

Cider Pressed from a Small-Farm Dream

Jennifer Conrad Seidel

Foggy Ridge's Diane Flynt left a corporate career to start a community-friendly cidery.

Cidermaking is Diane Flynt's second career. For 25 years, she worked in the banking industry. But she missed the lifestyle she knew growing up in small-town Georgia, where her grandfather farmed.

"I always knew that I wanted to have a career that allowed me to be in a more rural environment, to live a different kind of life," she says. "I enjoyed my corporate work and learned a great deal that has benefited me as a cidemaker and as a business owner."

With Flynt's corporate background, you might expect Foggy Ridge Cider to be a large-scale cidemaking enterprise with a national marketing campaign. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Flynt is a dedicated slow food advocate and a champion of artisanal food in Southwest Virginia. "People ask what artisan means, and I just lift up my hands. My hands look awful."

Serious About Cider

"About 15 years ago, when my husband and I were dating, I said, 'I'll marry you if we can buy a farm.' He said yes, but he really didn't mean it!" she laughs. He may not have meant it, but she did. After a long time of looking for property, they found a 200-acre farm off the Blue Ridge Parkway in Dugspur, about 60 miles southwest of Roanoke.

"We knew that we wanted to create an agriculture-based business. But I've always had a passion for *growing* things as opposed to *milking* things. I've always planted native trees and shrubs, so it seemed natural to try apples."

The Flynts planted more than 30 apple varieties in the first test orchard and used that experience to see which varieties did best in that climate. "Terroir is a big part of it. We need to know not only can it grow but will it produce the kind of fruit that makes really good hard cider. The same apple that's growing in Charlottesville is not going to taste the same if I grow it here, up at 3,000 feet."

Knowing that she couldn't make a living just selling apples, Flynt decided to study cidemaking. "I relished the intellec-



Apples from these Hewe's Crab trees, started with graftings from Monticello, will be used in Foggy Ridge's First Fruit cider.

FABIO CAMARA

tual exercise and marketing challenge of making and selling a fermented beverage," she explains. She apprenticed with American cidemakers over several harvests and took a professional cidemaking course in England. "Just as we have great enologists at Virginia Tech, they have great pomologists over there." She must be a good student, because Foggy Ridge has sold out every year since it opened.

*"Just like a winemaker is in the vineyard,
I'm tasting the apples and deciding
when to pick."*

—Diane Flynt

Orchard Offerings

Serious Cider is the driest of the 3 ciders produced. "It's made from our high-tannin apples, which give a lot of structure and depth. It is the one most like an English cider," Flynt says, noting that it pairs well with food.

"Our bestselling cider is called First Fruit," she continues. "It's off-dry, with just a bit of residual sugar. It has a nice balance of lively acidity and very nice apple aroma." First Fruit is so-named because it is made with early season apples—including Hewe's Crab apples—and because Hewe's were planted by Thomas Jefferson for his cider. (First Fruit alludes to that heritage, like a "first lady.") Flynt's graftings even come from Monticello. This cider also uses Graniwinkle, Parmar, and Mother varieties.

Sweet Stayman, the third cider, is made with Staymans, Grimes Golden, and Newtown Pippins. "We get all our Staymans from an 84-year-old grower in Bent Mountain. He does a fabulous job, so I don't need to grow them." Flynt also buys some Newtown Pippins from this grower to supplement her own harvest. "The Sweet Sayman is sweet but with a nice balance to it, like a dry Riesling," she explains. "It's great with spicy food like Thai food."

The most unique product in the Foggy Ridge line is Pippin Gold, a fortified dessert cider. "First, we ferment cider made from Newtown Pippins. When we get to the right sweetness level, we add brandy from Laird and Company, a distillery in North Garden," Flynt says. "We age it for about 9 months before we bottle it." According to Flynt, Pippin Gold has "the kick of a dessert wine without the 'spirity' taste."

This year, Foggy Ridge will make about 1,000 cases of cider. "Just like a winemaker is in the vineyard, I'm tasting the apples and deciding when to pick," Flynt says of her work in the orchard, where she does all of the pruning on her 1,000 trees. Shunning all-at-once harvesting and cold storage—practices used by commercial apple growers—her apples are left on the tree until they reach what she calls "optimal ripeness."

Later in the season, the picked apples might be held at room temperature for a little while before being pressed, because this allows more of the starch to convert into sugar. Flynt likens cidemaking to making white wine—"the only difference is that we have to grind the fruit before we press it." After the apples are crushed, ground, and pressed, the juice is pumped into stainless steel tanks, where it ferments. Flynt adds sulfites to kill off wild yeast and then adds a yeast that she has chosen specifically for cidemaking, but she does not add any sugar to increase the alcohol content.



Come Taste our Wines of the Week. Always \$10 or Less! Always Delicious.

cheap prices without cheap taste

MARKET ST. WINESHOP & GROCERY

UPTOWN 29 NORTH SHOPPER'S WORLD 434-964-WINE

DOWNTOWN 4TH ST. & E. MARKET ST. 434-979-WINE

MarketStreetWine.com



catering/take-out available

Soups, Salads, Sandwiches
Fine Wine and Beer

seasonal foods, often organic
sourced locally & made fresh daily

434-296-SOUP

www.revolutionarysoup.com

108 2nd Street SW, Charlottesville, VA 22902
104 14th Street Charlottesville, VA 22903

A Generous Spirit

Flynt has marketing savvy from her corporate years, but where others thrive on competition, she revels in cooperation. "I am where I am because of the generosity of others who shared their knowledge. I am passionate about sharing what I've learned with the cider community and with our customers." To that end, Foggy Ridge hosts grafting workshops and tastings with local chefs and food artisans, and Flynt teaches a pairing class at Murray's, a famous cheese shop in New York.

"I value cooperation with other artisans and agriculture-related businesses. We like to find people who are doing



The orchard surrounding Foggy Ridge's cider house is home to 1,000 apple trees, with more than 30 apple varieties.

FABIO CAMARA

THE WINE GUILD
OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

in search of...
great wine?
great discounts?
great community?

For Membership Information:
wineguildcville@gmail.com t. 434-923-3700

interesting things in our community and promote them." Last year Foggy Ridge collaborated with Dogtown Pizza, which has a mobile brick oven used at festivals and events. "We did a tasting with them, and they made a pizza with apples, fennel sausage, local pork, caramelized onions, and blue cheese," she recalls, dreamily.

"One of the values I hope to get across in everything I do is a spirit of professional generosity," Flynt emphasizes. And she walks the talk. Foggy Ridge is a member of the Blue Ridge Wine Trail, whose members collaborate on tasting tours. When Albemarle Ciderworks goes into production for the first time this spring, it will use the bottling line at Foggy Ridge. And Flynt has plans to host an event introducing cheese from Goat Lady Dairy, in Climax, North Carolina, to Southwest Virginia.

She tends her land with the same generosity. Flynt and her husband live in the middle of the orchard, so they take great care to use natural and organic methods whenever possible. "Commercial growers often use late-season sprays to get fruit that is beautiful in appearance. We don't care what our fruit looks like, so we do no late-season sprays at all," Flynt says. "We use organic controls, mating disruption, and integrated pest management, and then if we have to spray, we will."

"It gives me great pleasure that my trees will outlive me and produce fruit long after I'm gone," Flynt says. "I have every incentive to keep them healthy in a sustainable way."

Jennifer Conrad Seidel, the editor of Flavor magazine, always chooses hard cider over beer or wine.

CHESTER GAP CELLARS

estate grown
hand crafted wines
viognier • merlot • cabernet franc
& other innovative blends

www.chestargapcellars.com
open Friday, Saturday, Sunday

4615 Remount Rd (Rt. 522)
Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-8086

Foggy Ridge Cider

1328 Pineview Road, Dugspur

www.foggyridgecider.com

(276) 398-2337

Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekends from
May to December