

What's Wine Is Yours

Sherwood winegrowers practice "alchemy"

BY SARAH HORNER

When Ken Morrison and Mauro Hernandez first moved to their six-acre property in rural Sherwood, they couldn't resist cracking *Green Acres* jokes. But aside from some playful bickering about who was more like Zsa Zsa's character and briefly feeling overwhelmed by their new surroundings, the men embraced their decision and set to the task of learning the land. Just four years later, the couple farm three acres of wine grapes and have their own wine label, K&M Wines. This might not have happened, however, without an almost magical dose of serendipity.

Morrison was already making wine in his garage and basement when a mutual friend in Portland introduced him to Hernandez in 1997. One of their earlier experiences together was harvesting grapes from Sherwood winegrowers Fred and Jill Newton. While both men appreciated wine, they didn't start exploring and visiting wineries until a few years later, when work transferred Morrison to San Francisco in 2000.

Once settled in the Bay Area, Morrison and Hernandez began visiting the wine regions of California, where they were particularly taken with the smaller, more low-key wineries of the Russian River Valley. "We enjoyed the slower pace and the personal experience of meeting the owners when we visited these small wineries," Morrison explains.

In the summer of 2006, Hernandez was offered a new work opportunity back in Oregon and the couple once again was faced with re-



location. A hesitant Morrison told his partner the only way he'd move back to Oregon was if they could live in a place like Fred and Jill's. Just two days later, while reading Craigslist ads, Morrison found that—go figure—Fred and Jill's place was for sale. The decision was a no-brainer. The couple closed on the property in August 2007, their tenth anniversary.

During the first year, the previous owners came back regularly to help the men learn how to manage the three-acre vineyard and maintain the other three acres of lush gardens. Hernandez says that anxiety about becoming

farmers quickly dissipated, replaced by a grounded feeling the couple got from working on their land. "You get into a zone," he shares, "you're working in the earth and it is really hard to feel stressed."

Hernandez and Morrison named their vineyard "Alchemy," what Morrison describes as a metaphor for their life: "Alchemy is about transformative change, which is what we've experienced together as we embraced this new lifestyle."

One of the most pleasant surprises in the couple's move from the city to the country is

the lack of prejudice they have experienced. Hernandez says that "people assume that we live in a conservative, rural community and that our neighbors might not understand or respect a gay couple, but we have absolutely been welcomed."

Morrison adds, "Our sexuality hasn't been an issue at all. We're respected as neighbors who appreciate the land and who participate in the community of people here living the same dream." The couple laugh when they share that in San Francisco they never felt the sense of community and neighborly spirit they enjoy now.

Hernandez and Morrison launched their wine label in 2009 and are focused on selling their wines made from estate-grown pinot noir and chardonnay. They have help maintaining the gardens, including four "baby doll" sheep that roam the vineyard keeping the weeds at bay. They love to entertain guests and are open by appointment and on special wine-tasting weekends such as Memorial Day, Labor Day and Thanksgiving. "Just like those small, intimate tasting rooms we loved so much in the Russian River, we have created a personal experience here," says Morrison.

Hernandez agrees: "We love to share what we love with others." ☐

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