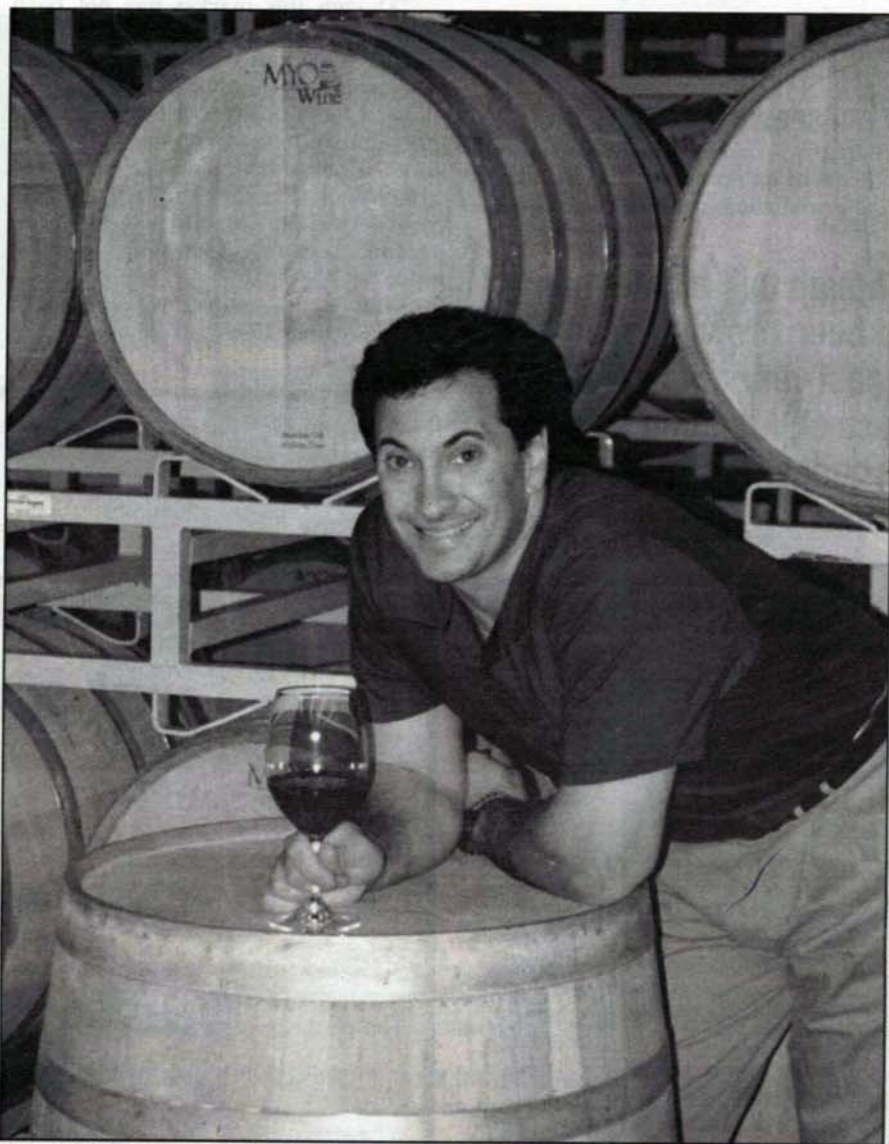


Want to make wine? He's



Business Journal photo by DAVID TOTH

Richard Mattina is owner of Make Your Own Wine in Elmsford.

By DAVID GURLIACCI

pen@westfairinc.com

Richard Mattina remembers groaning inwardly several years ago when a friend in New Jersey brought out some of his homemade wine.

Mattina, himself a wine lover and wine-maker, had tasted plenty of bad homemade wine. "But the wine was pretty good," he said. "We had another bottle, and it was better."

Mattina's friend told him that he had made the wine through a company that provided the equipment in a warehouse. As Mattina drove on the Garden State Parkway back home to Westchester, he decided he could get into the same business, but tweak it with his talent as a marketing consultant who gave training seminars.

That's how Mattina got the idea of starting Make Your Own Wine, a business now into its second year that combines seminars and the experience of wine-making.

His customers spend four evenings making their wine from September through July. In his first season, he had 150 cus-

tomers, but the business can handle more than 400 a season.

"People go nuts over the idea," he said.

His customers come not only from Westchester, but also from Brooklyn, Staten Island, New Jersey, Connecticut and even Rhode Island.

Mattina did three years of thinking through his idea and researching it before opening Make Your Own Wine in the fall of 2003. Other make-wine-yourself businesses sometimes didn't have good climate control, he said, and they didn't emphasize seminars as much as Mattina thought they should.

"You have a lot of people who like to be educated," he said. That way, when they open up a bottle of their own wine for friends, or give bottles away, they can explain something about it.

Except for the last session, which lasts three hours, customers gather for 90 minutes a night for both seminar and wine-making workshops.

The seminars aren't difficult or very deep, Mattina said, but participants will walk away with a better idea of what happens in the winemaking process.

got the equipment, the place and the know-how

STIRW



Step 1



Step 2

"I'm here to give them a general understanding," Mattina said. "It's the Discovery Channel meets wine-making."

STEP ONE: CRUSHING AND DESTEMMING GRAPES

In September or October, the winemaking season starts. In the first session, Mattina's seminar is about yeasts and fermentation and information about the specific grape varieties that customers have chosen. In the workshop phase, customers destem and crush grapes. The wine then sits in barrels for a week, and every day Mattina stirs it a bit.

STEP TWO: PRESSING

Seven days after the first crushing, customers return to press the grapes, now called "must." A machine using water pressure is used to gently squeeze the juice out without crushing the grape seeds. The juice then gets pumped into barrels.

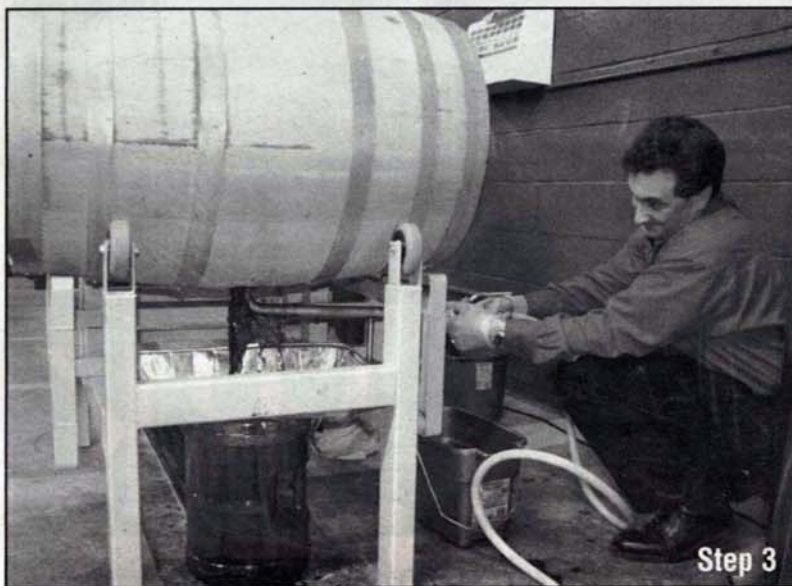
STEP THREE: RACKING

In February, customers come back to make personalized labels and to "rack" the wine in barrels. For racking, the wine is pumped out of the barrels except for the bottom inch or so of the "lees" where the dead yeast settles. The barrels are washed out, and the wine is put back in.

"And we have a party," Mattina said. "We have food, music, you meet the other people, and we start sampling wines."

For the next several months, he checks the barrels every two weeks or so and if some wine has evaporated, he tops off the barrels with a few ounces of extra wine kept for that purpose.

Samples of wine from each barrel are sent to a laboratory for testing, and if the wine appears to be too bitter or has some other problem, tartaric acid is added or



Step 3



Step 4

other adjustments are made, he said, "just like the wineries in California."

STEP FOUR: BOTTLING

At the final session in July or August, he gives a talk incorporating educational videos that he gets from his suppliers about barrels, corks and wine bottles.

Everybody then forms an assembly line in which the wine is poured from the barrels, filtered and bottled by a machine that not only corks each bottle, but puts a plastic wrap, called a capsule, around the top of the bottle. The wine-makers then put their own, personalized label on their wine, put it in boxes and take it with them.

The price per barrel (enough for 240 bottles), is \$2,400; for a half barrel (120 bottles), \$1,500 and for a quarter of a bar-

rel (60 bottles), \$800. Seminars, food, the wine and all the bottles, corks and labels are included in the one price, he said. The price doesn't change if several people take the course together, Mattina said.

"I've had a single person do a barrel, I have ladies night out, eight ladies doing a barrel," he said. "The more people the better, because it's more fun." Mattina said he went through a grueling process to get licensed by the state Liquor Authority but got his permit and approval from local land-use boards to open the business in a 5,100-square-foot space that is part of a corporate office park at 105 Fairview Park Drive in Elmsford.

He invested in a 16.5-ton air conditioner to keep the wine "cellar" in the back of his space climate controlled at a cool tempera-

ture. Mattina also monitors the humidity level and sometimes sprays the floors lightly with water to keep humidity at a proper level.

Mattina is the only full-time employee of the business, although he brings in relatives to help on an occasional basis.

Starting the business allowed Mattina to continue doing seminars, which he enjoyed, and avoid overnight business trips, which he dislikes. "I wanted to stay off the plains whenever possible and stay close to home whenever possible," he said.

Make Your Own Wine will also host corporate or regional sales meetings, team-building sessions or other company events, including Christmas parties. Mattina also offers wine-appreciation seminars and is exploring the idea of having singles events in the wine cellar.