

Where the Wine Flows And the Spirit Is Fortified

For Many, Haymarket Winery Is a Refuge

By Amy Orndorff

Washington Post Staff Writer

Thursday, September 6, 2007; LZ12

Cindey and John Tamayo tucked into their afternoon picnic of Vidal Blanc and sharp cheddar. In the distance, fledgling grapevines extended toward the surrounding mountains. Nearby, a more than 200-year-old estate sat on a hill, a 12-foot-high boxwood hedge leading from its back door to a red barn, which houses more than 600 barrels of wine.

It could be a scene from [Italy](#) or [France](#), but the Tamayos were near Haymarket. Stressed suburbanites such as the Tamayos of [Fairfax](#), both 44, travel in droves on Saturdays to this nook in [Prince William County](#) with similar goals: relax, drink some wine and enjoy each other's company. They find many reasons to stay for several hours.

"First of all, very good wine," said John Tamayo, a network planner for a telecommunications company. "Second, the ambiance. The whole look and feel, and the building. It's the whole environment."

Celebrating its first anniversary this weekend, the Winery at La Grange is on target to produce 7,000 cases of wine over a year, almost twice what most [Virginia](#) wineries can handle. It will beat records for first-year production and sales by a Virginia winery, thanks in great part to the landscape and the patronage of the Tamayos and other Washingtonians.

The wines, including a 2005 Meritage that won a gold ribbon at the Virginia State Fair Wine Competition in June, are produced in the red barn at [La Grange](#). The winery's 10 wines -- five reds, four whites and a dessert wine -- are sold in the gift shop within the manor house for \$15 to \$25 a bottle.

One of the biggest draws for commute-weary Washingtonians is the winery's proximity to the District. Less than three miles off Interstate 66 on Antioch Road, they are able to enjoy wine without a long drive.

"It's the whole package -- having nice space, nice wine and an easy trip," said Cinnamon Rogers, 36, as son Charlie, 4, pulled her toward the barrel room.

Not far away, her husband, Stephen Hornung, 39, played with their 2-year-old, Jake. The Alexandrians were on the way to a nearby farm to pick blackberries when they passed the winery and spotted a slide. They decided to stop on their way back and said they will probably return.

On that recent Saturday, owner Chris Pearmund, 46, bounced from picnic table to picnic table, checking on his patrons while wearing an infectious grin that makes him look just as happy and relaxed as his visitors. Pearmund, who also owns Pearmund Cellars in [Broad Run](#), has a dedication to winemaking and customer service that add to the winery's popularity.

"So it is that collective experience that I think helps to define Chris," said Bruce Zoecklein, a professor of winemaking at [Virginia Tech](#) who provides technical support to wineries in the state. "If I could boil it down to one thing, I think it would be his level of energy."

Running a winery the size of La Grange takes enormous energy. Every year, 110 to 120 tons of hand-picked grapes arrive from vineyards Pearmund owns or leases. For white wine, the grapes are processed, de-stemmed and pressed within 24 hours of being picked. By the next day, the juice is stored in tanks or oak barrels until the wine is ready to be bottled. Red wines have to sit in an open vat after being de-stemmed, but otherwise the process is similar.

The county worked with Pearmund to establish a location in western Prince William after he approached Supervisor [John T. Stirrup](#) Jr. (R-[Gainesville](#)) about the idea in 2005.

"Where can you go to find 20 acres of land that is not a shopping center or housing development to turn into a winery?" Pearmund asked.

Stirrup knew of a 216-year-old house and 22 acres near Haymarket that had been unlivable for many years. With no funds available from the county, the historic house would surely continue to deteriorate.

"That was an asset that the county was probably going to lose unless someone like Chris Pearmund stepped up," Stirrup said.

So the two worked together. Stirrup persuaded the Board of County Supervisors to approve a special-use permit, and Pearmund bought the house and land from private owners in 2005. Soon Pearmund began clearing the undergrowth of many years and rebuilding the house. Every electrical wire and windowpane had to be replaced, all the plumbing was redone, and heating and cooling had to be added.

"Disrepair is an understatement; catastrophic is closer," Pearmund said of how he found the property, which took him nine months to renovate.

The change is dramatic. A new stone patio extends from the front of the house. Inside, a tasting bar wraps around an old fireplace. Each of the nine rooms in the house has a slightly different theme, and in most, visitors can find a board game out, ready for playing.

"What could be nicer?" said Barbra Dunn, 76, as she sat at a table on the patio. "It looks like France when you are sitting here. . . . See that chateau? And the mountains?"