Hermit Woods

Wine Club Release
Fall 2021

Dear Club Members,

We passed a significant milestone this year. Although we didn't officially celebrate it, we have been in business now for over ten years. It has been an amazing ride, one we are so happy to have shared with you.

In honor of this momentous year, we have included our story here. Due to the limitations of space, we have done our best to hit the highlights. Stay tuned for the book someday, where we will relish in the details.

As I often say, the hobby the three of us enjoyed for many years got wildly out of control resulting in Hermit Woods as you know it today. However, the real truth is, the strong bond that developed between the three of us as we pursue our passions together is the culprit. We all share this incredible spirit that has allowed us to embrace every moment and experience it for all it has to offer. This journey has taken us down a twisty windy path that has led us here.

The best part is, we have only just begun. We hope you will all join us as we continue to twist and turn into the future on this fantastic ride. Great things await us around the next corner.

Sincerely,

Bob, Ken, and Chuck

Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

2019 Heirloom Crabapple

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 740 Cases Produced - 12.7 Alc By Vol.

A Story in Every Bottle

We discovered the delightful "Dolgo" crabapple years ago when I took a bite of one of the little red apples growing on a tree in Bob's front yard. The resulting experimental wine was outstanding, and it has quickly become our signature wine. Further research revealed that the Dolgo crabapple was brought to this country from Kazakhstan in the 1800s to add flavor to the cider being made at the time. Our biggest problem now is sourcing enough of these apples to make more of this very popular wine. Fortunately, the 2019 harvest was a bumper crop, so we have plenty of this vintage!

Wine Notes

Produced from Dolgo crabapples and wild, low-bush blueberries. Bright, fresh apple aromas precede a lively, mouth-watering, cranberry-like and apple flavored tang; reminiscent of a cranberry rosé.

Pairing Suggestions

This wine pairs well with just about any food and especially well with roast turkey (Thanksgiving!) or chicken.

Farmers Notes

Three farms - Allison's Orchard, Saxton, and Stone Mtn - supplied us with Dolgo crabapples for this vintage. These farms grow a wide variety of heirloom apples and other fruit, and follow best management practices ensuring the highest quality fruit. Chuck, our partner, has developed a close relationship with the orchard managers over the years and enjoys the time of harvest. Our blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries, a three generation family blueberry harvester in Ellsworth, ME. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness.

Vinification

The fresh crabapples are crushed and added to the right amount of water and sugar in both of our 1500 gallon "super tanks" used as fermentation vessels. Blueberries are added directly to the fermenters. Then, Lalvin D21 wine yeast is added for primary fermentation at a peak temperature of 73F. The wine is then aged in stainless steel tanks, with light toast, French oak staves suspended in the wine for 5 months, allowing for extraction of wood tannins and flavor, all while enhancing the structure. Afterwards, the wine is stabilized and filtered for a brilliant sparkle and a small amount of sugar is added for drinking balance.

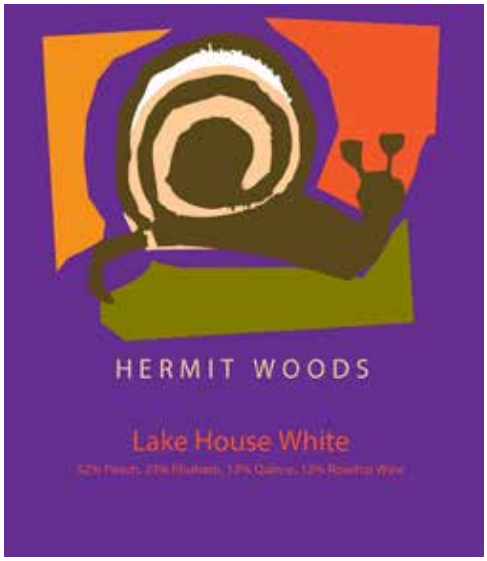
pH 3.27 RS 3.5% ABV 12.7%

Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

2018 Lake House White

141 Cases Produced - 12.5 Alc By Vol.



A Story in Every Bottle

Fine Chardonnay from Burgundy is one of my favorite wine types. I love the bright, fresh peach, melon, citrusy aromatics, delicate yet bold mouth-filling flavors, great weight, prominent acidity, and long finish. Our Lake House White approaches those characteristics, but with its own unique herbal aromatics and flavors because it is not made with grapes at all.

Wine Notes

This wine is a blend of four local ingredients, each contributing key components to the resulting harmony: peaches, quince, rosehips, and rhubarb. It is a complex wine with great aging potential.

Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy on its own or with anything with which you would pair a fine chardonnay, such as quiche, cheese, white fish, and creamy soups.

Farmers Notes

The peaches and quince came from local farms, the rosehips were harvested from three local patches and along a shoreline drive in Rye Beach, NH, the rhubarb (including some wonderful heirloom Whitney rhubarb) is from my garden and some friends' gardens.

Vinification

All the ingredients are combined with a small amount of water and undergo a cold soak maceration for greater aroma, fruit, and tannin extraction. After some initial fermentation by the natural yeast on the peaches, an excellent white burgundy yeast, Lalvin CY3079, is added to the primary fermentation of fourteen days, reaching a peak temperature of 65F. No pressing occurs, to utilize only the gentle free run fraction, then the wine undergoes secondary fermentation in stainless steel. Throughout fermentation and well into elevage, oak spirals (light toast French) are suspended in the wine for wood tannins, flavors, and enhanced structure. The wine is kept on the fine lees (dead yeast), a sur lie technique to soften and enhance the wine. The wine is then gravity racked a few times during elevage and then filtered prior to bottling. pH 3.49 RS 0% ABV 12.5

pH 3.34 RS 0% ABV 12.7

Hermit Woods

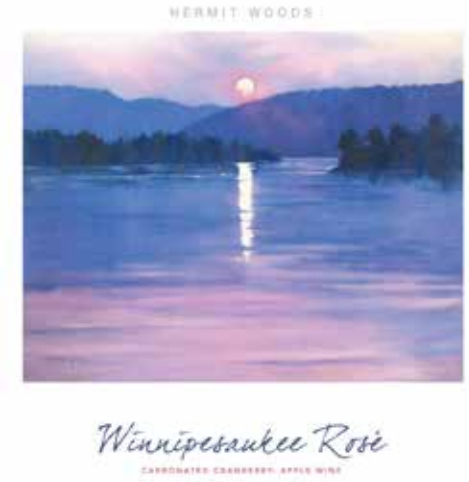
WINE TECH NOTES

2019 Sparkling Winnipesaukee Rose

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 144 Cases Produced - 12.6 Alc By Vol.

A Story in Every Bottle

As you may know, for many years we have crafted our Heirloom Crabapple Wine from special Dolgo crabapples. However, because of its color and flavor profile, many people have believed this wine to be a cranapple wine. Well, we now have a cranapple wine! When the drought-like conditions in the Fall of 2016 resulted in an insufficient crop of Dolgo crabapples, it prompted us to craft a cranberry-apple wine instead. This wine is also special because of the label. The label is an image of a painting by Christine Hodecker, a Meredith painter who lost her battle with cancer several years ago. This painting is belived to be her last painting. We created this label to honor her and the wonderful contributions she has made to the Meredith community.



Wine Notes

A combination of two classic New England fruits: cranberries and apples. This is reminiscent of a fine, semi-dry rosé champagne. Drink 2020-2023.

Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy this wine chilled on its own at all festive occasions. Pairs exceptionally well with roast turkey, smoked cheese, or even a vinaigrette salad. Also very good with Southwestern black bean dip with roasted cumin.

Farmers Notes

The cider and Kingston Black heirloom apples used for this wine were sourced from Apple Hill Farm near Concord, NH. The cranberries hail from a 3rd generation grower on Cape Cod, MA.

Vinification

To a fresh pressed cider we add fresh, chopped Kingston Black heirloom cider apples and chipped frozen cranberries. This blend is fermented at about 65F with Lalvin CY3079 yeast. After pressing, light-toast French Oak staves are placed in the storage tank for better structure and some oak tannins. During aging and racking, all transfers are done under CO2 gas to preserve the bright fresh aromas. Bench trials led us to add 32.5 g/L of sugar before bottling for drinking balance. The wine is sterile-filtered for brilliance and stability.

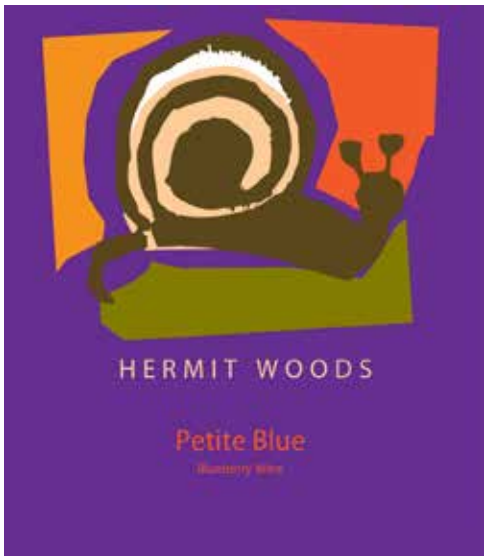
pH 3.15 RS 3.25% ABV 12.6

Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

2020 Petite Blue

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 223 Cases Produced - 12.7 Alc By Vol.



A Story in Every Bottle

Years before the winery started, Chuck, Bob and I - as well as a small group of friends we hung out with - would meet on a monthly basis to taste wine. At one particular evening of wine tasting, Bob brought out a bottle in a brown bag and shared it, and asked us what type of wine it was (other than red - ha!). All of us enjoyed it. Some thought it was a pinot noir, but none of us could guess that it was actually, against all odds, a dry blueberry wine! The next day, Chuck and his wife picked a whole bucket of fresh blueberries and showed up on my doorstep with them, requesting that I make wine like what we had the night before. Since then, I have been making dry blueberry wines every season, and the result - our famous "Petite Blue" and "Reserve" - have become some of our most sought-after wines. In fact, in the 2017 November edition of Food and Wine Magazine, Petite Blue was identified as THE craft beverage for the State of New Hampshire, beating out all beers, spirits and wines produced in the state.

Wine Notes

Petite Blue is reminiscent of some pinot noirs, with aromas and flavors that differ from grape wines because this wine is crafted entirely from wild, low-bush blueberries.

Pairing Suggestions

We have found Petite Blue to pair very well with a wide variety of foods, such as savory quiche, stuffed mushrooms, pepper chèvre, and herbed pork or chicken dishes. The wine is also delightful on its own!

Farmers Notes

Our blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries, a three generation family blueberry harvester in Ellsworth, ME. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure we use only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness. Our blueberries are the wild berries that grow close to the ground across much of Downeast Maine; the smaller berries provide us with a concentrated flavor and higher skin-to-juice ratio which give our wines the soft tannins we enjoy. The 2020 crop was the best we've ever seen, with a very high sugar level of 16-18brix!

Vinification

To bring forth the fresh bright blueberry aromas and flavors married with deep richness and oak spice, a number of important steps are taken during the vinification and elevage of this wine. Fermentation occurred in one of our supertanks with pumpovers for maximum extraction of fruit flavors and tannins. A special yeast strain from the Cornas area of the Rhone valley in France is used for its ability to showcase the fruit. The wine is filtered for a pleasing sparkle and a touch of sugar is added before bottling for drinking balance.

pH 3.27 RS 0.75% ABV 12.7

Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

2018 Elderberry

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 103 Cases Produced - 13.5 Alc By Vol.

A Story in Every Bottle

This fantastic fruit grows wild all over New England and there is even a song about elderberry wine, so we had to make such a wine! As you may know, our Hermitage wine is made of a blend of separate wines, including elderberry. As we never know the proportions of these wines will be needed to make the optimal Hermitage, we always plan to have some left over elderberry and blueberry wines. We then blend the remaining wines to find the best ratio for a dark, rich, dry red wine.

Wine Notes

A blend of two dark berries: mostly elderberry and blueberry. As with many of the great wines of the world, the wines are vinified and aged separately, then blended before bottling. This is done because different grapes and berries become ripe at different times, and we follow this practice to give us full control over the final blend.

Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy on its own, or with anything you would pair a fine syrah or red Rhone blend with, such as hearty meat dishes. I like the rich earthy character of this wine with venison.

Farmers Notes

Our elderberries come from Dixieland Farm, an organic grower in Arkansas. The blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries, a three generation family blueberry harvester in Ellsworth, Maine. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness. Our blueberries are the wild berries that grow close to the ground across much of Downeast Maine; the smaller berries provide us with a concentrated flavor and higher skin-to-juice ratio in order to equip our wines with the soft tannins we enjoy.

Vinification

Two wines are first separately crafted and then later combined in a specific ratio. The blueberries are fermented with Lalvin GRE and BRL97 yeast (Rhone strains), and the elderberries with Lalvin Rhone 2056 and AMH. Both wines undergo secondary fermentation in stainless steel tanks for a few weeks, and then an extended elevage in French oak barrels. Each wine is gravity-racked a few times during elevage; no fining or filtering occurs.

pH 3.6 RS 0% ABV 13.5

Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

2020 Hermit Cider

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 108 Cases Produced - 7.6 Alc By Vol.

A Story in Every Bottle

Years ago my wife, Maya, and I purchased an old farmhouse in Sanbornton. On the property are many apple trees and the first season we discovered that not all were for eating; many were for making cider … so that's what I did. Since then many batches of cider, apple wine, cyser, and apple jack have been made from the apples in my yard, as well as from neighboring trees and nearby orchards. I love this energizing, wholesome product sourced from the trees that grow so well here in New England. Early settlers enjoyed this beverage, and this blend is reminiscent of the style likely produced and consumed here hundreds of years ago. This special batch has been barrel-aged for extra richness and complexity. The story on the outside of the bottle was created by illustrator and children's book writer, Deb Lucke. From the sale of each bottle, 5% goes to the NH Humane Society.

Wine Notes

This assemblage is a complex blend of many types of heirloom and culinary apples combined with quince and crabapples, just as early settlers are reported to have done. Drink 2021-2023.

Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy on its own or with any food. Pairs especially well with hearty soups, chili, savory rosemary pork loin, and robust cheeses.

Farmers Notes

Apple Hill Farm near Concord, NH grows numerous types of apples, including many heirloom apples highly coveted for the cider they produce. 2020 was a dry year and apples were smaller, leading to the development of a deep, rich, concentrated cider due to the greater skin-to-fruit ratio. The cider blend: Ellis Bitter, Yarlington Mill, Dabinette, MacIntosh, Gala, Golden Russett, Honeycrisp, Cortland, and Jonathan.

Vinification

Added to the fresh cider are some crushed fresh fruit, including apples and pears from my backyard, heirloom Kingston Black, quince, and crabapples. This combination is fermented in one of our SuperTanks with Lalvin DV-10 yeast. After 10 days of fermentation, the fruit is pressed.and the cider transferred into French Oak Barrels for aging. Finally, it is filtered, carbonated and bottled.

pH 3.79 RS 0% ABV 7.6

HERMIT WOODS

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HOW A PHOTOGRAPHER, GEOLOGIST & PILOT OPEN A WINERY

Truthfully, you could make the case that Hermit Woods exists because I sucked at making beer. But, clearly, many other factors have come together to propel our journey together down the twisty windy turns of life that have brought us to where we are today. But, if I had not sucked at making beer, I might never have met Ken or Chuck.

The story begins almost 25 years ago when I brewed my first batch of beer in my kitchen. I loved to cook and follow recipes, so this seemed right up my alley. Well, not so much. Sure, I proudly suffered down my first beers, knowing I had crafted them myself. But it wasn't long after I shared a few bottles with friends that it hit home how awful it really was.

One sympathetic friend insisted that I meet Ken, who, he assured me, had been homebrewing for years, crafted excellent beer, and loved to share his knowledge. So a plan was hatched. Soon after, I was brewing beer alongside Ken in the basement of his Laconia home. More accurately, I was consuming copious amounts of Ken's previously brewed beer while watching him brew the next batch. It turns out this was an essential skill that defined the division of labor in our craft beverage production for years to come.

After an afternoon with Ken, I realized I had an important decision to make. I either needed to learn from Ken and perfect my own brewing skills, or I could just spend more time with him and drink his beer. Given where we are today, I made the right choice. I have never brewed another batch of beer since.

Getting to know Ken was easy. It turned out that we had a lot in common, and we were soon spending a great deal of time together. The best part was, on most days, activities either started or ended with beer, Ken's beer.

Another passion we shared was Mt. Biking. We spent many hours riding our Mt. Bikes throughout the Lakes Region and beyond. We typically sought out the wildest trails leading to the summits of our local mountains. It wasn't long before Chuck, an acquaintance of Ken's and a former competitive cyclist was inspired and began joining us on our weekly rides.

We didn't know it yet, but a bond was forming between the three of us from the very earliest days together that would change our futures in ways we couldn't have imagined. As the years went on, we shared a growing number

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of passions and interests, all of which usually involved consuming beer, wine, and spirits.

Around 2005, our interest in alcohol began to express itself in ways other than the pure enjoyment derived from its consumption. All three of our pasts included unique opportunities to appreciate the fine art of crafting alcoholic beverages. As a result, we began to seek out these opportunities together.

Initially, Ken's love of fermenting inspired him to explore making wine from wine kits. This opened up a whole new world for Ken, and ultimately Chuck and me, as we began to realize the potential this new direction brought. Ken began to appreciate the sheer number of fermentables growing in his backyard and the surrounding area, and without the limitations he faced in beer production, this opened up an avalanche of possibilities.

As with beer, the limits of commercial wine kits quickly left Ken wanting more control and creativity. With all of us having previously tried many classic wines from around the world, we wanted to explore the full depth of crafting wine in a more traditional way using whole fruit.

Our desire to work with whole fruit soon led us to the docks of Boston. We learned that you could purchase California vinifera grapes by the lug during harvest time. So the three of us and our wives climbed aboard the "Love Mobile," an 80's era van that Chuck had inherited from his father, and with a van load of enthusiasm, we headed to the Boston docks. Thankfully our enthusiasm made up for the lack of quality in the grapes available to us. Nevertheless, we filled the back of the van with grapes and headed north.

Along the way home, we stopped at a couple of wineries, sampled some wine, and began to imagine what would become of the somewhat questionable grapes in the back of the van. Of course, yet again, we didn't know that these early experiences visiting local wineries opened our eyes and our sense of curiosity in a way that would shape our futures.

Indeed, our earliest experiments with grapes did not produce a drinkable wine. It did, however, drive our sense of curiosity and wonder, and inspired us to explore even further. We eventually sourced high-quality grapes from a Boston vendor who took the import of grapes very seriously. As a result, we began producing drinkable wines, some of which are still drinking ok today, over 14 years later.

As our experience grew and our opportunities to work with a broader

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selection of fruit from California and Chile expanded, we began to better understand the fundamentals of making wine. Or more accurately, Ken began to develop the skills of a winemaker.

In 2007, literally wanting to leave no stone unturned in pursuing our knowledge of craft beverage making, we planted a vineyard in my backyard. Having no experience farming, and with a steep learning curve, we engaged the help of the University of New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension and other grape growers in NH. We researched hybrid grape varietals at Cornell University and learned about trellising, irrigation, and all the things farmers think about before planting.

We selected eight hybrid varieties of grapes, amounting to 120 vines. Then, we dug up my backyard and began the back-breaking work of planting those vines, erecting trellises and irrigation systems, and nursing our little vines to life. As you might imagine, patience is an integral part of the viticulture world. We understood that it would be three to five years of hard work and persistence before harvesting a single grape. Needless to say, this did not deter our ambitions in the least.

Ultimately, it turned out that growing hybrid grapes in the New Hampshire climate is very challenging, especially if you intend to do it organically. Only a couple of growers in all of New England have developed commercially successful organic vineyards. It also turned out that I was not meant to be a farmer. I simply could not seem to make the time for the myriad of tasks essential to successfully growing grapes. Ken was vastly better prepared for this, and with his guidance and coaxing, we persevered.

While nursing our young vineyard to life, crafting small batches of wine from grapes imported from California and Chili, we continued to expand our understanding of the local fruit that grew well and in abundance in our area. We explored apples, berries of

all types, peaches, pears, knotweed, zucchini, and tomatoes (yes, you read that right). It seemed there was so much to discover and no limit to what we could harvest and craft into wine.

By 2010, our hobby quickly became an obsession that the three of us shared and that our wives tolerated. As our wine explorations expanded and beer brewing continued, our cellars filled up with hundreds of gallons of fermented beverages -likely more than our government likes you to produce without a license.

We were beginning to accumulate

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more and more carboys, small stainless steel tanks, and rudimentary wine-making equipment. Mt. Biking, our favorite pastime, began to diminish, replaced by hours of farming, harvesting, fermenting, and of course, drinking.

We loaded up our "Love Mobile" many more times with fresh grapes from Massachusetts. We traveled New England with our wives and friends in search of other local wineries, learning and imbibing all the way. Our hobby was getting a little out of hand, but boy, what fun we were having.

Along the way, all our lives were changing in many ways. I was, again, feeling the need for a career change after spending the prior six years in advertising, marketing, and photography. In addition, with the airline business struggling from the 2008 recession, Chuck's career as a pilot was hanging in the balance. On the other hand, Ken's career was on solid footing, having worked as a senior scientist for a geological survey company for over 20 years. Still, he was also excited about further exploring his new skills as a winemaker.

In the winter of 2010, the three of us began to explore the idea of turning our newfound hobby into a business. After hours of discussion and a few exploratory visits to other NH wineries, we wrote our first business plan. The game was on and we were off to the races. Our excitement and enthusiasm for the idea grew with every passing day and every new development as we formed our first company together.

We contemplated several options for our winery's location, including Ken's house, but soon settled on my home. For this to happen, we needed to get my wife, Jerilyn, onboard, as we were proposing to convert our master bedroom into a tasting room, and what was then my basement office into a wine production area. The bedroom, it turns out, was easy; we simply told Jerilyn that we would fill her entire basement up with wine. Honestly, Jerlyn was as enthusiastic about opening a winery as we were and was on board from the beginning. The office was even more manageable; I was ready to be done with that phase of my life anyway and hoped this new direction would be the answer.

Deciding on a name for our new winery was a more daunting challenge. We spent months pouring over ideas and passing them amongst us with little success. In the end, someone suggested that we consider

"Hermit Woods." I can't honestly tell you who first floated the idea, but we all got behind it quickly. Given that our winery would be located near a forest in Meredith called Hermit Woods, we all felt the name provided an apt sense of place.

The Hermit Woods forest was so named because a hermit named Joseph Plummer lived in those woods over 150 years ago. He died in 1862, although the foundation of his home and his gravesite can still be found in those woods via a short hike off of Hermit Woods Road.

With our name and location decided, it was only a matter of acquiring the

equipment, completing all the requisite paperwork, and obtaining federal and state licenses, as well as town approvals. We divided and conquered. Chuck took responsibility for licensing. Ken managed the assemblage of equipment, fruit, and know-how to prepare our first wines. I handled the town approvals and adjustments to our living quarters to accommodate our new winery.

It took us a year and a half to complete the necessary steps to open our doors for business, but we did it. On June 17th, 2011, we made our first sale, and Hermit Woods Winery was born. It was a milestone we were all very proud of. All of us have achieved many interesting and exciting things in our lives, but coming together as we did, to pull off what seemed nearly impossible and make it happen as partners was a crowning achievement for all of us.

The early days and months were a fantastic time. That first summer we were only open Thursday through Sunday. The three of us and our wives worked in the tasting room, and Ken, Chuck, and I spent many hours working in the cellar late into the evening producing batches of wine. It was an all-consuming summer, but the time we spent together cemented our relationships in ways that would help us endure and weather the trials and tribulations that growing any business ultimately involves.

I think back to those first few months and the joy we felt sharing our wine with people from all over the Northeast and beyond. It seemed incredible and was a constant high. We celebrated every milestone and marveled at our success, as modest as it was. To put it in perspective, today we serve as many people in two or three days as we did in our entire first year of operation. The achievement didn't come easy. We worked every bit as hard that first summer as we do today, maybe even harder, as we had so little experience and expertise in our new adventure.

Over the next three years, we continued to operate the business out of my home, steadily growing sales by almost 100% each year. We more than met our obligation to Jerilyn, filling our basement with wine. The storage of wine became a growing problem for us on many fronts, not to mention that we often couldn't access our washing machine and dryer without moving a few dozen cases of wine. By the end of 2013, we were producing nearly a thousand cases of wine a year.

The anticipation of further growth prompted us to start considering a new home for our winery. We needed a facility that would allow us to sustain continued growth, and we gave serious consideration to building a new winery on the front of our property. We consulted an architect and the town fathers about the possibilities and quickly realized, that while it was possible, it could not reasonably happen for several more years, and we didn't have the time to wait.

We began considering our other options. Should we be a farm winery or an urban winery? In what town should we be

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located, and what about financing? We worked with the Belknap County Economic Development Council (BCEDC) and Meredith Village Savings Bank (MVSB) to navigate the financing hurdle. By early May 2013, we had settled on our future home at 72 Main Street in Meredith, NH - the former home of Fermentation Station. By May 29th, we had closed on our new property, and the wheels were set in motion for Hermit Woods as you know it today.

As it turned out, the decision to relocate to Meredith was easy. Ken and I both had a long history in Meredith. Ken had worked for over 20 years at the geology firm located in Meredith, just two doors down from our new winery. As for me, I had assisted Mill Falls at the Lake with their website, advertising, and marketing for years. Not to mention, Meredith is a quintessential New England tourist town that was in the process of becoming an international tourist destination.

We decided to use the remainder of 2013 and early 2014 to renovate our new building in preparation for opening sometime in 2014. The plan was to continue to operate the winery at my home at 56 Taylor Road until November 2013, at which time we would close and use the time to complete construction and move wine production to the new winery in Meredith. We worked with Christopher Williams Architects to render the look of our exterior and with our builder to design the wine-making area and new tasting room. We would leave the third floor for a later date.

We were funding our new winery on a shoestring budget. MVSB and BCEDC helped with financing the purchase of the building and some of the remodeling costs, but there was no way we would have the funds to achieve our vision. With this in mind, we decided to explore crowdfunding. We decided on Kickstarter and began developing our campaign in the fall of 2013 for a December launch.

With Kickstarter, you get a set number of days to raise your required funds - in our case, 30 days. If you don't meet your goal, you don't receive a penny. Our goal was $27,000. We pulled out all the stops. We worked from every angle - from friends and family to social media to traditional media - every day for the campaign's entirety. In the end, we surpassed our goal with a total of $29,000, but not without some nail-biting as we entered the home stretch. It wasn't until the final hour of our campaign that a $2,500 contribution from our blueberry provider, Merrill's Wild Blueberries, put us over the top.

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In November of 2013, we moved the wine-making operation into the new winery and began producing the first vintages from our new space. While production commenced, we worked on finishing the tasting room.

Our new tasting room opened to the public on February 15th, 2014. Our transition was complete. We were now the proud owners of an urban winery located in downtown Meredith.

Our move to Meredith came with a whole new level of commitment. Until then, what we were doing could easily have been considered still very much a hobby. The

three of us had still been maintaining our former careers in some form or another, and we were only open to the public in the summer and fall, and mostly just on weekends.

However, our Meredith location was the real deal. We would have to commit a much more significant amount of time and resources than ever before. Our business would be open year-round, and seven days a week. It would require hiring employees for the first time. Except for occasional consulting work, I committed full time to the winery. Ken began working half-time as a geologist, freeing up time for him to focus on production. And although Chuck had returned to piloting, his life's passion, he remained committed to the winery in every way he could. When he wasn't flying, he could often be found behind the tasting bar sharing wine with our guests.

Over the next seven years, we endeavored to turn what once was just a hobby into a serious business, and, in the end, our livelihood. We grew at a rate of twenty to forty percent a year. On at least a couple of occasions, we came close to thinking we might not even make it - but we did! We have experienced some of the most amazing times and suffered through some challenges that threatened our very future. But for the strong bond created in the early days of our friendship, quite frankly, we likely would not be here with you today.

This journey has brought us even closer together and allowed us to embark on adventures beyond our wildest imagination, with some still being imagined for the future. We have traveled the world together, searching for the knowledge and skill needed to achieve perfection in our endeavors and fulfill our dreams. As the saying goes, how do you

make a small fortune in the wine business? You start with a large one. Although we may never get rich with this venture, if we measure wealth by experiences, happiness, and the people you share your life with, we are some of the wealthiest people I know.

And finally, what has made this journey truly special is you, our guests. Without you, we would not be here, and I don't just mean because you purchase our wine. It is the opportunity to share our wine, experiences, and dreams with you that truly drives us every day. It is seeing your happy faces year after year as you return to the Lakes Region. Indeed, true wealth is determined by who you share it with, and we are so happy to be able to share it with you.

This story is by no means over. I will save the details of our time in Meredith for subsequent chapters, along with our exciting plans for the future. Thank you for going on the ride with us.