



Liquid Art Winery builds hearty presence

Manhattan winery sprang to life in spring 2016, the work of co-owners David and Danielle Tegtmeier, with ample doses vision quest, hearty enthusiasm and good old hard work

First MHK winery western Flint Hills existence ... as if it's always been there

The prescience of creativity and imagination is hypothesized modestly by Zen philosophy: "Don't be an interpreter of reality, be a visionary; don't think about it, see it!" This hearty sanctification of the spirit, soul and psyche can be applied to the advancement of human innovation as a purveyor of growth.

Great successes require enhanced vision. The vision typically required from the brilliance of, say, a skilled sculptor: Donatello. Michelangelo. Artist, designer, seer ... individuals with extraordinary creative capacity to envision a "work" out of next-to-nothing: piece of clay, blank canvas ... ordinary tract of land.

Even a less-than-ordinary, tangled mess of land. Land snarled in such disorder as to be ensnared, tousled and disheveled by invasive, 40-foot-tall cedar trees. That takes a real visionary. Paul Newman as Butch Cassidy once imparted to the Sundance Kid: "Boy, I got vision and the rest of the world wears bifocals."





Seeking perfection in the soil and topography

When David Tegtmeier saw one quarter-square-mile tract of land west of Manhattan (around 150 acres) in late 2013 – boy, did it take vision – unbelievably, revelatory vision, to see anything more than unfertile countryside. Where most would see hilly, rocky landscape, ill-equipped to farm, Tegtmeier saw south-sloping hills to encourage air flow and serve as conduit to siphon cold air. He could already picture rows upon rows of grapevines, spaced in even, 15-degree grids amongst the heretofore cannibalized prairie.

Popular misconceptions range wildly about Kansas agriculture. You would think vineyards in not-entirely-accommodating climates such as Kansas would be as plentiful on the plains as Siberian soybeans. Truth is, there are more than a dozen operating Kansas vineyards; it just takes a discerning eye to find the right land tract. Tegtmeier wasn't fazed by challenges. He had the vision. He just knew the soil near Wildcat Creek was beyond mere adequacy to grow grapes. His literal thought? Near perfection.

He and wife Danielle were enthusiastically devoted to operate their own vineyard/winery in concert with an event space, even going back as far as early encounters as a couple at Kansas State University during the 2007 fall semester.



“He saw the vision right away,” Danielle said. “He took soil profiling that very weekend and took it to K-State, and as soon as he got the results back he said, ‘Danielle, we’re jumping ship and we’re doing it.’”

Jumping ship? That meant abandoning secure jobs in Colorado. Home ownership. ‘Oh, there is no way. You’re crazy,’ Danielle remembers thinking of her husband’s proposition. Unfazed, they moved to Manhattan in September 2014 and started the arduous process to clear the ground. No simple task: clear 100 acres of thick cedar. The designated location: west of Wildcat Creek (north side, Wildcat Creek Road); northwest of Prairiewood Retreat; approximately one mile south of Anderson Avenue.

“This is where we wanted to do it. The soil, the topography ...
ideal for growing premium-wine grapes.”

About 18 months later, the vineyard and event space were in place. Liquid Art Winery and Estate sprang to life in spring 2016. David and Danielle Tegtmeier, co-entrepreneurs. Magical? In some ways, perhaps. More aptly, ample doses vision quest, hearty enthusiasm and good old hard work.

“This is where we wanted to do it,” David said with a westward gaze toward a government-owned plateau (easternmost Fort Riley), where the sunsets are one-in-a-million to match the couples’ nigh crazy notion of growing wine among the dotted, tree-scarred landscape of the northwestern Flint Hills.

“I dove into (researching) everything and realized, this probably is the number-one spot; the best place around Manhattan – or anywhere else close -- to do what we wanted to do. The soil, the topography ... is ideal for growing premium-wine grapes.”



Liquid Art's beginnings, halfway around the world

David Tegtmeier had already filed away years of enology analysis. He studied abroad in summer 2008 at Bordeaux, a French coastal region off the Bay of Biscayne. Bordeaux is located 185 miles north of Pamplona, Spain (4,640 miles from Manhattan). Tegtmeier toiled at a winery in world-renowned Saint-Emilion, which is 25 miles further inland from Bordeaux. Soil conditions in Manhattan, Kansas? Very similar. Nearly identical to Bordeaux, France, by Tegtmeier's calculus.

Who would have imagined that? David Tegtmeier, of course. Remember, the incomparable sculptor's vision? This all must ultimately circle back to the furtive imagination that would augment this notion to grow grapes at 39.1924 degrees North longitude. Kansas grapes!

While in France, among other things, Tegtmeier learned the vine-soil interaction duality. The Bordeaux region is celebrated as among the best grape-growing regions in the world, and features rocky, clay soil embedded with limestone. Saint Emilion is described in this manner by travel and tourism publisher Fodors: "With its 13th century ramparts, cobblestone streets and rock-face hermitage, this hilltop town presides over one of the region's richest wine districts."

The area around Manhattan, Kansas? Known to be more conducive to ranch than farmland because of its rocky, limestone-encrusted layer of earth. Grapevines planted on such terrain, though, seek cracks in the rock shale and creep into the ground layer to find richly-fortified nutrients. The hillsides assist to drain cold air, although more thorough steps are necessary to prevent against extremes of heat and cold; particularly the polar opposites of high humidity and freezing temperatures.



California is known as America's wine-producing heartland, burnishing a 90-percent share of the U.S. wine market production with few of the ecological impediments faced by Kansas grape farmers.

"It's definitely much more difficult and you have to know what you're doing," Tegtmeier said of climate challenges in Kansas. "We have much more extreme weather, much more extremes. You're doing a lot more management. It's probably twice as much work to grow grapes here as it would be in California.

"They have it easy in California."

Rooted in vineyards, even as a young tike

Tegtmeier grew up near Seneca, where as a 15-year-old he managed his grandfather's Bern-situated grapevine just five miles south of the Kansas-Nebraska border. His mental intoxication for intellectual growth that involved viticulture -- the science, production, and study of grapes -- emerged from his boyhood as he tended to that 4-acre, Bern vineyard. After two years at Kansas State University,



Tegtmeier ventured west to California's San Joaquin Valley in pursuit of a degree in the chemistry of winemaking at Fresno State University. The rest is serendipitous, a karmic dalliance with destiny that led the couple's return to The Little Apple, via Washington. And Colorado.

"We couldn't walk through the property," Danielle said of the couple's first estate exploration, long before the Liquid Art view

that Manhattan visitors have grown accustomed. "We couldn't drive through. It was a hairy, cedar mess. Everything you see now where the vineyard is, was just like that. David spent months on a dozer, clearing everything."

The earthly obstacles, in this case those gnarly cedar trees, were nothing compared to what most would equate to an un-ascendable hindrance. That Kansas climate.

"There are more of the unknowns," Danielle admits of Kansas extremes. "You have to pick a site like we have. Our south-facing, rocky hillsides protect from cold weather and cold frosts in the spring when the grapes are just starting to bud. You have to do more 'canopy management' than they do in California.

"There's lots and lots of things, and you can get around all of them. It just takes more work and you have to know how to do it properly."

"It was a *hairy, cedar* mess ..."

David professes excitement to convey the industry knowledge he accumulated from the California and France sojourns. He passes "wine wisdom" on to students at Highland Community College satellite campus in Wamego, where he instructs an introductory-level enology course. Highland has offered associate of science and technical certificate programs in viticulture and enology since 2010.

Winemaking has deep roots in Kansas agriculture

Kansas isn't known as a wine-producing territory. Long before prohibition, however, it was a grape-growers' paradise. Immigrants from France as well as Germany grew grapes largely for personal consumption in both Kansas and Missouri. By 1880, an estimated 226,000 gallons of wine were produced in the bi-state region ("A History of Wine in America," by Thomas Pinney). Then in 1881, Kansas pre-empted the ban against sale of alcohol and became the first to pass statewide prohibition.

That was a full 37 years before national Prohibition (18th Amendment, passed in 1918). The self-imposed ban lasted 15 years beyond Prohibition revocation (until 1948); though it was a full century before the Farm Winery Act of 1985 established guidelines for Kansas winemaking production and sale. That legislation set the stage for Kansas wine producers to mark a comeback. Now, there are 28 operational Kansas wineries, including four in the north-central Kansas region around Manhattan: Liquid Art, Oz Winery (Wamego), with Prairie Fire and Wyldewood (Paxico).

“We wanted to help change the wine industry here -- make it better -- and that’s why we’re doing this ‘all-out’,” David said when the winery began full operations in 2016. “We’ve gone all out on this place ‘cause we want to do it right. We’re not like any other winery in this state.”

Liquid Art Winery and Estate, est. 2016.

The name carries a certain panache without heavy-handed flamboyance. And what a gathering place for weddings, receptions, meetings. The event space accommodates seating for



375 and provides an ideal setting for the full-scale events that accompany weddings.

David explains the winery’s nuanced name, Liquid Art Winery, by reading from the crafted bottle label: “Wine is just an expression of art; created by Mother Nature but crafted by the vintner’s hands.”

Danielle adds: “We want to recognize arts that are not normally recognized; wine-making truly is an art because every vintner has a different style.”

The logo fashions a soiled paint brush swished from tip to bristle into the shape of an ‘L’, and circularly traces the stained remnants from an oval-bottomed bottle. Congratulations, Manhattan; The Little Apple® is now home to a bustling, first-class winery with first-rate, Flint Hills views. Courtesy, Danielle and David Tegtmeier.



“Everybody we’ve talked to says how excited they are that this is going to be in Manhattan,” David said during spring 2016.

“Everybody says, ‘Bout time we get a winery, we’ve needed one for a long time.’ They’re happy we’re doing a legitimate winery space where people can come and enjoy it.”