

MAY 11, 2007

## Day Trips

BY GERALD E. MCLEOD

### Windy Hill Winery

Photo By Gerald E. McLeod

The **Windy Hill Winery** is doing some interesting things with locally grown grapes. The little winery north of Brenham makes eight wines using some uncommon varieties with good results. Each offering may reflect the charm of the winemaker, but each has its own character and personality.

"We're in Texas, and we like our wines cold," says August Meitzen from behind the bar in the small tasting room next to his vineyard and house. "In France, room temperature is 69 degrees. In Texas it's 100 degrees." As he chuckles his eyes twinkle at the obviously well-used lines.

The winery is a hobby gone wild, according to August's wife, Linda. Pretty and energetic, she has taken an active interest in the winery. "August has always enjoyed making things," she said. She wouldn't reveal any of his less-than-successful projects.

When he retired from the finance business, August became intrigued with supplementing their food supply with crops grown on their property outside of Dripping Springs. "We made jellies, sauces, and beer," Linda says. "We figured out pretty quickly that we really didn't care for beer, and the kids were drinking it all."

"The problem with the land around Dripping Springs," August says, "is that all of the dirt is at the bottom of the hill. If you live on the side of the hill or at the top, it's all rocks."

Although August was interested in attempting to make whiskey, federal rules convinced them to start experimenting with winemaking instead, first with a winemaking kit and then using juices from California. Pretty soon August was planting grapevines in their back yard. "We practiced a lot on our friends," Linda says.

By 2000, they had moved to the Brenham area to be halfway between family in Houston and Austin. "Plus the soil is so good here, you can grow anything," Linda says.

August planted six acres of grapevines on the hilltop overlooking the rolling hills of Washington County. "Cold settles in the low lands," he says. On the hill, the vines have good soil and air circulation.

In 2005, the Meitzens opened the doors of Windy Hill Winery with their first public offering of about 200 cases. "It was a tremendous leap, going from home brewing to commercial winemaking," Linda says. They had help from the T.V. Munson Viticulture Enology Center at Grayson County College in Denison.

The grapes come from five neighboring vineyards growing American hybrid varieties. "It's been a fascinating journey," Linda says. "We've made a lot of progress in a short time." The winery went from 800 cases in its second year to 1,500 cases last year.

According to August, their bestselling wine is the Yellow Rose, a Blanc du Bois blend. The white wine is made in a Riesling style with a crisp, sweet finish that is best served cold.

The second bestseller is the Tejas Port made from estate-grown LeNoir or Black Spanish grapes. This is a full-bodied wine with a high alcohol content.

If you want high alcohol content, try Windy Hill Winery's Texan, a blend of Muscadine and Wild Mustang grapes. The native Mustang grapes come from near Dime Box, and the 1800s recipe came from the Washington County archives.

They might not be their bestsellers, but the Meitzens' reds are some of their most interesting wines and their personal favorites. The locally grown Shiraz wine shows that the international grape can do well in Texas. The barrel-aged Shiraz has a strong bouquet, but the oak mutes the fruit flavors that are more noticeable in the regular Shiraz. The winery also introduced a wine using the Chambourcin grape as the main ingredient instead of using it to blend other wines.

"We want our wines to be a fun experience," Linda says. "The wine tastings should be an educational and growing experience that starts or adds to a love of wines."

Windy Hill Winery is about 10 miles north of Brenham off of TX 50 at 4232 Clover Rd. The tasting room is open Thursday through Saturday, 11am to 5pm, and Sunday, 1 to 5pm. To get in touch with the winemaker, call 979/836-3252 or go to [www.windyhillwinery.net](http://www.windyhillwinery.net).

