



"FIRST, WE DID THE VINEYARDS, THEN WE DID THE WINE CELLAR, THEN WE WORRIED ABOUT THE SALES. IN AMERICA, YOU USUALLY WORRY ABOUT THE SALES FIRST – ALL THE OTHER FRILLS COME LATER." – JOSEPH MAXIAN





VINEYARD OF DREAMS

Fairy tales can come true at
Sand Castle Winery

By Tina Henderson

The notion of producing world-class wines in Bucks County seemed like a fantasy at first. But Czechoslovakian immigrants Joseph and Paul Maxian, owners of the Sand Castle Winery, saw tremendous wine-making potential here. Back in 1985 they planted 40 acres of “vinifera” or wine-producing grapes on the banks of the Delaware River, about twelve miles north of New Hope on Route 32. The Maxian brothers combine an Old World knowledge of fine wine-making with each man’s respective expertise in engineering and geology, enabling them to produce wines of superior quality—classic wines descended from some of the finest European wine-making traditions. Joseph Maxian is quick to credit the locals in explaining his success.

“People really took us to heart,” he says. “Our survival is based on those who supported us when everybody else was saying, ‘Oh, Pennsylvania—give me a break!’”



THE CENTRAL DELAWARE VALLEY IS RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN THE WORLD CABERNET, CHARDONNAY, PINOT NOIR AND RIESLING GRAPES CAN GROW WITH EQUAL SUCCESS.

Skepticism aside, the Maxians had a lot in their favor from the beginning. With optimal geographic and weather conditions for vinifera plants, and the Maxians' life-long exposure to Old World wine-making methods, it seems the stars just lined up for Sand Castle Winery. In fact, the Central Delaware Valley is now recognized by the Federal Government as its own special viticulture district, one of the few places in the world where Cabernet, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Riesling grapes can actually grow with equal success.

"In this area we have the ability to produce some incredible wines," Maxian goes on. "My brother is a civil engineer and I'm a geologist. We have the right soil requirements here, and with this, we know how to make the plants thrive. You see, grapes are like humans—if you give them everything, they get lazy. But if you make them strive, they send the roots down fifteen feet into solid rock, and they really flourish."

The Maxians bought the original piece of property in 1974, adding additional land in 1987 to complete the 72-acre estate as it exists today. The brothers currently have 40 acres under cultivation, and plan to add between 5000 and 6000 plants every second year until the vineyard

TASTE TO THE MAX: MAXIAN SIPHONS A SAMPLING FROM A VINTAGE IN THE MAKING.



reaches its maximum planting of 50 acres. They selected all of their vines from the Mosel Valley region in Germany and the Burgundy and Bordeaux regions in France, selling their first vintage in 1988. While working towards that vintage, they survived by operating a construction company in nearby Ringoes, New Jersey. These days, the Sand Castle Winery enjoys a thriving business, filling orders from more than 100 restaurants, both stateside and internationally, with a fan base that just keeps growing.

"We did things the old European way, which by American standards is backwards," Maxian says. "First, we did the vineyards, and then we did the wine cellar, and then we worried about the sales. In America, you usually worry about the sales first – all the other frills come later."

Despite what seems like indefatigable energy, Maxian admits having struggled

can cover a variety of flaws, but when we produce a Chablis-style Chardonnay in pure, stainless steel containers, you can taste everything—there's little or no room for mistakes."

This spring, Sand Castle unveils the newest addition to the estate and perhaps its most magnificent. A 10,000 square foot "castle" will be opened on top of the existing wine cellar—its crowning glory. The castle will replace the tiny tasting room and adjacent canopy-covered outdoor patio where guests have perused Sand Castle's offerings, tasting wines alfresco style in the warm spring and summer months. The castle will be a showcase for what the vineyard proudly produces today, and Maxian says they've waited a very long time for this moment.

"Finally, our wines will get the presentation they deserve," he says. "Every bottle carries the castle insignia, so they are finally going to be getting a proper home, right here on top of

CRITICS LOVE THE SAND CASTLE RIESLING, AS WILL CALIFORNIA CHARDONNAY DRINKERS WITH A PENCHANT FOR THE DRY, BUTTERY TYPES.

through difficult times: "People ask me the secret of our success. I tell them it was the failure to quit. Somehow it has all paid off."

One of Sand Castle's greatest challenges: While the vineyard succeeds in producing interesting, unique wines which are hard to achieve, the truth is sometimes people aren't quite ready for them. Sand Castle is most famous for its Rieslings, yet it sells to a general public which consumes mostly White Zinfandel and Chardonnay. But critics praise the Sand Castle Riesling, as do California Chardonnay drinkers with a penchant for the dry, buttery types. Standing on the landing high atop Sand Castle's 7,000 square foot wine cellar, Maxian reflects on some of the differences between varieties.

"With Chardonnays, there's either an oak or a Chablis character to the flavor. It's like the difference between say sushi or Cajun style," he explains. "What people don't know is that the oak taste

this wine cellar. The castle will not only make us more comfortable, but people will get a better education throughout the year. The tent is no good in inclement weather and the tasting room is small and easily overrun, but with the castle, these problems will be eliminated."

Walking back up to ground level from the wine cellar, Maxian gazes out over the vineyard with great contentment. "I tell you," he says, "this place is beautiful 365 days a year. The fog will roll in and touch on the grapes, and from here, well sometimes it all looks like some kind of fairy tale." •

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