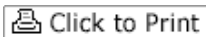




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Urban wineries include everything but the vineyard

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By Jerry Shriver, USA TODAY

CINCINNATI — The 1880s-era two-story frame building where Joe and Joan Henke greet thirsty customers six days and nights a week has always pumped lifeblood into the quiet Westwood residential neighborhood that surrounds it. But seldom has the heartbeat been this strong.

Located across the street from a Methodist church and City Hall, the structure housed a candy store, tearoom and restaurant over the decades until the Henkes arrived in 2001 and began trucking in grapes to the parking lot, making medal-winning wines in the basement and serving them to mellow crowds upstairs.

"People had never seen anything quite like this before," says Joe of the barrel room/restaurant/tasting bar/retail shop known as Henke Winery. "But I think they've found a *Cheers*-like home they're comfortable with. We see a lot of locals who walk here, enjoy the food and wine, and then walk home. We also get people from Kentucky and Indiana who make the winery their prime destination."

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Though a retro, homespun atmosphere prevails — volunteers crush the grapes and bottle the wine, and the musical acts in the dining room play for tips and sips — Henke is actually part of a modern urban winery revival that has taken root in at least a dozen cities, from Brooklyn to Oakland to Traverse City, Mich.

"I just took a chance," says Joe, a former machinist and hobbyist winemaker who founded a smaller version of the winery in 1996 in a nearby neighborhood before outgrowing it and moving to the current location. "But I've lived here all of my life, and I felt it could work."

So far it has: Visitation, production and sales have grown each year, and in 2007 his \$29.95 Norton Limited Edition, made from grapes grown 30 miles to the east, was named Ohio's best red wine in a statewide competition. Henke also trucks in grapes from California, Indiana, New York and Northern Ohio and produces about 1,500 cases of wine annually, up from 300 at the beginning. Nearly all of it is sold in the retail shop or the 125-seat restaurant, where tastes are offered for \$1 each.

Not tied to 'one piece of dirt'

Urban, industrial-style wineries have existed in America for 150 years or more, but the path the Henkes and their contemporaries are following more closely resembles the one blazed by craft brewers who opened hundreds of neighborhood brewpubs in the 1980s to sell their boutique ales and lagers.

This time, it's would-be vintners who are opening wineries, often with tasting rooms and retail shops attached, in downtown or industrial-park settings miles from the farms that produce the grapes. Rather than pay sky-high prices for land in wine country, they rent a space in the city, truck in fruit from a variety of regional vineyards and ferment and cellar the wine on site. Or, they process the juice at a co-op close to the vineyards, then finish it off in the city.

"There is a growing recognition that you really don't have to tie the winemaking to one piece of dirt," says Brendan Eliason, who in 2005 opened Periscope Cellars in a World War II submarine repair station in Emeryville, Calif., an industrial town at the eastern end of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. His winery/tasting room/art gallery has become a popular gathering spot and is part of an alliance of 15 East Bay urban wineries, most of which have opened in the past five years. A majority of those ventures, including Periscope, source their grapes from some of the vineyards that also supply the famous estates in Napa and Sonoma counties to the north.

"One of the great things about grapes is that they care a lot about where they're grown, but not at all where they're made into wine," says Eliason. The bring-the-wine-to-the-people sensibility also led Paul Wegimont and Greg Sandor to open Bridge Vineyards in Brooklyn, N.Y., last month. Their renovated space along the East River showcases their wines, along with those made by other artisans from around the state, in a tasting room and retail shop. For now they make their Merlot and Chardonnay about 90 miles away at a custom-crush facility near Long Island's North Fork vineyards, and ship it to Brooklyn. But with the 2008 harvest, they plan to make a portion of the wine in the city and then serve it along with tastings of dishes made with regional ingredients.

"The North Fork is beautiful wine country, and it was great to go there once or twice a year in summer, but what about the rest of the year?" asks Wegimont. "We really wanted to connect it to Brooklyn, to the city. It has been a great fit to be just under the Williamsburg Bridge, a stone's throw from Manhattan. There is much more of an artisanal community, and people care more about local food and co-ops and organics."

Customers can get their feet wet

While Henke, Periscope and Bridge are typical of the newer urban wineries, several other models also are developing followings. Urban Wineworks in Portland, Ore., has a winery, tasting bar and retail shop featuring Pinot Noirs and Pinot Grises that are made on site using grapes from the Willamette Valley 45 miles to the south. But customers also can create custom blends using components dispensed from taps at the bar, or make cases of their own wine from start to finish during a year-long winemaker apprenticeship program. D'Vine Wine, with 18 locations in five states, also offers customers a customizing approach, using bulk grape juice shipped from California's Central Valley.

"When we grow up, we would like to be just like Starbucks," says co-owner Reuel Fish, who opened Wineworks in 2000 and has replicated the concept on a smaller scale in several other locations. "We want to bring a product that once went through other distribution networks directly to the customer. A lot of people from Portland have out-of-town visitors, and rather than driving an hour each way, they can stop by and taste Oregon wine right there."

Another model, which has proved to be popular in San Diego and Canandaigua, N.Y., is the regional culinary center. These places don't have wineries on site, but they sell and offer samples of wines and food from a variety of producers in the region, present cooking and wine appreciation classes and stage special-event tastings.

Says John Alonge, who opened the San Diego Wine & Culinary Center in 2005 and doubled it to 8,000 square feet last year: "We're across the street from the convention center and the biggest hotels, so we get a constant parade of visitors who want to experience 'the bounty of the county.' They can do everything here except walk through the vineyards. It has become a true destination for wine aficionados."

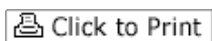
At the New York Wine & Culinary Center in Canandaigua, on the edge of New York's Finger Lakes Region, visitors receive a similar immersion in regional food and wine, via a restaurant, garden, wine-tasting room, exhibition kitchens, cooking and wine-tasting classes and special events. The \$7.5 million center has drawn more than 151,000 visitors since it opened in June 2006.

To varying degrees, all of these city-dwelling vintners say their aims are to demystify wine and reach new audiences, provide a place for locals and visiting oenophiles to hang out, and nudge palates toward deeper appreciation.

"People came in here drinking semi-sweet blends five years ago and now they're drinking Cabernets," says Joe Henke, who sells 15 varieties of wine. "The advantage we have is, instead of going to a supermarket and seeing a wall of wines that are indistinguishable from one another, they can come here and taste first, then select and be happy with the bottle they're taking home."

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