

Details are delicious

Review of Pepper's Ridge Winery

by Casey Uebelhor

"I have no fear when I blend," professes Kevin DeWeese, owner and vintner at Pepper's Ridge Winery, Rockport. "I'm a blender. I worked 30 1/2 years at Alcoa, and my expertise was blending metals for cost. That place made 1.6 million pounds of new metal *a day*."

DeWeese is tenacious, honest and specific. Particular?

Yes, but he's not afraid to gamble.

His endearing quirks are shown off perfectly by one of his premier wines — *Small Town White (Happy Trails)*.

"I got outside the box," he nods. "I did so many different things. Nobody could ever copy this wine."

The butter-smooth aroma of melon (and mango?) breezes from a glass of this pale-as-wheat white. "My vision was that if you're a micro-brewery drinker and you like citrus, you'll like this," DeWeese explains.

The wine's aroma does nothing to prepare the taster for its flavor. "I took a chance," he admits.

It paid off.

Happy Trails leaps around, dazzling the tongue with a dewy spice and never-too-tart

finish. Don't be fooled: it's not a sweet. This wine is listed as semi-dry, and is elite enough to be so. (In terms of taste, it's downright *aristocratic*.)

Don't pair it with anything. Don't even think about 'accompaniment'. This wine is — in and of itself — *the item*. So just relax and enjoy the citrus-canopy-serenity — the melt-across-your-mouth smoothness — that can only be created by a true taste-testing perfectionist.

This reviewer is not the only one to think it's special. *Small Town White (Happy Trails)* won the Historic Newburgh 2016 Gold Medal in the Sweet White category.

"It's the only place that we enter wines for competition," tells DeWeese of the Historic Newburgh Wine, Art and Jazz Festival. "It's like the Peoples' Choice Awards...It's your customers. Not just judges."

On Friday night at the Newburgh Festival, visitors pay for a meal and tasting, voting for their favorite wines as they go. DeWeese appreciates this structure,

knowing the feedback he receives comes from connoisseurs and casual tasters alike. "Last year, out of five divisions, we won three golds and a bronze — that's out of sixteen wineries," DeWeese asserts.

Looking for something dark and wintry? *Hoosier Red (Chambourcin & Cabernet)* will have you dreaming of fuzzy socks and flannel pajamas. Ask Santa to slip it in your Christmas stocking! It's cozy, not oak-y, and will pair with smoked meats and a warm Gouda. *Hoosier Red* is another Historic Newburgh 2016 Gold Medal winner (Dry Red category) and is a *must-try* at this year's Christkindmarkt.

(Look for Pepper's Ridge in the Monastery Event Center.)

If your fall entertaining calls for a white, you'll be hard-pressed to find a more suitable wine than DeWeese's *Bluff City White (Cayuga)*. This dry beauty (golden as a Klimt) begs to be served with a platter of cheese and chewy bread. Have it with Parmesan-crusted chicken or a creamy cold pasta salad. "It's dry, but it's real fruity," DeWeese describes. He's not wrong, but don't take "fruity" to mean lacking in sophistication. Serve this wine and your table *will* impress.

Or take a bottle and some blankets



Nothing trendy here — Pepper's Ridge is decorated with an eye toward the old-fashioned. There are hand tools everywhere — antiquities that are no longer in use — pitchers and jugs, cowbrands, hand drills. DeWeese makes sure the place is perfectly groomed, curating with the precision he brings to his wine-tasting. As a result, the tasting room contains no kitsh, only charming, stylish appeal.



Setting the bar — In case you're wondering, the canoe above the bar is decidedly not for sale. "I've had a ton of offers," affirms owner Kevin DeWeese. This gorgeous, memorable feature originated in Old Town, Maine.

— Photos by Casey Uebelhor

down by the river! This wine is perfect for a late autumn picnic. (Don't we all know Rockport is known as Bluff City?) "I grew up in Spencer County. Life-long citizen," says DeWeese, who knew exactly what he was doing when he named this memorable wine. And, yes, it's another 2016 Gold medal finisher.

DeWeese's father, Glenn DeWeese, and his grandfather, Earl DeWeese, shared the nickname, 'Pepper'. You guessed it — that's where Pepper's Ridge gets its name.

The name is accented in red lettering on the refined black background of a Pepper's Ridge label. A setting-sun bullseye frames the silver outline of a huntsman and his hound. The label is notable and stylish — just like the bare-wood interior of the winery, the bar top crafted from poplar from the surrounding woods, the bar posts made of reclaimed beams from a barn razed in the 1890s.

"The brick on the bar we found tucked back here in the woods," DeWeese tells, "And so we used it."

DeWeese believes in buying American: his blueberries come from Michigan, most of his fruits he buys locally. His *Lakeview Peach* is named for Lakeview Orchard, rural Rockport, where DeWeese acquires his peaches, apples and plums.

(Continued on page 4)