

Wine & Dine *Rob Lane*

Cock-a-doodle Cabernet

Barry Tortolon, winemaker at Rooster Hill Vineyards located on the east side of Keuka Lake, has taken the long route to becoming a professional winemaker. Tortolon has worked as a teacher, truck driver, laborer, and research technician, among other jobs, on his winding path to his current position at Rooster Hill. But, along the way, he has always been focused on the craft of winemaking.

Ever since he was a youngster growing up in the Finger Lakes region, where he helped with his grandfather's vineyards in Dundee, Tortolon took an interest in the science of how the fruit of the vine becomes good wine. He was chosen as a recipient of the Greyton Taylor Scholarship, named for the Taylor Wine Company patriarch and awarded to qualified applicants who intend to work in the wine industry. In 1983 Tortolon married and enrolled in Fresno State University's well-respected agricultural science program on his scholarship, earning a degree in oenology and chemistry. Forty-six-year-old Tortolon says, "I was the country boy heading off to the big city. It was very different than the Finger Lakes."

With degree in hand, he headed back to the Finger Lakes in 1987 in search of a winemaking job, but no solid prospects emerged. Thus began fifteen years of assorted non-wine-related employment while he honed his skills by working part-time for local wineries such as Fox Run Vineyards and Glenora Winery. Tortolon is quick to credit Peter Bell of Fox Run and Steve DiFrancesco at Glenora for imparting their knowledge to him. In fact, it was Steve who recommended Tortolon as head winemaker at a new startup winery in 2002.

Dave and Amy Hoffman had just left careers in marketing and finance in 1999 and were returning east to escape the bustle of southern California. They moved to Keuka Lake and bought land to plant a vineyard. They planted four grape varieties in 2002 and needed someone to set up their winemaking operation. Tortolon brought some of his homemade wine to the interview; the Hoffmans were impressed.

Tortolon's philosophy is to create wines that are robust and lively, as well as elegant and stylish. "I strive for optimal balance, structure, and finish in all Rooster Hill wines," he emphasizes. From the edgy oak and rounded fruit tones of the 2007 Chardonnay (\$13.99), a rare age-worthy Finger Lakes Chard, to the always elegant and surprisingly complex hybrid blend Silver Pencil (\$10.99), to the beautifully lush and deep flavored 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19.99), Barry Tortolon crafts wines with depth and complexity. When he's not working at making fine wine, you can find him enjoying the beautiful views around Keuka Lake on his bicycle. But crafting over 3,500 cases of wine a year doesn't leave much time for relaxation. That's bad for Tortolon, but good for us wine drinkers.

Rob Lane writes a Finger Lakes wine blog, www.fingerlakesweekendwino.blogspot.com. Contact him at robl@mountainhomemag.com.



© ROB LANE
Winemaker of Rooster Hill Vineyards Barry Tortolon

Finger Lakes Wine Review *Holly Howell*

Best Backyard Bottle

Some grapes just never get the respect they deserve. As versatile as these grapes may be, they manage to elude the spotlight. So, this month is dedicated to the one I love. This month is dedicated to Cabernet Franc. Although this grape originated in France, it has found a fabulous new home—the state of New York. As a matter of fact, many winemakers are hailing this grape as the state's new signature red. It loves our cooler climate and shorter growing season and is producing award winning wines from the Finger Lakes to the Hudson Valley to Long Island. Recently, I tried a Cabernet Franc from one of the newest "red" masters of the Finger Lakes, Damiani Wine Cellars, located on the eastern shore of Seneca Lake. In a very short time, they have proven that this region is more than capable of producing stellar red wines. The double-gold-medal-winning Damiani Cabernet Franc 2007 is a luscious wine that tastes of ripe blueberry with a tinge of chocolate—so yummy, and a steal at \$23. This wine is a total shoe-in for picnic fare, grilled steak, or any backyard barbecues.

Certified sommelier Holly Howell teaches at Rochester Institute of Technology and the Seasonal Kitchen Cooking School. Contact her at wineanddine@mountainhomemag.com.

Damiani Wine Cellars in Hector, New York, are the makers of this perfect summer red wine, Cabernet Franc.



COURTESY DAMIANI WINE CELLARS