

868 ESTATE VINEYARDS

Offering Inspirational Views Of The Valley And Mountains



BACK IN 2009, two long-time friends, Peter Deliso and Wendy Charron, came up with an idea – to join Virginia’s fast growing wine industry and find the perfect place to build a contemporary, premier vineyard focused on delivering a memorable experience to their customers.

Early in the process of looking for just the right place, Peter and Wendy met Carl DiManno, a winemaker with ten years of experience in winemaking and vineyard management in Virginia and Maryland, and with an MS in Enology from the University of California, Davis. Carl joined the team and became an integral part of finding the property on Harpers Ferry Road and creating what is now 868 Estate Vineyards.

The team spent three years vetting locations along the Loudoun County wine trail for a wide variety of factors including road access, plantable acres, soil conditions, orientation, scenic views, proximity to other well-known vineyards, and neighborhood support. In the second year, Peter, Carl and Wendy became very interested in a 90-acre parcel across the street from Breaux Vineyards. In addition to checking the boxes, the team also soon realized the restaurant next door would be great addition. Vineyards with an on-site restaurant and catering business are very rare in Virginia, and the team realized the combination would allow them the ability to provide a unique vineyard, winery, culinary and events experience to their customers.

The team approached Dr. Thomas Orme and Executive Chef Author Clark, the owners of Grandale Farm Restaurant, to see if they would be interested in merging the restaurant, and the thirty acres surrounding it, into 868 Estate Vineyards. Dr. Orme and Chef Clark quickly embraced the vision and the many advantages of a combined operation.

With the project now taking shape, the team drew further on the support of Wendy’s husband, Chris Charron, founder and CEO of Charron Consulting in Dulles (and scheduled to be the 2015 Chairman of the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce), who now serves as chief sampler at the new vineyard, and Peter’s wife, Nancy Deliso, who now serves as vice president of marketing. With the three families engaged, the team was able to close on the 90-acre parcel in July 2011, close the Grandale merger in February 2012 adding 30 acres and the restaurant, develop a complete marketing plan under the brand – *868 Estate Vineyards*, complete significant renovations at the Grandale site in early 2012, plant an initial 10 acres, and launch the business in May 2012, only 4 1/2 months after closing on the Grandale – 868 merger.

“The opportunity to add Grandale to the mix let us begin operations almost immediately since the main buildings and customer base were well established,” said Nancy Deliso. The restaurant building/cottage and what is now the winery’s tasting room were built in 2001 and 2002 as part of an agricultural learn-

ing center that Dr. Orme had established. The restaurant opened to great acclaim as a “must experience” destination in 2005. In the past nine years, Chef Author Clark and his team have established Grandale Restaurant as one of Loudoun County’s premier restaurant and catering businesses, with a stellar reputation for elegant dining and beautifully appointed events, including summer weddings on site.

The 868 Estate Vineyards team selected the 120 acres on Harpers Ferry Road also because the land offered excellent soils (terroir), with ideal aspects for planting many acres of densely-planted, low-yield vineyards, and with a convenient location on the Loudoun County wine trail. The site boasts the highest elevation in the valley between Short Hills and the Blue Ridge Mountains, offering spectacular views of the valley and the mountains beyond. Its summit elevation is 868 feet, thus the new name of the vineyard.

Also in early 2012, the partners planted ten acres of vineyards, including a relatively new white wine grape variety, chardonel, and have plans to gradually increase their vineyard plantings on the farm’s best available parcels until they reach what they think is its optimal size, about fifty acres. The rest of the farm will be reserved for flower and vegetable gardens for the restaurant, walking trails through the woods and hills, thick woodlands and environmental habitat, and, perhaps, a large pumpkin patch. Weddings of various sizes already occur on the estate and the partners expect with their

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new facilities, including a bridal cottage and tented event area, that 868 Estate Vineyards will become a very popular wedding and corporate event location in 2014 and beyond.

In 2013, 868 Estate Vineyards has already received eight Gold, Silver or Bronze awards in national and regional wine competitions. It was recently selected as one of only 25 vineyards in the State to attend the 2013 launch of Virginia's October Wine Month. The winery, restaurant and catering business continue to grow at double digit rates and the team has been able to achieve their financial goals for the business. Grandale Restaurant has been named as one of Northern Virginia's top 50 restaurants by *Northern Virginia Magazine*, was named a Destination Restaurant by *Visit Loudoun*, and is in the top ten percent of all businesses rated nationwide by *Trip Advisor*. 868 Estate Vineyards has also been able to leverage its unique abilities, with "perfectly paired" food and wine offerings in its tasting room and at its special dinners and events.

Carl DiManno will soon begin to produce 868's wine from their own winery, which is scheduled to be completed in fall 2013. If all goes well in the vineyards during the growing season of 2014, DiManno will produce wines from the grapes that will be harvested from their initial ten acre planting. Until then, he is making outstanding wine offsite, using grapes he purchases from regional vineyards. 868 Estate Vineyard's new wine making facility was designed to produce 5,000 cases of 868 wine per year, and as the vineyard grows and matures, the 868 team has already designed a larger facility that will increase capacity to 10,000 cases per year.

When he's not managing completion of the winery, Chris Charron offers personal ATV tours to the hill's summit, which has already been thinned of trees and shrubs so his guests can see what the view from the new tasting room (scheduled for 2015) will be like.

The 868 team is frequently on-site at the vineyard, working the site or in the tasting room. Visitors will frequently find one or more of Peter, Nancy, Wendy, Chris, Carl or AJ working the weekends, sometimes along with friends and family volunteers. ■

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