

Great Wine Great Idea

St. Helena Couple Plan To let people "adopt" their vineyard.

Story and photo by Jim Brumm

A good idea is a beautiful thing. And Peter and Paulette Story of St. Helena have a good idea. They are in the final stages of opening their new winery, St. Helena Winery. After two years, all the

permits are in, it's all approved. It's ready to go.

They have a by-appointment tasting room like many wineries. But unlike most wineries, you can't buy their wine no matter how much you like it. And it's good wine - once you taste it you'll want some. But, sorry, it's not for sale.

Instead, Peter and Paulette are offering something they think you'll like even more. In place of selling you a bottle of wine, they will sell you the vine it came from. Well, you don't really *buy* the vine, you adopt it. Let me explain.

For just \$79.95 per year, you can "adopt a vine," and "own" a piece of the Napa Valley. Adopting a vine gets you a certificate of adoption, an engraved metal tag hanging on your vine, right out there in the vineyard, with your name and the date you adopted it and a photo of your vine.

All St. Helena Winery vine adopters also receive a bottle or two of the winery's fine wine each year. "You're not buying the wine," explains Peter. "The wine is a gift from the vine. Each year around the holidays, each vine owner will get a letter, asking if they would like to receive either one bottle of our Sympa Reserve Cabernet, or two bottles of Scandale, our estate Cabernet."

Sitting on the shaded porch of

their vineyard home, Peter and Paulette tell of their journey to the valley. "We can't believe how lucky we are to have landed here," said Paulette. The couple moved to the valley in 1994, scouting out a place to make their dream.

Peter, originally from the east coast, worked for years at Sun Microsystems selling computers. Paulette grew up in San Francisco.

Peter is loving his new-found life path. He was recently elected President of the Napa Valley Home Winemakers Association. He has been learning the winemaking trade with the help of a mentor and his eyes sparkle as he discusses hang time and brix and sugar levels. A delivery truck pulls up as we visit and Peter leaps up with a grin. "It's my new one-ton basket press," he says, "I've got to go use my forklift!" and runs off. Paulette smiles at him as he leaves.

Later, Peter explains his Adopt-A-Vine idea further. "People want a different experience," he said. "What do you get for Uncle George for Christmas? Now you can give him his own piece of the Napa Valley. And he and any others who adopt our vines can come here anytime to visit their vine. We'll show them right where it is. Before the holidays he'll get a notice that a gift from his vine and its sisters is waiting for him."

The Sympa Reserve is a beautiful, intensely-dark, Cabernet - a Big Red. If you love big Cabernets you will love this young, yet smooth wine. Peter says he will never produce more than a thousand cases.

Adopt a vine, get a bottle. Adopt twelve vines, get a case. In a world where wine commonly goes for \$75 and up in tasting rooms, the \$79.95 price tag, along with the novelty of an adoption certificate and photo of your vine, makes this a unique gift idea.

As far as the Storys know, St. Helena Winery will be the first to offer vine adoption as a way to market wine.

The Storys have 12,000 vines waiting for adoption. A good idea? You do the math.

St. Helena Winery can be reached at 707-967-WINE.



Peter and Paulette Story stroll through their St. Helena vineyard