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GOLD MEDAL WINNER CALLS WINE 'A LABOR OF LOVE'

Louis and Madeline Piancone of Piscataway, New Jersey recently were honored with medals from The American Wine Society's 2008 Amateur Wine Competition held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Over 440 wines were submitted from amateur wine makers from around the US.

Louis and Madeline started making wine in 1992. Years prior, Lou always said that one day he would like to learn the craft. As a child, he had memories of his father and grandfather making wine in their homes.

Lou and Madeline decided to venture into this new hobby. In September of 1992, they decided to start this process. Initially, with the help of

Lou's father, he purchased the necessary equipment to get started. His father was born and raised on a farm in Puglia, Italy and his experience with winemaking was part of what his grandparents did. Lou would frequently sit with his father for daily winemaking lessons. Now he needed grapes and a little physical help.

The winemaking crew that first year was his wife Madeline and her mom. They had an employee who helped maintain the grounds of their family business. He loved to make wine and offered to help that first year. He also offered to go to the market where they sold wine grapes to help pick the right varieties and quantities. His name was Giuseppe and he became the Piancone's winemaking helper for the next seven or eight years. Madeline's Uncle Duke also offered his help.

They blended equal amounts of Zinfandel, Grenache and Alicante grapes. They made three 50-gallon barrels of red wine that first year. For their first shot, the wine came out pretty good. 150 gallons was aggressive but it all came out great.

The family's two-car garage became the winery, so dedication to cleanliness kept the cars on the driveway year round. Today the Piancone's still make wine out of that garage. The name of the street they live on is Winterberry Circle, so during the early years of winemaking, the family decided to call the winery/garage "Winterberry Winery."

Soon after the first few years of this hobby, the Piancones took a stab at making white wine. This process is a bit different than red. "I find making white more challenging than red," Lou said.

In 1995 Lou made some changes to his winemaking process. He started using yeast cultures to start fermentation rather than using the wild

yeasts that are natural on the grapes, and started using sulfites which helped preserve the wines. That year he ventured into making different varieties. "I made a barrel of Merlot. It was also my second year making white wine. The Merlot grapes I bought that year were almost perfectly balanced. That had to be one of the finest wines I have made in my 16 years of winemaking," Lou said.

After a while, the Piancones became friendly with other winemakers. They were soon encouraged to enter their wines in an annual NJ Amateur Home Winemaking competition. "Initially I felt uncomfortable about this, thinking that my wine can never compete with wine made

from experienced home winemakers," Madeline said. "After making that marvelous Merlot in 1995, we gained some confidence to enter this wine in our first American Wine Society's NJ Home Wine competition."

The AWS is a national organization that promotes the appreciation of wine through education. The local chapters in New Jersey organize an annual competition and hold the final judging at the NJ Wine Festival, at that time, was held at Waterloo Village in Stanhope, New Jersey.

That Merlot that the Piancones thought was so fabulous, really was! "We won first place for the best red wine in our first competition. We also entered

our 1995 Chardonnay and that received a second place for the white wine category," Lou explains.

"Since the day I received my first award, I have gone on and entered many competitions; locally, nationally and internationally," Lou said. "I have received many medals and ribbons and received three Best of Show awards. The feeling is indescribable to receive an award based on the ability of your winemaking skills."

Louis and Madeline have won three gold medals, one silver medal, and four bronze medals for their wines. They have been members of the AWS/Raritan Valley Chapter since 1994.

"We are thrilled to recognize Lou and Madeline Piancone for their fantastic wine. This is an elite group of people who deserve recognition for this outstanding accomplishment," says Mary Ann Coskery, National Executive Director of the American Wine Society.

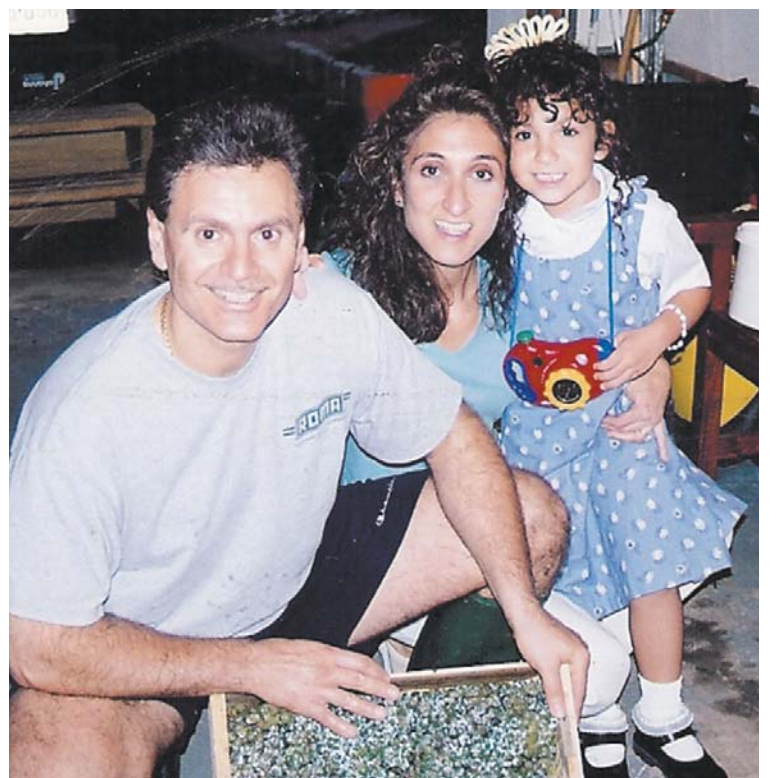
The Piancones have no vineyard experience but someday would like to have the opportunity to own a small winery. "Winemaking is hard work but it is labor of love," Lou said.



LOU AND MADELINE'S gold-medal winners.



LOU'S DAUGHTER MARISSA helps him push down the must.



LOU, MADELINE AND MARISSA pose with a case of beautiful white grapes.