

Counterpoint

What it's *really* like: the spouse's perspective

By Karen Elliff

I am the said vineyard creator's wife. To help describe the full measure of this mildly insane, seven-year endeavor, I will offer, dear readers, a "counterpoint" from the perspective of Scott's wife.

When we purchased the parcel of land directly adjoining the front of our Madison County getaway, the property was adorned with a double-wide, a broken refrigerator or two, and dozens of old, gnarly apple trees. Once the assorted debris had been removed, I would have been content to gaze out at the ancient, if barren, orchard, but, for some reason, Scott wanted to see the land bear fruit.

Perhaps this was borne of the fact that Scott's job as a business consultant involved the use of his brain but not his brawn. He prepared endless memoranda, business plans, and PowerPoint presentations. But he never created a real product — something tangible that one could turn over in one's hand. This land gave him an opportunity to toil in the dirt and the fresh air, and to create something real out of nothing but nature.

Once Scott decided to establish the vineyard, one thing was fairly certain: this endeavor was going to be a financial sinkhole of fairly significant proportions. But I looked at it this way: many forty-something men, approaching middle age, pour money into less noble activities. Some men gamble, some turn to drink, some lavish gifts on other women. Other men's midlife crises express themselves in more benign but still cash-draining sports cars and sailboats. I figured a vineyard might be a better place for Scott to expend his extra energy,



even if it cost a few dollars. And, I hoped, he might even find a new source of joy and fulfillment.

To his credit, Scott threw himself into learning what to do at each phase along the way — from plowing to planting to trellising. Many steps required specialized knowledge or equipment, but Scott was physically present at each turn, even if he wasn't controlling the backhoe or driving in posts.

On the other hand, I do not like to sweat and I don't like bugs. This makes me remarkably unsuited to labor in the field. So I have taken a "hands off" approach and

serve mainly as a sounding board for the options that Scott has had to sift through in making the many necessary decisions.

Although a few mistakes have been made along the way, it has been extremely rewarding to watch Scott's vision take shape. Not long ago, Scott retired from his brain-intensive job. The vineyard was waiting to embrace him. But it was not the embrace of a wife; I am not jealous.

I don't want this to sound like a puff piece, so I will tell you that I do get annoyed sometimes at the amount of time Scott spends at the vineyard. I do get bored sometimes listening to the tactics of combating powdery mildew. I do get exasperated sometimes when a new piece of machinery costs more than a year's college tuition. But I share the wonder and the excitement of holding in our hands the fruits of Scott's labor, and I take pleasure in knowing that this makes him happy.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Scott Elliff is the owner/operator of DuCard Vineyards in Madison County. He can be reached through www.ducardvineyards.com.

Karen Elliff, the vineyard spouse and supporter, acknowledges that she's an enthusiastic consumer of the final, bottled product.