

Published January 20th, 2010

## Growing a Vineyard

By Sophie Braccini



Susan Captain and her husband in their wine cellar in Moraga Photo Sophie Braccini Captain. The Captain's wine has been produced under their name by Parkmon Vineyard. In 2010 they will launch their own label.

When Jay Ingram, Moraga Parks and Recreation Director, first met with Susan Captain he intended to ask Lamorinda wine maker to organize a wine and food pairing class. But when the elegant Moraga resident arrived to the meeting in her heavy boots and garden attire, directly from pruning her vines, they started talking about the technical aspects of wine making. From that discussion stemmed the concept of teaching vineyard management as a community class.

"The idea is to teach people how to establish a vineyard," says Captain, "the classes that I will teach are for the wine lover who wants to know what it takes to make wine, for the Lamorinda resident who has been playing with the idea of wine-making and wants to know what is involved, and for the committed budding grower who wants to start things right."

Both Susan and her husband believe that Lamorinda in general and Moraga in particular are ideally positioned to become the next Napa. "We want to share our knowledge with our neighbors and encourage them to start their own development," Susan says, "We want them to become better than us and teach us in turn."

The Captains planted their vineyard five years ago, when their youngest child was ready for college. "I needed to have a new project in my life," says the mother, who is a mathematician by training. When she decided to become a wine grower, Captain attended a series of seminars and viticulture classes at UC Davis, Napa and Santa Rosa Community College.

On their 3.5 acre hillside property, which has magnificent views of the wilderness, grows 3500 plants from different varieties; Petite Syrah, Petite Verdot, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cab Franc. "Since all the work is done manually and by us, it's not a good idea to have everything to do on all the plants at the same time," says Captain. "In 2010 they will launch their own label."

Captain's plan right from the beginning was to work cooperatively. They are part of the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association, they partner with UC Berkeley for bio-control research and train young people interested in wine growing. "I've had students from high school working with us since 2005 through the 4H viticulture program," says Captain, "and for two years I have had students from Miramonte High School who have interned with me at the vineyard through what is called the WISE project (a program that allows the replacement of a senior's second semester of English with an independent inquiry into a topic of their choice)."

The series of classes offered through the Parks and Recreation Department in Moraga will take place in the vineyard. It will comprise both basic principles of viticulture and practical aspects of small vineyard management. "There will be general information in each session, with specific focus on what is going on in the vineyard at the time of the class," says Captain, "it will be both theoretical and hands-on, and wine tasting will be offered in the cellar after each class."

There are three classes in the series, beginning with Pruning & Training on Tuesday March 23rd. It will be followed by Canopy Management and Sugar Testing/Harvesting. "We have seen people in the area making a significant investment in a vineyard that was almost completely lost because of poor choices," says Captain. "It is important to learn how to do it right, and as the saying goes 'all good wines start with good grapes.'" Registration is available online at

-www.moraga.ca.us or by calling 888-7045.

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA