

SIPS

Stars were aligned, so they bought a New Zealand vineyard

By **Ellen Bhang** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 07, 2013

Many wine enthusiasts dream about owning a vineyard. Few turn those musings into reality. When Arlington resident Beth Ann Dahan, 47, tells people that she, her husband, and a business partner purchased 60 acres of vines in New Zealand, and recently produced 1,100 cases of pinot noir, people invariably ask, “Why New Zealand?”

Dahan, a wine educator at Boston University, explains that she and her husband, Arié, 43, who grew up in Paris, fell in love with the pristine beauty of Central Otago, on the South Island of New Zealand. They were impressed with the energetic wines produced there and the tight-knit community of sustainability-minded growers. Looking to turn their passion for wine into a new venture (Arié Dahan and business partner Max Risman, 42, work together in finance) the three launched Vela Wines in 2011. The company is named for a constellation shaped like ship sails, seen in the Southern Hemisphere.

The name of their line is “Twelfth Night” because of something that happened to them while traveling. “It was our first trip to New Zealand to look for a vineyard,” Beth Ann Dahan says. “On the twelfth night of the trip, we visited an observatory. We were blown away by the stars. The next day, we found the vineyard.” After the moment when the stars aligned, they assembled their team, which includes Anthony Worch, Vela’s winemaker. Originally from Alsace, France, Worch and his crew are based at the vineyard. The Dahans and Risman are “very hands-on,” says Dahan. “We’re in daily contact to make sure wines are the style we’re looking for.”

At a recent tasting at Menotomy Beer & Wine in Arlington, Dahan poured the 2012 pinot noir, as well as a lively riesling, made with grapes from a neighboring vineyard. Mary Parent, owner and wine buyer at the shop, was the first to purchase Vela wines (currently only available in Massachusetts). “We took them in because they are

awesome,” Parent says. “When we can tell customers we know [the Dahans], that they live in Arlington, and shop at our store, that’s really great.”

As for other enthusiasts who hope one day to purchase a vineyard, Dahan has this advice: “It’s wonderfully rewarding, and a lot of hard work. You need to go into it with your eyes wide open.”

Vela is hiring an associate to supervise its seasonal crew in Central Otago. Aspiring vineyard owners, take notice.

VELA WINES “Twelfth Night” Pinot Noir Central Otago 2012

A young, fresh food wine, offering aromas of ripe cherry, newly turned soil, and an elegant undergirding of toastiness from old and new French oak. Energetic acidity balances alcohol (14.3 percent) while fine-grained tannins give it some appetizing pucker. Finishes with red fruit and spice. Around \$22. At Menotomy Beer & Wine, Arlington, 781-646-0889; Brookline Liquor Mart, Allston, 617-734-7700; Savour Wine & Cheese, Gloucester, 978-282-1455; Curtis Liquors, Weymouth, 781-331-2345, or go to www.velawines.com.

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