

# DAMIANI 2010 RESERVE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

*A record breaking red*

BY SALLY KRAL

Seneca Lake's Damiani Wine Cellars has always been somewhat of an anomaly in the Finger Lakes for its focus on red wine production in a region so well known for its whites. But their dedication to red wine has paid off: In October, *Wine Spectator's* James Molesworth awarded Damiani's 2010 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon the highest rating to-date for a Finger Lakes red wine—90 points out of a possible 100. So what goes into creating this record-breaking wine and what does this mean for the region? We spoke with co-founder Lou Damiani to find out.

**Sally Kral:** First off, congratulations on this impressive accolade.

**Lou Damiani:** Thank you; we're excited about it. The odd thing is that it's a Cabernet Sauvignon—who would've thought that would be the grape to achieve this? I would have guessed a Pinot Noir or a Cab Franc, since that's what's so widely produced here. But we've been making good Cabernet Sauvignon for years and I think *Wine Spectator* looks at things like that—they don't go for flukes.

**SK:** Can you tell me a little bit about production of the 2010 Reserve?

**LD:** My wine philosophy is that wine is 50–75 percent made in the vineyard. You can't make a good wine from bad grapes. My partner Phil Davis, our viticulturist, grows excellent Cabernet Sauvignon on select sites with gravelly, loamy soil and good canopy. We do vertical shoot positioning on some and Scott Henry shoot positioning [*ed.* Where vines are trained to point downwards] on the others, so we're grabbing all the sunlight we can to produce a ripe grape. The trick with these Cabernets—especially Sauvignon—is it takes time on the vine to develop and ripen those tannins. The tannins need to be dark, rich and complex. To ensure that the

grapes fully ripen, it's important not to over-crop and to give them time to hang. We're also really careful not to over-oak—we're not Napa, we're not Bordeaux. It's important to be true to your own region, so I use some oak aging (around 12–14 months) to make a velvety wine with rich color. Another important factor in this wine is that it's unfiltered and unfinned, which was important to adding to the suppleness of it.

**SK:** How has the response been among consumers?

**LD:** There's been a definite uptick in sales of the 2010 Reserve. We only produced about 300 cases, so it'll be gone fast! But I think the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon is even better than the 2010, so we're excited for the next few years with our Cab Sauvs.

**SK:** What was it like to receive news of the rating? What do you think a 90-rated red wine will do for the Finger Lakes wine region?

**LD:** It felt great to get that recognition that yes, beautiful red wines can be produced in the Finger Lakes. Phil and I got into this business with the stubborn idea that we could produce reds here and we've stuck to that. So it's been great to show that if they're grown right and made right, we can make some beautiful, food-friendly, big wines here. Ultimately we just do what we do and hope it gets noticed and translates into some appreciation and sales for the region.

We may be the first to break the 90, but there are a handful of other wineries in this region that are really helping put Finger Lakes reds on the map of world-class wines. That's what's really exciting; we're all doing this together and it feels really good.

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