

Wine & Dine *Rob Lane*

Kingdom on the Lake

Mike and Corinne Oleksyn met on Seneca Lake, a fitting location in light of their common love of boats and wine. They proceeded to sail full speed ahead, open the newest winery on the east side of Seneca Lake, and tie the knot at their new Kings Garden Vineyards, located just south of Lodi, New York.

What sounds like an overnight success story actually started in 1998 when Mike bought a plot of land in the “banana belt” area on the east side of Seneca Lake, so named for its warmer air currents that moderate temperatures favorably for grape growing. Mike’s work as a fiber-optic engineer had taken him throughout Europe, where he enjoyed the finest wines and where the idea to make his own fine wines started to gel.

Despite having no farming background, Mike counted on his mechanical experience and determination to learn the skills of grape growing and winemaking. He spent every spare minute working on his vineyard. He even hand-grafted every vine in his original 1988 planting. But disaster struck in the infamous winter of 2004. Mike, like many other vintners in the Finger Lakes, lost many of his vines when temperatures plunged to fifteen degrees below zero.

Still determined, Mike replanted and kept honing his skills while he continued to log copious amounts of frequent flyer miles with his day job. Then, in 2006, a chance meeting with another boater on Seneca Lake changed his life. That other boater was Corinne, who had great energy as well as experience working in Finger Lakes wineries. Mike had found his true love and a partner to help him realize the dream of opening a winery.

They were married last June at Kings Garden Winery (so named for the gardens that French and British troops kept while stationed in the area in the 1700s) and opened the winery on Labor Day weekend. The challenges have been many, including keeping deer and turkey away from the grapes. “The turkeys seem to coordinate their grape eating as they walk with military precision,” Mike says, “one turkey to a row, and devour the ripe grapes.”

But Mike and Corinne expect to produce 2000 cases for 2009. As for what visitors can expect, Corinne says, “We want to give visitors personal attention, and we want them to have a fun experience and enjoy themselves here.” Mike and Corinne plan to have music and special events at the winery, including a first anniversary party.

Their current wine lineup includes three Chardonnays and three red wines. Favorites include the stainless steel-aged 2007 Chardonnay (\$16 per bottle) with butterscotch highlights, classic Chard citrus tones, and a long, spicy mineral finish that is unique to the Kings Garden *terroir*. The 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$18) features nice plum and deep cherry tones tinged with that special Kings Garden spicy finish. Coming soon is a unique and excellent late harvest Chardonnay with beautiful honeyed pear and spice.

Kings Garden Vineyards is located at 9085 Route 414, Lodi, NY 14860. For more information, visit www.kingsgardenvineyards.com, or call 607-582-7444.

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Mike & Corinne Oleksyn with their Kings Garden Vineyards’ wine.

Finger Lakes Wine Review *Holly Howell*

Sip a Salamander

May is a month of many celebrations in my family—lots of birthdays and anniversaries, along with Mother’s Day and Memorial Day weekend. All of them mean good food on the table, but the one I look forward to most is the mouth-watering “Cinco de Mayo” (May 5 in Spanish), which is the ultimate excuse to indulge in some great Mexican food. And that means spice! I have been saving a stash of Finger Lakes Gewürztraminer wines just for the occasion. Gewürztraminer (pronounced Guh-VURTS-trah-MEE-ner), is a white wine that originated in Germany but is now loving the climate of New York State. It comes in an elongated bottle that reminds me of Riesling, but its flavor is more floral and spicy in the savory sense—clove, nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger. When it comes to Mexican food, Gewürztraminer is the next best thing to a chilled Corona. One of my new faves is Red Newt Cellars Gewürztraminer (\$19). Red Newt is located on the east side of Seneca Lake, and Gewürztraminer is definitely one of their specialties. The 2006 vintage is totally fruit driven (think lychee and citrus), and can easily take on a plate of nachos, a trio of enchiladas, or a salsa-covered chimichanga. If you want to kick it up a notch, try one of Red Newt’s “single vineyard” Gewürztraminers. The Sawmill Creek Vineyard 2007 (\$36) received a ninety-point score from *Wine Spectator*, and the Curry Creek Vineyard (\$42) received an eighty-nine. Both receive a perfect score for yum-factor on the Holly scale. Happy Cinco de Mayo, and Happy Gewürztraminers!



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