



## TECHNICAL REVIEW

# Messina Hof Wine Cellars

Linda Jones McKee

## The Beginning of the Modern Texas Wine Industry

**TEXAS HAS A HISTORY** of growing grapes and making wine that goes back to the second half of the 19th century, but when Prohibition ended in 1933, the state had one winery that managed to survive. Val Verde Winery, founded in 1883, remained Texas' only winery until the 1970s, when the interest in starting wineries East of the Rockies began to increase. When Paul Vincent Bonarrigo and his wife Merrill bought some land in Bryan, Texas and founded Messina Hof Wine Cellars in 1977, it was the fourth winery in the state. Probably not one of the winery owners at that time could have predicted that in 2021, the state of Texas would have a total of 490 wineries, with only California, Oregon and Washington having larger numbers of wineries.

Paul V. was a physical therapist with a six-generation family tradition of winemaking dating back to the Bonarrigos' original home in Messina, Sicily. One of his patients, Ron Perry (who later became a professor of horticulture at Michigan State University), suggested that they should plant a one-acre experimental vineyard on the Bonarrigos' land. They planted 26 different varietals on that acre.

Paul Mitchell Bonarrigo (Paul V. and Merrill's son) told *Wine Business Monthly*, "That initial one-acre vineyard was really what sparked the beginnings of our winery story. Through all those trials, they determined that the best variety for the vineyard – and the region – was Lenoir. As part of the follow-up research, they determined that Blanc Du Bois also was a very strong variety for our region."

When the vineyard began to produce fruit, Paul V. started to do some small scale, hobby winemaking between 1981 and 1983. According to Paul M., his dad "found an incredible amount of joy and quality that came from the fruit. The hobby project got to the point where it was a pretty sizeable scale. Before 1983, they had gotten up to over 500 gallons. He was at the point of having a



ALL PHOTOS MESSINA HOF

Merrill and Paul V. with their first grape press

used milk tank and some old whisky barrels as part of their operation." After the winery was bonded in 1983, the first vintages of commercial Messina Hof wine were made from a combination of fruit from the estate and from the High Plains.





## Fast Forward to 2021

Today, 38 years later, Messina Hof Wine Cellars has 28 acres of vineyard that they own, and contracts with grape growers primarily from the Hill Country and the High Plains for 600 to 900 acres of grapes each year. The winery produces between 60,000 and 65,000 cases each season and makes 85 different wines for sale, not only at the original estate winery in Bryan but also at retail locations in Fredericksburg, Grapevine, and Richmond (near Houston). Messina Hof is now the fourth largest winery in Texas and produces wines from 33 varietals of grapes, all of which are grown in Texas.

How did the Bonarrigos succeed in expanding Messina Hof as a winery in a state without much of a support structure for a grape and wine industry?

Paul M. provided some answers. “My parents always have been great marketers, both for Texas wine and for Messina Hof,” he said. “They made some really intelligent moves back then. A lot of wineries were thinking of wine from the perspective of ‘Hey, we need to get into *Wine Spectator*. We need to get it into wine publications in New York and nationally.’ My parents were less focused on that and were more focused on regional partnerships and tourism. They were focused on smaller organizations and cities like Houston and Austin that would help to promote Texas wine.” In 1984, the Bonarrigos started two festivals: Springfest (which later became the Wine & Roses Festival) celebrates the budding of the vines and the blooming of the roses, and their first Harvest Festival.

“In the late ’90s period we actually started to see a very significant uptick in our traffic from the Houston market especially. Of course, we had the advantage of having Texas A&M which does have a draw in terms of the customer, the people who come to town. And students who go to Texas A&M—I can’t



Messina Hof Wine Cellars’ primary location is in Bryan, Texas, which is a close neighbor of College Station, Texas, the home of Texas A&M University. The estate location includes 18 acres of vineyard, the Messina Hof tasting room, The Vintage House Restaurant, The Villa Bed & Breakfast, and the winery production facility.

tell you how many, probably hundreds, have told me, ‘I went to Texas A&M and I love Messina Hof because that was the first wine I ever had.’

“We’re all about education and we do have a unique opportunity to touch a lot of students that are here to have their early wine experiences and educate them about wine. The other piece is that people travel to Bryan and College Station to go to Texas A&M’s football and other sports programs, and we became a common tourism destination on those trips.

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Vineyard and winery production at the winery estate in Bryan

“Their [Paul V. and Merrill’s] focus on the tourism element of wine turned out to be one of the greatest benefits probably for 15 years, because that grew not only the customer base that was coming to visit but when they went back to wherever they came from, they wanted to have Messina Hof. In the late ’90s and early 2000s, Messina Hof took a pretty big jump in terms of production, case sales. That went all the way up to 2005. At that point, we were at between 28,000 and 30,000 cases. That was a really big growth period.”

Throughout the years of running a winery, one of Paul V.’s mantras had been “Don’t give up your day job.” He continued with his physical therapy practice until 2009, when he sold it with the goal of freeing up more time for him and Merrill to travel. The following year, after Paul M. left active duty in the United States Marine Corps, he and his wife Karen returned to Bryan and the transition to the second generation began. The Messina Hof Estate Vineyard, Resort and Winery in Bryan at that time included a tasting room, The Vintage House Restaurant, The Villa Bed & Breakfast, and the winery production facility.

According to Karen Bonarrigo, the family “did demos together, we did wine dinners together, we were in the office all the time together, and we used that time to try to absorb as much information as we could – contextual history about how some of the decisions had been made and some initiatives that were done, what worked and what didn’t work. Lots of discussion about where we wanted things to go, how we wanted to change things or keep things the same.

“Through that process, Paul naturally migrated towards taking over the operational side of the business, which was his expertise, and things his dad had been working on. He started transitioning to the production side and a lot of the hospitality realms. With my background, Merrill had me start in HR. Eventually, after Paul and Merrill had retired and Paul and I were trying to re-configure some of the departments, I ended up taking over all of marketing and then really diving into a lot of the food and wine programs.

“Merrill’s passion is cooking, and that is one of my passions as well. And so we did a lot of the food and wine pairings, and classes and tastings and things like that, together, which gave me an opportunity to really expand my wine knowledge at the same time, a sort of one on one mentoring level with Merrill. She’s a fantastic teacher, extremely patient, very communicative, and it was great to be able to learn from her what it is that she would be picking up in wines, what it was that she was noticing, and being able to understand the ins and outs and how that tied back to things that were happening in the cellar and things like that.”

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There are four themed cottages and 10 acres of vineyards on the Messina Hof Hill Country Winery location.

During the transition, the family worked together to expand the scope of Messina Hof Wine Cellars with a location in Fredericksburg. The Bonarrigos found a property on a major highway that included 10 acres for a vineyard and winery facility, and in 2011 opened the Messina Hof Hill Country Winery in Fredericksburg with a tasting room and the Manor Haus B&B featuring four themed cottages.



Entrance to the Messina Hof Grapevine Winery tasting room

In 2012, the winery operations were officially passed to Paul M. and Karen. Paul became the CEO and head winemaker, and Karen took on the role of director of administration. In 2014 the two opened the Messina Hof Grapevine Winery and tasting room, and in February 2021, launched the Messina Hof Harvest Green Winery & Kitchen, restaurant, tasting room and production facility.

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The wine tap system in the Messina Hof Grapevine Winery tasting room



Entrance to the Harvest Green Winery & Kitchen outside of Houston

When asked what their plans are for Messina Hof going forward, Karen responded, “We have absolutely loved being able to strategically push out beyond the main estate to other parts of Texas and be able to connect with more customers. Last year gave us the chance to refocus back in on food at all the locations. Food and wine pairings have been a huge part of what we do at the estate, the wine bar, the restaurant, the educational programs, cooking parties that we do. But we never were able to quite implement those in Fredericksburg and Grapevine nearly to the same level.

“Last year gave us the chance to test those things out, as we were required to do that, and it was a way to be able to keep the business open. We realized that we could do that in ways that really were very scalable. Being able to incorporate that principle to the rest of the wineries has been really fun. We’ve figured out how we can incorporate that whole other level of wine enjoyment and exploration with food and wine pairings.”



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# Messina Hof

## WINERY

4545 Old Reliance Rd. Bryan, TX 77808 | 979-778-9463 | messinahof.com

**Founders** Paul and Merrill Bonarrigo

**Owner, CEO, Head Winemaker** Paul Mitchell Bonarrigo

**Chief Administrative Officer** Karen Bonarrigo

**Year Bonded** 1983

**Winery Case Production** 60,000 cases

**Average Bottle Price** \$20

**Direct-to-Consumer Sales (%)** 70%

## VINEYARD INFORMATION

**Appellation** Texas, Texas Hill Country

**Vineyard Acreage** 28 acres

**Varieties Grown** Lenoir, Blanc Du Bois, Sagrantino

**Soil Type** Clay Loam

**Climate** Gulf Coast, Hill Country, Texas High Plains

**Additional Varieties Purchased** Blanc Du Bois, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Dolcetto, Gewürztraminer, Grenache, Lenoir, Malbec, Merlot, Mourvedre, Muscat Canelli, Negroamaro, Orange Muscat, Petite Sirah, Petit Verdot, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Noir, Primitivo, Riesling, Ruby Cabernet, Sagrantino, Sangiovese, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Syrah, Tempranillo, Trebbiano, Viognier and Zinfandel

**Vineyard Sourcing** Multiple vineyard contracts in the High Plains

**Tons Used vs. Tons Sold** 1,250 tons harvested (2019); Sold 40 tons as grapes, but another 400 tons as bulk wine and custom wine

**Sustainability Practices** Composting (800 tons to vineyard at Harvest Green)

## VINEYARD EQUIPMENT

**Tractors** John Deere 3720 Tractor, hedger attachment to the John Deere; Kubota M5040 Tractor

**Vineyard Management** Minor leaf pulling; hedge once a year, around veraison

**Sprayers** Airblast sprayer, 3-point mount

**Pest/Animal/Bird Control** Bird callers, bird netting and metallic steamers to minimize bird damage

**Weed Control/Mowing** Bushhog pto mower for the tractor; John Deere 360 lawn mower

## BUSINESS

**Banking** American Momentum Bank, Wells Fargo

**PR Agency** Integrate Agency

## WINERY

### Cooperage

**Barrels** World Cooperage Fusion Series Barrels, 1,050 barrels in use

**Barrel Racks/Pallets** Two barrel racks, from Western Square

**Barrel Washing System** Aaqua Tools Hot Cart Barrel Washer; Also use the hot cart for cellar cleaning

### Winery Equipment

**Fermentors** 72 stainless steel tanks of different sizes (from 260 to 9,100 gallons) and different manufacturers. Most are capable of fermentation. The majority of the larger tanks are from Santa Rosa Stainless Steel

**Filtration System** Velo DE Filtration system; .45 micron and .65 micron filters for bottling

**Forklift** Yale propane 6000 LB capacity, and Yale electric 3500 LB capacity

**Hoses** 1.5, 2, and 3 inch McCarty FDA transfer hose, and 1.5 inch McCarty Balthazar Wine Hose

**Pumps** 8 total pumps—main ones are Ragazzini SF 90T, Waukesha 2065 from Carlsen, Liverani VFN 60 from Prospero, Vogelsang VX 136

**Punch-down Devices** Manual punch-down tool

**Pump-over Devices** Process Engineers pump-over system that includes Ace Venturi and Lotus on some tanks, manual on others

**Presses** Willmes 3000, purchased in 1986 from Sen Machines in San Rafael, CA; Enomet DHEA 50

**Tanks** 72 Stainless steel tanks of different sizes from 260 to 9100 gallons and different manufacturers; Most are capable of fermentation; Most of the larger tanks are from Santa Rosa Stainless Steel

**Tank Heating/Chilling System** Carrier 80-ton Aquasnap

### Crushpad Equipment

**Bin Dumper** Rotating head forklift

**Crusher-Destemmer** Vega 10 destemmer and crusher from Carlsen and Associates. We plan to upgrade to Vega 15 in 2022

**Receiving Hopper** Proprietary custom made hopper over the destemmer

## Winemaking

**Analytical Equipment** Mettler Toledo Five Easy Plus pH Meter, Thermo Scientific Orion DO meter, Charm Novalum, Apera TN400 Turbidity, Vinmetrica SC Malo, and standard aeration-oxidation setup

**Filters** Heyes Filters SPBVS Beverage Series Membrane

**Yeast, Nutrients, Enzymes** All are customized for each wine lot. Yeast come primarily from Laffort and Scott Labs; nutrients are from Laffort; enzymes are primarily Cinn-Free and Color Pro from Scott Labs

## PACKAGING

**Bottling Line** GAI 3003A filler and Kosme ADH Compact 440 labeler from Prospero

**Capsules** Saxco Screwcaps

**Corks** Amorim and M.A. Silva for natural cork and nomacorc green

**Glass** Saxco, O-I, TricorBraun, Encore

**Label Design** Internal

**Label Printing** Multi-Color Corporation

**Website Design** Integrate Agency

## SOFTWARE

**Accounting Software** Quickbooks Enterprise

**Club Management** Orderport POS

**Compliance** Ship Compliant

**DTC Software Suite** Orderport POS

**Tasting Room POS** Orderport POS

**Restaurant POS** Revel POS

**Tasting Room Reservations** Cellarpass and Opentable

**Wine Production software** Winemakers Database

**Vineyard Software** Microsoft Excel

## WAREHOUSING

**Case Goods Storage** 10,000 sq. ft. at the Estate, 1,500 sq. ft. in Grapevine

**Pick, Pack and Ship** 2,000 sq. ft. at Harvest Green

## Additional Winery Locations

**Messina Hof Hill Country Winery and Manor Haus, Fredericksburg, TX**

**Date Opened** 2011

**Facilities** Vineyard (Lenoir), tasting room, Manor Haus B&B

**Messina Hof Grapevine Winery, Grapevine, TX**

**Date Opened** 2014

**Facilities** Tasting rooms, event facility

**Messina Hof Harvest Green Winery & Kitchen, Richmond, TX**

**Date Opened** 2021

**Size** 12,000 sq. ft.

**Facilities** Tasting room, restaurant, vineyard (Lenoir and Blanc Du Bois), wine processing & production, barrel room, wine warehouse



## Vineyards in Transition

The Bonarrigos initial planting of one acre was expanded in 1982 to eight acres, and by the 1990s, about 18 acres at the estate were planted. They had invested in a property of approximately 50 acres in the High Plains and also worked with other vineyards. According to Paul M., they purchased a vineyard with more than 100 acres in New Home in 2000.

Paul M. told WBM, “There are a lot of lessons learned on the vineyard side. Texas has a little bit different relationship between the vineyards and the wineries. A lot of this has to do with my dad’s leadership for the industry, and others too. Their mentality was always that we have to be very careful not to allow our industry to splinter into two separate factions. For the most part, the Texas wine industry has been able to stay together fairly solidly, ever since the beginning.

“Because of that, the way we communicate, the way we engage for the grapes, the grape supply, is a little bit different, and it does take some of the pressure off a winery to have to own their own vineyard. Instead, we create these long-term relationships. For example, Young Family Vineyards is one of our larger vineyards and we’ve been working with their family since the ’80s when Larry Young’s dad was managing the vineyards. That has been a multi-generational partnership between us and them.

“We understand that when you want to be able to scale up and grow quickly, it helps to have agricultural partners who can help you do that. Almost every one of our growers farm other crops, and farmed other crops before they farmed grapes. Their expertise is in agriculture, and they bring that expertise and infrastructure and support to their vineyards, which means you run a more efficient operation that way. There are some benefits with that. They can use the equipment that they have.



Sagrantino grapes at the estate vineyard

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“Being a farming community where a lot of the grapes are grown, there’s a lot of cross-support, and they help each other. If I need one grower to go over and help another grower to harvest a vineyard, they do it. It’s a family. What I have seen is that whenever an industry gets to a certain size, it becomes a fairly normal thing for there to be more separation [between vineyards and wineries], especially when you get a few winery players who become really large, like over 500,000 cases. Then it becomes more of a manufacturing operation and less of a small family business.



Paul M. and crew hand-harvesting grapes at the estate vineyard in Bryan

“But we’re not there yet, and almost every winery in Texas is still owned by a family business of some kind. We do have some corporate interests that are starting to come into our industry, but for the most part, it’s still very family-driven, which I think is incredibly healthy for us.”

In the past 10 years, the Bonarrigos have sold their vineyard properties in New Home and the High Plains. They currently own and control 28 acres, between the three properties in Bryan, Fredericksburg, and Harvest Green near Houston. The total acreage that Messina Hof sources grapes varies for several reasons. Paul M. commented, “This year, there was a significant loss of fruit in multiple areas of the state because of the cold weather. I have ramped up our core contracts, at this point we’re probably around 600 acres that we touch. On any given year, we’re between 600 and 900 acres that we have relationships with and that we have contracts with to be able to pull fruit in.

“We have altered our strategy a bit on how we purchase fruit, and a lot of that is because over the last 8 years, the amount of technology that has been installed, in the High Plains especially, to try to mitigate frost, to mitigate hail, to mitigate some of these major issues that we’re facing before has helped to create a more consistent crop, year to year. This year and last year are not good examples of that. You can only mitigate cold so far, you can only mitigate hailstorms so far. It still has an impact, but I would say every year it

*“We don’t own any harvesting equipment at Messina Hof. All our estate acreage is hand harvested. We have lugs and bins and lots of harvesting knives. But not a harvester that we own. We have vineyard tractors and things like that. We have spray programs. But most of the work that’s done in the vineyard we try to do as much by hand as we can. We do all pruning by hand, we do all training and tying by hand.”*

has less and less of an impact in terms of per acre. but I tell a lot of people that ask questions about what truly is the viability of the Texas wine industry – it’s incredible, the quality is exceptional. We’re learning some hard lessons in terms of the best strategies going forward on what we need to have installed in the vineyards.

“I have sourced grapes primarily from the Hill Country and the High Plains over the last ten years. There are significant differences in the fruit that comes from those different areas. There are some specific vineyards that have very unique varietal characteristics that are very desirable, but I would say it’s more about the growers who really understand their craft and can make great quality fruit.

“One example of terroir, a very interesting one, is that we are now the largest producer of Sagrantino in the United States. We source it from five different vineyards in Texas. One of those vineyards, of course, is at the estate. We have two acres of vineyard there that we use for a very small batch of Sagrantino, and the remainder of the vineyards are in the High Plains. The difference of flavors and ripeness and characteristics that you get from the one down here in the Gulf Region and from the High Plains is fairly substantial.

“Does terroir play into our buying decisions: absolutely. When we search for vineyards, it absolutely does. The only thing superceding that is looking for growers who are high quality and long term. Like I said before, many of our growers have been with us for a long time, so we just continue to work with them on their programs. We travel up there often in order to work with them on best vineyard practices, what kind of flavors we’re looking for, and therefore, how does one prune, do we want to do some different experimentation in the vineyard to see what kind of flavor changes we find in the finished fruit. Do we limit buds, or do some cane pruning, or want to do a different nutrient strategy for a year or a different watering strategy? All those conversations happen to fine tune the end product.

“At the same time, there’s a lot of technology that’s coming into play, like wind machines, hail netting, and you now have people who are bringing online the newer harvesters that are more gentle on the fruit, that destem the fruit on board. All of those things go into quality enhancements.

“We don’t own any harvesting equipment at Messina Hof. All our estate acreage is hand harvested. We have lugs and bins and (laughs) lots of harvesting knives. But not a harvester that we own. We have vineyard tractors and things like that. We have spray programs. But most of the work that’s done in the vineyard we try to do as much by hand as we can. We do all pruning by hand, we do all training and tying by hand.”





## Varieties and Production

Paul M. reported that at their Hill Country location, they do about 500 gallons of small batch production. At Harvest Green, they currently have 3,000 gallons of cooperage. They are finishing the revitalization a mixed one-acre vineyard of Lenoir-Blanc Du Bois and have planted another acre of Blanc Du Bois. They plan to add two more acres to that site and would like to add some of Dr. Andy Walker's new Pierce's disease resistant varieties, starting with Paseante Noir and Camminare Noir. When that four-acre site is producing, they may bring in grapes from other vineyards in the area and production might get up to 5,000 to 10,000 gallons eventually.

"We had already planted a very small number of Walker's new varieties on the estate, and they're producing very well. As far as long-term viability, I think there is some great potential for the Gulf region of Texas to really embrace these varieties."

Before the two acres are planted at Harvest Green, Paul M. plans to move 300 tons of grape compost from the estate vineyard down to the Harvest Green site to help prep that site for planting. "We've used some of it on the estate, but I have a lot more than what I can use there," Paul said.

"Currently we have 33 varieties of grapes that we work with in Texas. The variety question really comes down to what varieties have a historical track record. In terms of the quality produced, Cabernet Sauvignon has been the most consistent variety in Texas.

"As varieties have shown potential, we have doubled down in order to make sure that we have strong products in those varieties. At the same time, we also know that the only way that Texas is really going to learn what varieties grow well, and where they grow well, is for wineries like us to experiment.

"As new varieties come into play, I joke that's because we have a lack of self-control, but really, it's because for us to better the industry, we have to be willing to experiment. Sometimes that means that a variety isn't as good as we thought it might be. Or, like in the case of Sagrantino, that experiment has turned into an absolute block-buster success. That is a variety that I think long-term is going to do very well in Texas.

"Consumer buying habits ten years ago were still fairly 'safe' because of the fact that the Texas tasting room infrastructure was not as substantial as it is now. As these tasting rooms started to get more popular with other people, new varieties started gaining recognition, and people were purchasing them, and joining wine clubs and getting shipments. For example, we launched our GSM in 2012, and I would say the first year or two, it was a very hard, uphill battle. The wine was exceptionally good; it was selected by the Saltgrass Steak House national wine list, but even they told us it was hard to explain to people what GSM is. It stands for Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre.

"Fast-forward to 2016, and now GSM is one of our top selling red wines and well-recognized statewide and sold in many wholesale locations. It was able to gain traction and acceptance. Varieties that are more unique to Texas, like Blanc Du Bois, are an even harder push to get into the market."



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Paul Anthony on the new catwalks in the estate winery production area

## Winemaking and New Equipment

“In terms of our winemaking general mentality,” Paul M. noted, “when you have 85 products, every product goes through a different process. We try to insulate what yeast we’re going to use and follow it all the way through the end. Every red wine does go through oak aging, and at this point, we have a little over 1,000 barrels in use at the winery. We primarily work with World Cooperage for that. We have both French and American oak fusion series barrels for red wine. We generally do some barrel fermentation with our Chardonnay and our Viognier. All our other whites are stainless steel only.

“For reds, I prefer to do still fermentation and then immediately rack to barrel after press-off. That also allows us to be able to control temperatures more finely. Being in Texas, temperatures are a big element we have to deal



Messina Hof tanks are insulated with a special bio-based insulation to protect the wine from Texas heat



Paul M. in the barrel room





Steps go up to the catwalks at the winery production facility in Bryan



VEGA 10 destemmer ready for installation

with, especially when it gets over 100° F outside. We rely very heavily on our Carrier AquaSnap chiller that can get down to 20° F. We have a bio-based insulation that goes on the outside of the tanks. My understanding is that one of the heavy ingredients in it is soy. With that insulation, I can keep a tank outside, even if it's 100° F outside, and get it down to 30° F."

In 2016, Messina Hof added new stainless steel tanks and additional new barrels with the capacity for 95,000 gallons of wine. Total capacity at the Estate in Bryan is 300,000 gallons between stainless steel and oak. "At this point we have 17 larger volume tanks outside—they are between 5,800



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gallons and 9,000 gallons. We have the smaller ones, 500 gallons, but most of the tanks that are inside range from 1,500 to 4,000 gallons, with most of our tanks inside being 3,000-gallon size. Almost every tank we have is connected to the chiller system to be able to control the temperature. On white wines, I normally try to push them on how cold I can ferment them. I find that the quality of the fruit characteristics and aromatics is really great if I can keep it low—there are some yeast that do OK at 45°, but most of the time it's around 50° F, 55° F. Whereas with the reds, we're really trying to push the upper limit, like closer to 80° F, 85° F to create better maceration and extraction.

“Depending on the program, we keep our dry reds in barrels anywhere from 9 months to 18 months. For our ports, sometimes as long as 3 to 4 years.”

In 2021, Messina Hof installed some additional catwalks at the production facility at the estate winery. They bought a new destemmer, a Vega 10, from Carlson Associates. They wanted to get a Vega 15 but accepted the Vega 10 as an interim solution. Paul M. commented, “That's going to give us some enhanced capabilities in terms of the cleanliness of the processing for the fruit that's already destemmed when it comes in.” He also noted that they have been working with Process Engineers to create automatic pump-over systems and make all of their pump-overs both better quality and less labor intensive.

## Messina Hof Wines

The Messina Hof wine portfolio includes more than 85 wines made with Texas-grown grapes. The majority of the wines are dry, with more than 35 dry red wines and 15 dry white wines as well as several dry rosé wines currently available. These are primarily the wines that have scored well in international and national competitions, and Messina Hof is now the most awarded winery in Texas. In part because of the emphasis by the Bonarrigo family on wine events, wine and food pairings, and wine tourism, many of their customers have developed preferences for drier style wines, which currently account for 60 to 65 percent of Messina Hof wine sales.

The winery also makes several dessert wines and ports, with the premium ones known as Paulo Port. Messina Hof ports are made from estate-grown Lenoir grapes and undergo a unique sequential inoculation process that was invented by Paul V. to achieve port's high alcohol level requirements naturally during fermentation. According to Paul M., his parents started making a dessert wine, a late harvest Riesling called Angel, in the early 1980s, and in 1990 it was the first Texas wine to get a 90 in *Wine Spectator*. It has been on their core wine list ever since.

Messina Hof also offers alternative packaging options including growlers and four canned wines—a dry red, a dry-style rosé, a sweet red, and a Peach Moscato. With the opening of the Harvest Green location, the wine team added a collection of augmented reality wines that feature interactive labels “to bring to life core themes in the Messina Hof winemaking process.”





Several Messina Hof wines now feature augmented reality interactive labels



Karen and Paul Mitchell, Sophia Marie, Paul Anthony, harvest 2021

## Third Generation

Paul M. and Karen have two children, Sophia Marie, 11, and Paul Anthony, 9. In August, Paul M. told *WBM* that the children had been picking grapes in the vineyard that morning and were helping to prepare for harvest the next day. Sophia Marie has been apprenticing with Paul M. for the last few years in the lab, helping with analyses. He said, “Whenever we’re doing fermentation operations, we test every lot every day. The lots that haven’t started fermenting yet, she can taste the juice; otherwise, she can smell them and give me her thoughts. I’m trying to train them from an early age on the appreciation of the family business. And then, we’ll see.” **WBM**



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