



Va La Winery – a Local Treasure in the Township

By Stan Lukoff and Edited by Tony Scheivert

[This is the first profiles of businesses in New Garden Township. If you have any business suggestions for future Lyceum issues, please send us an email at newsletter@newgarden.org.]



In early September, Township Manager Tony Scheivert and longtime resident Stan Lukoff had the pleasure of visiting Va La Vineyard, the oldest operating vineyard and winery in New Garden Township. Anthony Vietri is the vigneron (both cultivating the grapes as well as the winemaker) and pretty much wears all the hats at Va La. His wife Karen is also actively involved managing the tasting room and other details relating to operating the winery.

A “world class winery” is a bit of an oxymoron in this part of Pennsylvania, but Anthony has had the vision for Va La since he was a child playing in the barn once owned by his great grandparents (Matteo and Carolina Carozzo), daydreaming about someday making his own special and unique blends of wines. Most Pennsylvania wines are geared more towards the mainstream wine palate, whereas Anthony focuses on an Italian-inspired blending of varietals that seems to be his signature style to suit his refined palate. What Va La has done with their less than 7 acres of grapes is nothing short of amazing and miraculous! At present, Va La has between 25 and 30 varietals growing at any given time, including some that could not be mentioned as they are special root stock that is being tested in the fields. Wine production is limited to less than 750 cases per year.

Anthony is also unusual among his winemaking peers in that he is self-taught, cultivating his knowledge through visits to wineries in Italy and California, as well as much experimentation at Va La. Anthony graduated from the University of Delaware majoring in English studies, and then pursued graduate studies in a filmmaking curriculum at University of California for a few years. He then transferred to NYU film school, where he could be more hands-on with the cameras and equipment. At the age of 35, Anthony realized his passion was not in filmmaking, so he and his wife opted for a total career change and made the transition to grape farming and winemaking, with the support of their family.

Farming is in Anthony’s blood: his family can trace their farming roots back to Italy in the 1500’s. The name of the winery came from the last five letters of the family name, Giusvalla. Va La translates to “go there,” which were the exact words Anthony heard that convinced him to go back to the family farm in New Garden Township. Anthony’s great grandparents worked at the DuPont Hagley powder mills, and once the mills shut down in the early 1920’s, his ancestors turned to farming crops and mushrooms to make a living. The actual property where the winery is located was purchased in 1928. The initial grape stock





for Va La was planted in 1999, and the winery and storage area was built in September 2001, just in time for the fall grape harvest that year. The wine fermentation tanks are a special variable capacity tank that allow for flexibility in storage quantities, and were sourced from Italy, very close to the region where his family had farmed since the 1500's. These tanks allow Anthony much more flexibility from year to year, depending on the amount of grapes being harvested.

In most years, Va La is producing only four wines that are harvested on the 6.73 acres of grapes, as no grapes are purchased or grown outside of this parcel. Most wine aficionados have heard of the term "terroir" to describe the type of soil and climate characteristics where the grapes are planted. Anthony has worked with the existing Avondale soil conditions, and has partitioned four "micro terroirs" where Va La's varietals are grown. Each wine varietal is matched with the soil that is best suited for the grape, which is the challenging part of his grape cultivation. There is constant tweaking and optimizing of the varietals for each "micro terroir" to continually refine and optimize each blend. The dark mushroom soils over clay account for two of these regions comprising the **Barbera** and **Mahogany** blends. The white soils (basalt and stony silt loams) are where the **La Prima Donna** varietals are grown. The red and black soils (loam soils overlying gneiss and Mt Cuba schist) are where the **Silk** varietals are grown. Anthony is also very proud of the fact that no hazardous pesticides are used during growing or processing, as he lives on site with his family and is a great steward of his farm environment.



Anthony had some great stories about his "critter control" techniques to keep out the deer, rabbits, foxes, groundhogs, raccoons, possums, etc. Basically he utilizes an electrified fence for the deer, and lower fencing for the smaller animals. Birds seem to be the most challenging to control, as they are drawn to the grapes as they ripen. To handle this, Anthony has strategically placed mirrored disco balls so that the light reflections scare the birds away.

He does envision a day where a fleet of Va La drones and robots will scour the fields for predators and chase them away from the precious grapes on the vines. During the interview for this story, Anthony spotted a praying mantis that he calls the T-Rex of insects and is extremely beneficial to the vineyard, preying on other insects that eat the leaves or the grapes. Anthony loves these predators, and has even occasionally relocated their nests to other parts of the vineyard for better coverage of these beneficial insects in the grape growing areas.



The tasting room experience is not to be missed. Hours are limited to Friday/Saturday/Sunday, so be sure to check their web site or call for details. The main tasting bar is downstairs with additional tasting tables upstairs. The vintage barn is over 100 years old and has been completely renovated using cypress wood that is very familiar to the mushroom industry. The wines are paired with local bread, cheese, and olive oil to enhance the tasting experience. Anthony loves using local vendors for these pairings including sheep's milk cheeses from Meadowset Farms in Landenberg (www.meadowsetfarm.com) and Neuchatel chocolates in Oxford (www.neuchatelchocolates.com).

These dark chocolate truffles have centers made with Va La Silk wine. Part of the fun of visiting the tasting room is that you could be sitting next to some locals from New Garden Township, or a wine enthusiast from anywhere in the country or, for that matter, the world.

When discussing township services, Anthony is very appreciative of the local support of the police, fire department, and other township resources that help keep things going. Anthony likes to keep up with the ongoing Route 41 by-pass activities, as well as other developments and projects being planned in the township. We were also pleased to know that Anthony was familiar with the existing web site and newly launched [New Garden Lyceum e-newsletter](#). He is also thrilled to be the first New Garden business being profiled in this edition.

Va La has received some great press recently, being awarded in the America's best 101 wineries by the [Daily Meal](#) (for 2014 and 2015), as well as mentioned in the August edition of [Wine Enthusiast](#) by local wine expert and longtime fan of Va La wines, Roger Morris, for the Va La Silk Rose. [American Winery Guide](#) published in August a glowing article stating that "Va La could very well be the best vineyard and winery in the state of PA and quite possibly, the best on the east coast!" Other accolades include being named by Wine Enthusiast magazine as one of its favorite US wine tasting rooms. Quite amazing for a winery that does no advertising with just word-of-mouth buzz!

If you enjoy great wine, and want to support local businesses, Va La is a must visit for the tasting room experience. You will then understand how lucky New Garden residents are to have this award-winning winery, and Anthony's talent and vision in our backyard.

More Information

Phone - 610. 268. 2702

Address - 8822 Gap Newport Pike (Rt 41) Avondale, PA 19311

Va La website - <http://valavineyards.com/>

Va La Twitter - @valavineyards

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/VaLaVineyards>

Tasting room hours:

Fridays: 12:01 to 5:29 pm (Last service @ 5pm)

Saturdays & Sundays: 12:02 to 5:58 pm (Last service @ 5:30 pm)



