



A Tribute to Bob Wollersheim

We are saddened at the departure of winery founder Bob Wollersheim this past December. Bob died at age 66 after a two-year battle with brain cancer. He was able to stay active and keep abreast of the winery's news up until the last couple weeks. He died peacefully at home with his family by his side.

Bob was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and went to college at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was an electrical engineer for the UW-Space Science program and helped develop weather radar and space satellites during the sixties and seventies.

Bob also had an appreciation of wine. He grew tired of traveling with his job and wanted to spend more time with his wife JoAnn and three small children Julie, Steve and Eva. In 1972, the family purchased the historic winery property from the fourth generation of the Kehl's, the German family that had built it, and moved to the house next to the winery. It was kind of a crazy idea and a big risk to move the family from a 1960's house in the suburbs of Madison, to an 1850's home in the country with only wood stoves for heat, and an old winery building that hadn't made wine in 70 years.



Bob was a pioneer in many fields. He experimented with hundreds of varieties of grapevines to see which would suit our cold climate. He also liked the agri-tourism aspect of the winery—bringing the understanding to visitors that a winery is a working grape farm. Bob planted the first field in the vineyard with Foch vines that today make our Domaine Reserve. He really appreciated the notion of "terroir" and the effect that the soil has on the wine.

Philippe's arrival in 1984 was the start of yet another era for the winery. Even though Philippe didn't speak a lot of English when he first came (originally for six months), Bob and Philippe understood each other very well. Philippe stayed on and took over the winemaking. Not only did Philippe become Bob's son-in-law but they also had a great business partnership. Bob had the engineering background and Philippe had the wine background.



Bob with his family continued the running of the winery and worked to beautify the winery property, promote the preservation of bald eagles, encourage Wisconsin grape-growing and promote the discovery of locally made wine.

One of Bob's projects in the last couple years was to write a book about the many experiences he had at the winery. As Bob loved the two oak trees next to the winery, he attempted to construct the memory and observations that the burr oak and the white oak have seen over the last 150 years. We don't know if there are enough pieces to put together as a book, but this paragraph from the introduction he wrote sums things up very nicely:



“ We can tell over and over that we have been able to do what few people have ever been able (or committed) to do; "we have been able to live our dream". There has never been a day or night in all those years that we felt we should have not done it! I also feel that being able to follow a dream is 10% luck and 90% being committed to making something happen.

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We thank Bob for being committed to the winery, committed to his family and for following his dreams of making Wollersheim Winery a success. Bob's legacy will live on. ❖

