

# Don Perkins: Spirits at home in blacksmith's barn

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In a 150-year-old barn wine is fermenting.

Steve Linne made his first vintage at Blacksmiths Winery in 1999 and continues to experiment with offerings that highlight the local flavor of Maine. Located right off Route 302 in South Casco across from Cry of the Loon gift shop, Linne likes being in a place with lots of history.

"This is the original house and barn of the village blacksmith in South Casco," he said. "The front of the building was his brother-in-law's house that was dragged down from up on Quaker Ridge and then attached."

Circa 1854, the building is a classic New England connected farmstead and needed a lot of work when Linne first got it; the property was nearly foreclosed upon. In the 1960s part of it served as the area's post office.

"That section has been rebuilt and is now our bottling room," he said. "The winery is in the barn."

The small barn makes for a good fermenting area. Huge stainless steel tanks reaching some 20 feet high can stand in the space unobstructed. Blacksmiths has 10,000 gallons worth of stainless tank capacity and more in the form of cube-shaped, pallet-sized containers. It takes about six to eight weeks to make a 300-gallon batch of blueberry wine.

Blueberry is one variety Linne likes to offer because it's a Maine product. Blacksmiths wines are in many local markets and Hannaford and Shaw's supermarkets.

"I do grape wines primarily out of necessity," he said, "but I'm more focused on what I can do locally first. You really have to import grapes."



Steve Linne, founder of Blacksmiths Winery, pours a red wine at his tasting room in Casco.

*Don Perkins photo*

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Linne hopes to give Maine's blueberry growers a boost in the near future. He's in talks with Chinese importers who are interested in a Maine blueberry wine.

Another local fruit in his cross hairs are apples. One thing Linne has been bottling a lot of lately is hard cider, a product he says is gaining market share.

"(The cider) is getting more interest than the wine," he said. "I have a meeting in Massachusetts at the end of the month with distributors who are interested in picking it up down there."

Blacksmiths currently gets all of its cider stock from Ricker Orchards in Turner. It's then barrel-fermented in bourbon and rye barrels with three different yeasts and aged for four months before its blended and filtered. At five percent alcohol and light amber colored, it pours a lot like beer.

Apple cider was once the most common drink in the nation. Not surprisingly, Linne is fascinated with this kind of beverage history and is especially curious about events surrounding prohibition. When first retrofitting the barn for the wine operation, Linne came upon some of prohibition's past in the soffit area of the roof in this very barn.

"We pulled out all kinds of small liquor bottles that were stashed up there," he said. "I've still got one -- it has a piece of an Old Testament Bible that was wrapped around the court and stuck in it."

Linne, 54, is a chemical and environmental engineer and is also active in dog rescue adoption. Blacksmiths supports the Harvest Hills Humane Society in Fryeburg and Labs4Rescue. In fact, Linne has a chocolate lab acquired from Labs4Rescue affectionately nicknamed "Fatty Bampkins."

When Linne started the cider product a couple of years ago he decided the critter's name should grace each bottle. The dog even has her own web domain at [www.fattybampkins.com](http://www.fattybampkins.com).

Linne lives in Raymond and recently joined the planning board there. With just four employees, he likes being in a historic building and living and working in the Lakes Region.

"The area has a rural feeling but is close to Portland and Boston," he said. "Fall is my favorite season."

Blacksmiths is open for winter hours; tastings are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday through Monday.

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