tasting room. Our May Wine Celebration and special food/wine pairings will launch the 2013 vintages. And the 2nd Annual Solstice Thumbfeet Fundraiser will happen in June. The festivities give me the chance to take off my winemaking hat, pick up my saxophone and join the stage with our house band, Stella and the Hot Kielbasas! ≈

Freelance writer Caroline J. Beck lives in California's wine country and Lexington, Mich.