

The Adventures of Carolyn McHugh "The Traveling Apprentice" Spotlight on Perigeaux Vineyards and Winery

It was crush time (industry parlance for that magical time when grapes are crushed to produce juice that is then fermented into wine) at Perigeaux Vineyards and Winery in St. Leonard and I was there for my Traveling Apprentice assignment to help with the harvest. My husband, Gene, agreed to join me as a cellar rat (more lingo for an unskilled winery worker).

Perigeaux is owned by John Behun and Mark Flemming who started the winery in late 2001 and harvested their first grapes in 2005.

Harvesting is done by hand at Perigeaux so John gave us each a grapefork harvesting tool and a lug. The grapefork is a two pronged device with razor blades that safely severs clusters from the vine. The lugs are large plastic crates that hold 35-40 pounds of grapes and systematically stack on each other in a way that prevents crushing of the grapes during transportation.

John led us to a row of Zinfandel vines where he showed us the grapes to harvest and the ones to leave, pointing out elusive-clusters hidden under leaves and telling us it was easier to find them if we harvested from opposite sides of the vine.

Gene and I clipped our way down the rows, he on one side, me on the other, and enjoyed the warmth of the September sun and the camaraderie of nearly a dozen other laborers, mostly members of the owner's extended families. We were entertained as we worked by the high pitched laughter of Mark's elementary school- age nephews and niece, the good natured interplay between teenagers, and conversations with John's parents. We worked steadily and by the end of the day we'd collectively harvested 80 cases of Zinfandel, 45 cases of Montepulciano and 45 cases of Cabernet Franc, cases of grapes that wouldn't be ready for consumption until 2012.

Next came the process I'd been waiting for: crushing the grapes. My heart beat faster. For days I'd imagined tying a bandanna around my head, rolling up my pants legs, removing my shoes and hopping into a bin to stomp the grapes as I belted out a robust Italian song, ala scenes of Lucille Ball. Imagine my disappointment when- -after the MOG (materials other than grapes such as twigs, leaves, etc.) were removed- - the contents of the lugs were tilted into a *mechanical* de-stemmer that removed the stems, slightly crushed the grapes and dumped the must into a large microbins for the next step of the process.

Except for having my fantasy crushed by the appearance of the mechanical de-stemmer, being a cellar rat for a day was very satisfying. I even rationalized that it was probably for the best that my dreams had been thwarted: After all, I couldn't speak- - much less sing- - Italian and I have an aversion to putting my feet in squishy substances. I decided I'd just have to find comfort with the knowledge that in 2012 I could drink a glass of Perigueux wine that I'd had a hand (but not a foot) in making.



Look for next month's issue to find out about Carolyn's next assignment.