

# Toujours la Tour

## VINO VIRGINIA PROVIDES UPSCALE EXPERIENTIAL-THEMED WINE TOURS



Kim Ciftci (left) and Paul Bauman (right)



The private tasting at The Winery at La Grange



BY LINDA BARRETT

Chris Pearmund with the first, and autographed bottle, along with Dawn Tollus

Photos courtesy of Linda Barrett

I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE AMONG THE HAPPY PEOPLE WHO ARRIVE AT OUR LOCAL WINERIES IN BUSES AND VANS. THEY ALWAYS SEEM TO BE LAUGHING AND ENJOYING OTHER PEOPLE'S COMPANY. CURIOSITY GOT THE BEST OF ME, SO I RECENTLY TOOK MY FIRST WINE TOUR.

I selected a new tour company, Vino Virginia, that offers "upscale, experiential-themed wine tours." Run by Paul Bauman and Mr. Kim Ciftci, the company currently offers four unique wine experiences, with plans for more.

But back to the tour.

We were met at a convenient location by the Vino Virginia van and heartily welcomed by Paul and Kim. A great start. After brief introductions to the others on our tour, we were underway. Kim sharing the fascinating and colorful histories of each winery, peppered with interesting facts about the history of wine in Virginia.

Ours was the Boutique & Craft Winery Tour that included stops at The Winery at La Grange, Marterella Winery, and Pearmund Cellars, where we were provided with a unique hands-on experience.

### *The Winery at La Grange*

The first experience was laid out before us at a long, elegant table in the winery's barrel room, with half-rounds of tasting glasses filled at each place setting. We were treated to a morning with Jim Koennicke, the assistant winemaker, who personally guided us through La Grange's finest wines and wine-making processes as we noshed on gourmet meats and cheeses. We noted that many barrels had engraved plaques on them and learned about the industry's latest offering: barrel sponsorship.

### *Marterella Winery*

Our second stop took us to the beautiful Marterella Winery where owner Kate Marterella herself took us under her wing. Warmed by her friendly personality and hand-made pizzas from the winery's outdoor wood-burning oven, we settled in as old friends to enjoy the wine, the view, and the enchanting porch swing. Already, our little group had bonded, and we shared stories into the afternoon.

### *Pearmund Cellars*

At our third stop, we were welcomed to Pearmund Cellars by owner Chris Pearmund, a legend in the Virginia wine industry. He personally showed us the facility before taking us into the vineyard itself to offer a fascinating insider's view on the business of winemaking. Not only did we enjoy tastings of their fine wines along with gourmet treats, we were the first to tap into the latest vintage, filling a bottle from the stainless steel tank ourselves. Chris Pearmund personally autographed the bottle as a gift.

Throughout the day, winery personnel treated us like VIP patrons, and we got to really see and understand the passion





Dawn Tollus pouring the first bottle at Pearmund Cellars

Chris Pearmund giving a talk in the vineyard while Gary Altman looks on

that goes into owning and running a winery first-hand. "I had no idea what to expect, and this tour far exceeded my expectations," said Dawn Tollus.

### *Vino Virginia Tours*

Tour operators Paul Bauman and Kim Ciftci developed a passion for wine individually before meeting each other and forming Vino Virginia. Paul's background includes a quest for adventure and hospitality focused on increasing tourism. Kim's background includes finding his own adventures in his Washington, D.C. backyard. An ordained minister, he combines his passion for ministry and interest in wine into sermons from the Vine, preaching Sunday morning sermons from one of several vineyards on a rotating basis. He also performs weddings, baptisms, and vineyard blessings as the *de facto* "Pastor to the Vineyards."

"Vino Virginia started around discussions on my deck over wine and cigars," Bauman said. "We wanted to differentiate ourselves and provide a high-end experience, and we wanted people to really experience not just going to the wineries, but the other unique things there are to do in our particular area."

The pair themed their current tours based on local interests: Boutique and Craft Winery; Passion for Food, Wine and Life; The Civil War; and The Hunt Country and Stable Tour, with additional themes being planned. Tours are held mainly on Saturdays, with corporate event and special groups by appointment.

"Our whole strategy is to provide our clientele with special experiences they can't get anywhere else," Bauman

continues. "Our guests get to meet with senior members or owners at each winery and venue, in small intimate groups where they can personally interact while enjoying premium wine and food tastings."

Paul and Kim, along with any additional Vino Virginia tour guides, are all Certified Tour Ambassadors™ for The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership, a four-state, 180-mile long historic region spanning Gettysburg, PA to Monticello in Virginia. Through their training, they became experts in the unique aspects of this area and share their knowledge with interesting commentary along the tour, adding yet another level of exclusivity.

Traveling with other people didn't turn out to be a problem, because we didn't remain strangers for long. "Everyone was so nice, and the experience was so fun that we want to go again and bring our friends and family on future experiences," said Gary and Liz Altman.

Each trip is unique and focused on providing a first-class experience. Every detail is attended to, so all you have to do is sit back, relax, and enjoy your Vino Virginia tour of choice. You'll be rewarded with the best Virginia has to offer, including its world-class wines. ♦

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## VINO VIRGINIA WINE TOURS

### BOUTIQUE & CRAFT WINERY TOUR

Experience the true spirit of winemaking as winery owners and senior staff at these family-owned cellars take you through the history, processes, and business of winemaking, while enjoying private tastings, and gourmet appetizers and lunch.

### PASSION FOR FOOD, WINE & LIFE TOUR

Enjoy the perfect pairings of Virginia wine and gourmet food in this tour that transports guests back in time to the early days of our history. Visit a historic tavern for a sumptuous pairing of locally-sourced delicacies, and tastings at notable wineries.

### THE BLUE & GRAY EXPERIENCE

Some of the richest history of the Civil War took place in our own backyard. Experience the rich American history that unfolded in Virginia during the Civil War, while visiting battlefield areas and historically-themed wineries for tastings and gourmet foods.

### THE HUNT COUNTRY AND STABLE TOUR

On a fairytale adventure into the heart of Virginia's Hunt County, guests have the opportunity to mingle on the exclusive grounds frequented by Washington, D.C.'s elite at three distinctly different wineries owned by famous and wealthy entrepreneurs who craft limited-production wines, along with introductions to polo, dressage, fox hunt, steeplechases, and barn tours. Tastings and gourmet appetizers and lunch included.