



Eagle Point

Welcome Home to Wine Country

By Lorraine Payette

Thoughts of wine country always evoke special images. Sun drenched hillsides in a far away land covered in orderly rows of vines filled with grapes, all ripe and full and bursting with juice. Discretely placed buildings that house the presses, tanks and barrels, with an all but invisible staff that make the magic happen as these lush fields of fruit evolve before the eyes into the merlot, cabernet and selected blends so eagerly sought after by the true connoisseur. The bliss of a tasting presented by experts in the field, the wines at a state of perfection and accompanied by exquisite hors d'oeuvres and sparkling conversation.

The idea of such a trip intrigues and delights, but today's hectic lifestyle leaves little time for such magic. Trips to France and Italy, or California's Napa Valley often aren't feasible. Even a romp through Niagara's wine region may be more than can be handled.

But the beauty of the Vinland is right here in Leeds-Grenville, cleverly hidden in plain sight. Welcome to Eagle Point Winery, come inside

the gates and see what wonders await.

Two vineyards spread out over the land, awaiting the perfect moment to collect the grapes and bring them in to be crushed and processed into the finest wine produced in this area. Everywhere on the property located at 337 Escott/Rockport Road in Mallorytown there are wonders to behold.

"We have everything here on these 600 acres," said Debra Marshall, Operations Manager at the winery. "There are waterfalls, and a creek that goes right down to the river. First growth trees, beaver dams, everything. When you have the time to tour, it's absolutely beautiful. I'm in awe every morning here as the sun is just coming up over the vineyard and the light is just starting to grow, the rolling hills and the layers of mist – clear below, clear above, and a single layer coming through the trees. It's gorgeous."

Eagle Point was purchased by its first owners to raise their show horses and Black Angus cattle, but in 2006 the direction changed

with the vision of establishing a vineyard and winery. They consulted an experienced vintner/grower to discover what would be needed and found the perfect piece of land on the property in Mallorytown to establish their vineyard. Exact conditions are required for successful viticulture (grape production). The property provided the ideal slope and orientation as well as proper soil depth and drainage. Work began under strict supervision and consultation with experts, and the first vineyard was planted in 2008.

Thomas Marshall, wine maker and viticultural consultant, and his wife, Debra, worked with the original owner from the very beginning in 2006, advising him in the planting and growing of the grapes and in the design of the winery.

Unlike in the European and Niagara wine regions, the harsh winters in Mallorytown can be disastrous to wine grapes, and special precautions must be taken each year just to keep them alive and producing.

"This was a calculated risk," said Debra. "Eagle Point is definitely on the edge for grape growing. We have to bury vines and choose varieties that have a shorter growing season - the ones that can survive extreme winter temperatures, even when buried. In the fall we select two canes each, tie them to a wire, and hill dirt over them. That's the only way the buds will survive the cold. Then every spring we turn around and dig the vines out, lift them up and put them back on a trellis."

The process of growing the grapes is more labour intensive in south-eastern Ontario than elsewhere. The canes are buried soon after harvest and raised as late as possible in the spring to avoid frosts. Late spring and early autumn frosts in this region can kill the fruitful primary buds, and the growing season is substantially shortened by them. Green harvesting is also practiced where some of the grapes are removed early, and the canopy is opened up to provide better sun exposure. Only grapes with a shorter growing season will succeed, so cabernet sauvignon (a longer season grape) cannot be grown here.

"We select only varieties that we can grow," said Debra. "Some of the ones that we have are pushing the envelope a bit, but through other viticulture strategies we can get them to harvest at the proper pH, acidity and brix (sugar levels). We need to extract the best we can out of the finest quality grapes"



(opposite pg.) Premium wines to delight the palette

(clockwise) A warm and comfortable setting for a wine tasting

The wine is aged in barrels in the traditional European fashion

The focus at Eagle Point is on making premium wine in the traditional European manner. Although highly labour intensive, with 90% of the work needing to be done by hand, they have the advantage of possessing some modern technology like chilling tanks and climate controlled conditions, but these are not all that is needed to make a quality wine.

In order to do that, they ensure that the grapes that are brought in to the crush pad are of the highest quality. The vineyards are constantly monitored and maintained, with careful checking of all the fruit, cutting out anything that will not ripen in time for harvest, any disease or damage on the fruit. This extreme care guarantees that when they go through with the harvester everything that is being picked is the absolute best.

The winemaker is important to the process, with the mark of his skill in every bottle of wine that is produced, but he cannot create the best without premium quality fruit. Not every year is perfect, and the sign of a good winemaker is the ability to still turn out a quality wine with what is available. A lot of technical work is involved, and Thomas Marshall can make that happen if needed.

In 2012, after a single year of official operation, the winery was sold to Du Zhongyi of Inner Mongolia as part of his mission to bring the best in Ontario wines to China.

Du became aware of the region and all it had to offer after the 2008 trade mission on which TLT Mayor Frank Kinsella visited China. This opened up an active dialogue and exchange of culture and business between the two areas, and Du fell in love with what it could do and produce. He toured the area and

immediately saw the potential of Eagle Point in the way it was being run by the Marshalls.

"We're a winery, so we're concentrating on wine and the experience," said Debra. "My personal philosophy is based on all of the memories that I have of going anywhere which are basically driven by the experience I had at that location. If people have a wonderful experience, they'll remember it and want to share it with others.

"I tell my staff, 'Your job is to make sure that everyone who walks through that door feels like they're the most important person in the world.' When they leave, they must have a feeling that their time with us was the best time they have experienced at a winery. We want to be builders of good memories."

Having bought the winery, Du invested heavily in it, bringing in quality equipment and hiring people from the local area to work with management. Six new jobs were created, and premium wines were produced under the Marshalls' exacting standards. Within a year of purchase, the new owner was ready to capitalize on his investment with his first shipment of 12,000 bottles of wine to Wuhai City, Inner Mongolia, where they will sell for about \$225 apiece, about ten times the Canadian price. Eagle Point plans to make such shipments every six months, eventually doubling their exports to China.

"People were concerned that we were sending all the premium wine overseas and leaving nothing for the domestic market," said Debra. "That's far from the case. We make sure that every bottle we produce is of the same exacting standards and that Canadians will be drinking the same wine that is being exported."

But wine production is only one facet of the work at Eagle Point. They are also involved in various activities and invested in the local community.

"We want to keep people coming to Eagle Point for all the best in cultural activities," said Debra.

Included in this are not only wine tastings, which can be arranged for businesses and private parties as well, but weddings, special celebrations of all kinds and other events.

In early October this year, the winery hosted a very special plein air event. A dozen painters were hand selected to participate in this rare chance to come out and capture on canvas, some of what Eagle Point has to offer in the way of beautiful works from the weekend that were displayed for viewing at the winery, followed by a public opinion ballot judging.

"Eagle Point will select one of the paintings to use either for a label or a neck tag," said Debra. "We're going to try to do that every year, and they'll all be scenes from the 600 acres here at the winery." LH

To learn more about the wine country in your own backyard, or to schedule an event/visit, please contact Debra Marshall, Operations Manager at Eagle Point Winery, at 613-659-4140, go to the web site at www.eaglepointwinery.ca or email dmarshall@eaglepointwinery.ca