

Dominique, who has an extensive and fascinating background in winemaking, opened up the Gainesville store six years ago, just across the street from its current location, which it moved into in July 2009. After the Gainesville store proved to be a successful venture, the Frenchman opened up the Bethesda location in 2008, and the D.C. store a year and a half after that.

After studying nursing in Australia, Antoinette came to the U.S. with her parents and worked for a year at a wine shop in Richmond. When her father suggested that she run the shop in Gainesville, she was pleased with the idea. Discussing her background in wine, she said, "It was a language I learned how to speak. When my dad made the proposal for me to work in the shop, I thought it would be a great opportunity to work with my parents and people who had that type of experience."

Like most other wine specialty shops in the area, Cork & Fork offers wine tastings each week. After sampling up to 100 wines weekly, which are brought in by various distributors, Antoinette is particular in choosing her wines for the tastings, held on Saturdays from 1-5 p.m. She enjoys offering customers a taste of "whatever I fell in love with that week." On any given Saturday afternoon, shoppers passing the store will look in to find wine enthusiasts gathered near the stage that sits in the front window, tasting wines and socializing.

Cork & Fork occasionally holds specialty tastings, where four stations will be set up in the store. They also have an "open mic" night on the weekends, January through November. "We clear off the stage, and invite jazz groups, and open it up for people to bring their guitars and join in," said Antoinette.

During the winter holiday season, wine classes and seminars seating 12-24 people are often held. Antoinette explained that the sit-down tastings offer eight wines, along with food pairings. A speaker—usually the winemaker, someone from the Landragin family, or a representative from a distribution facility—often comes in to discuss the wine. "It's someone who I know has a lot of experience," said Antoinette. "I want the group to learn a lot about wine, and not just to come in and drink." Those interested in these events must sign up to participate. Information regarding all events is published in the shop's weekly electronic newsletter.

Antoinette and her small staff of three have a special relationship with a large number of their customers. "The majority of them consider us friends," she said, noting that that is what sets her shop apart from commercial wine shops and grocery stores. "We are lucky to be a close community. It's very family-based, and people are very warm and welcoming."

When it comes to purchasing wine, Antoinette focuses on getting a great value. She enjoys going with small production companies and tries to avoid mass corporation wineries that produce millions of bottles each year. "I want wines that I know will fit my clients' personality," she said. She feels that it is her responsibility to please her customers. "When you do something well, people will always expect that from you," she said. "I imagine 'What would I want to take home?' If it's good enough for me, I'm assuming it's good enough for them."

Both Antoinette and Alten have each been invited in previous years

to do judging for the Virginia Governor's Cup. "It gives me an opportunity to taste Virginia wines," said Antoinette. "There are some amazing wines in Virginia, and if I had the space, I would love to carry more." As it is now, Cork & Fork stocks more than 50 Virginia wines; others from all over the world, including Greece, France, and Italy; and numerous domestic wines as well. During the winter months, Antoinette tends to stock more red wines, while in the summertime, there are more whites. "We try and keep it pretty balanced throughout the year," she explained.

"It's a very enjoyable industry to be in," she said.

## The Winery at La Grange

Also located in western Prince William is The Winery at La Grange. Nestled on 20 acres in the foothills of the Bull Run Mountains, at 4970 Antioch Road in Haymarket, it is the only winery located in Prince William County.

"We are the local community winery," said Chris Pearmund, managing partner and executive winemaker at The Winery at La Grange. "In times of economic difficulty, people don't need to go to Napa; they can get away [from it all] and have a great time [by visiting their local winery]."

The Winery at La Grange is truly a thing of beauty, but it wasn't always that way. In fact, in June 2005, the Prince William County Historical Commission reported that it was in such a state of disrepair that it may have to be torn down. However, La Grange was spared from such a fate when, in December 2005, it was purchased by PWC Winery, LLC, and the tedious process of restoring and renovating the outbuildings and surrounding property as well as the three-story circa 1790 manor house began.

Pearmund said the long process of restoring the property was definitely worth the effort. "The uniqueness and historical significance of [the property] have made it the perfect location for the winery," he said. The property now includes a vineyard, the restored manor house/converted tasting room where wine is served and paired with foods from the region, an historic smokehouse, a patio area with fireplace, a historic springhouse and a modern "barn" where wine is processed and stored.

The Winery at La Grange is open year-round, seven days a week, save for New Year's Day, Easter, Christmas Day and Thanksgiving. They offer a wine selection that includes a Pinot gris, Viognier, rosé, cuvee blanc, Norton, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, meritage, Tannat, a port-style wine fondly named "Snort," and the famed Fletcher's Chardonnay, as well as a selection of prepackaged foods. **PW**

*Linda Ross Pugel is a 30-year resident of Prince William County, and currently resides in the Lake Ridge area with her husband and son. She holds a bachelor's degree in communications from Virginia Wesleyan College. Ross Pugel can be reached by email at [lpugel@princewilliamliving.com](mailto:lpugel@princewilliamliving.com).*