

Regional Wine Week features Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard

By Scott Greenberg

I am proud to participate this week in the first — of what I hope will be an annual event — Regional Wine Week, created by Washington Post wine writer Dave McIntyre and freelance wine journalist/blogger Jeff Siegel.

Dave and Jeff conceived this project as a way to bring local wines into the media spotlight and turn readers and consumers onto wines that simply don't get enough attention, even though they are delicious and deserving. During the week of Oct. 6, wine journalists representing a variety of newspapers and blogs from across the country will cover some of their favorite "local" wines.

Dave loosely defines local wine as "any wines not from the West Coast." He continues, "The U.S. wine industry has exploded in growth this decade, with most of it coming outside California."

True enough. And because I am lucky enough to live in Maryland — and close to Virginia — I found a number of worthy wines to shine the proverbial spotlight on. So for the inaugural column, I decided to cover a local wine right in my own backyard; Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyards, located in the rolling hills of Comus, Md., in the northwest corner of Montgomery County,

Sugarloaf, originally known as Windmill Farm, began its life as a cattle farm and weekend getaway destination for Daniel O'Donoghue. Located only 40 minutes from Washington, Daniel wanted a family retreat close-enough-but-far-enough from the city where he and his large clan could congregate for holidays and special occasions. After his passing in 2001, his four children needed to figure out what to do with the property. A fortuitous family trip to Napa Valley in 2002 set the wheels in motion. They returned home with a vision of wine grapes dancing in their heads and a new life for their newly inherited farm.

From the beginning of their adventure, the four children, Daniel, Lois, Carol and Phil, made a pledge to undertake this project only if they

could produce fine-quality wines of distinction. They were committed to excellence.

They had the property tested and it turns out that the soil composition of the vineyard, located in the shadow of Sugarloaf Mountain, and the microclimates in the region greatly favor many of the red Bordeaux varietals. Today, Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard has more than 19,000 vines planted, mostly to cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, petite verdot and malbec. Chardonnay and pinot gris round out the two white varietals on the property. All of the grapes in the vineyard are hand-picked over several days to ensure proper ripeness. The state-of-the-art winery — the only one in Montgomery County — produces more than 4,500 cases

of wine. Most of the wine is aged in French oak barrels prior to bottling.

You can go there and check it out for yourself. Information can be found on the vineyard's Web site at smvwinery.com.

Here are a few of my favorite wines from the Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard portfolio. Availability and prices are subject to change.

2007 Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard Pinot Grigio (\$17)

I just recently tried this wine and

was blown away by its fresh, crisp flavors of green melon, gala apple, passion fruit and nectarine — all kept in check by the abundant acidity. Notes of citrus on the medium finish gave it a nice "zing" and made me long for one last warm summer evening.

2006 Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard Chardonnay Reserve (\$22)

The appealing nose of nectarine, roasted nuts and floral notes are joined by flavors of green apple, nectarine and pineapple. Subtle hints of lemon peel and toasted almonds sneak in on the evenly balanced finish.



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