



Tousey Winery

Kimberly & Ben Peacock - Journey into Farming

CLERMONT



Kimberly and Ben's children, Tiger and Scarlett, play in the vineyard.

EARLY INFLUENCES

Kimberly: "I was born on the farm. Back then, my dad had apples. When I was older, I spent time over in Europe, but when I came back every summer, I did the farmers' markets with dad."

Ben: "I worked in London, in the city, for many years. I had a totally different background. However, I'm originally from the north of England, which has beautiful countryside. I've grown up in that environment."

Kimberly: "So moving to the country wasn't a huge shock. We both enjoyed it. We were living in Copenhagen and London, big cities, and after a vacation visiting my dad, we immediately connected with something that we appreciated as kids."

A FAMILY BUSINESS

Kimberly: "My dad moved away from apples and started with unique berries such as currants, gooseberries, quince. We've always had Concord grapes growing up, and Dad had a dream to produce a Cassis using his own blackcurrants. My dad's also a beekeeper, so we use honey instead of sugar to sweeten the Cassis. It's perfect! And then we had the opportunity, three years ago, to come back. Dad was like, 'I've started this wine game, are you guys interested?'"

Farming Journey

Originally from:

Kim: Clermont, NY

Ben: England

Types of Training: Self-education, internship, and classroom-based training

Land Search Length: 2 years

Land Source: Family land and leased land

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First Year: 2009

Location: Clermont, NY

Size: 10-15 acres

Markets: Tasting room, restaurants, and farmers' markets: Kingston and Rhinebeck in the summer, Kingston and Red Hook in the winter

Products: Wine

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Kimberly: "We definitely thought it was a wonderful opportunity. We were super excited about starting something of our own, but it was also very, very challenging because we were expecting our second child and overcoming the hassles of moving countries. It was a huge change, so it was a hard decision in that way, but it was also as if it was meant to be. It was amazing. It was so different, but we were so ready for it."

Ben: "We knew what we wanted to do, and this was it."

LEARNING THE WINE BUSINESS

Ben: "I came from a business background. I was a contract manager in London. I realized I would need more than a modicum of knowledge of wine and winemaking and farming, so there has been a steep learning curve, but you get there. I'm not there yet."

Kimberly: "Ben interned at a winery north of here."

Ben: "Most people start as interns. There is a structure. To be labeled a winemaker is a lofty and an experienced position, so when people say to me, are you the winemaker, in a sense, yes, that's correct, but I'm a student. I'm just learning. If I'm a winemaker, that assumes to me that I've got the same experience and knowledge as these guys up in the Finger Lakes, and that's not true."

Kimberly: "We bow to the fact that we're students, and we respect their knowledge."

Ben: "We decided early on to ensure that we have the best grapes we could get and the best wine that we could produce. So we acquired a wine consultant to help us make sure that we were doing the right thing. We did the same with the vineyard."

Kimberly: "This is what they do for business, but it's amazing how we've just become a massive family. It's so touching how fantastic everybody's been. We don't have much family around, but it doesn't feel that way. It's beautiful."

Ben: "We see them as mentors and friends. For instance, I was up in the Finger Lakes every other week last year. We follow the systems that our mentor follows—how to process fruit, when to process fruit, how to look after the wine after it's been processed. We haven't tried to reinvent the wheel."

THE VISION

Ben: "We have always wanted to have a quality product, from day one, which meant we had to make some fundamental changes. We wanted to grow vinifera grapes, which are European grapes—Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, etc. Those were the wines that we wanted, which was a change from the wines that Kimberly's dad produced originally."

Kimberly: "So we looked for a site to plant a vineyard, one that would be suitable for vinifera grapes."

Ben: "The problem with vinifera is they're not as winter-hardy, so they are a trickier prospect... We had a very clear vision. Maybe we didn't know the steps to achieve it, but we had a clear goal, to make top-quality vinifera wines. In the Hudson Valley there are a lot of sweeter wines, a lot of hybrid wines. We think there's a gap in the market for what we do."

MAKING IT A REALITY

Ben: "Kimberly's dad already had the farm, and we were lucky to lease an already existing vineyard, which was a little dilapidated."

Kimberly: "It needed love, but it had the exact grapes that we were looking for."

Ben: "We took over that farm on a long-term lease. We have 10 to 15 acres of grapes. We plan to extend the acreage this year. Fifty percent of the wines we make come from the grapes from that vineyard. Hopefully that will increase. Every penny we make from the wines goes straight back into the business. What we've tried to do is not go into debt. So that means we can only grow at a certain speed, which is limiting but also liberating as well."

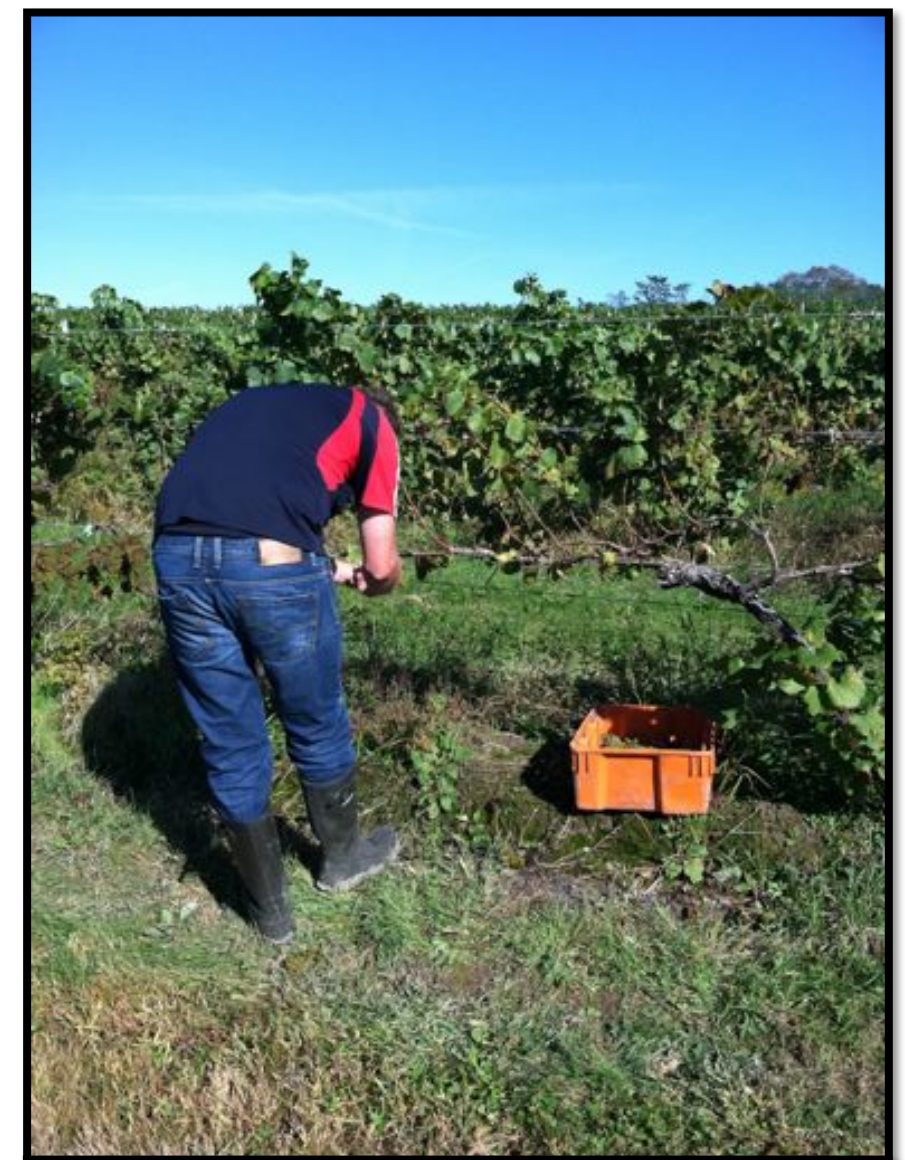
Kimberly: "It's been the biggest challenge ever, but it's been fantastic... People have been so wonderful, stopping in, we're painting - 'can we help?' We've made fantastic friends that have stayed until 4:30 in the morning pressing grapes with us because our equipment is small, and we're new and we can't get it all done and they've just stayed."

Ben: "There's a real sense of community"

WHY FARMING?

Kimberly: "I want my kids to grow up around farms and healthy food. We took a massive risk, but it's working, and we're doing everything together. We spent half a day in the vineyard yesterday together. Our kids are there. We went from politics and restaurant business and crazy lives to now being with our babies. It's wonderful to be with the people that you love. It's been a fantastic journey and it's so rewarding."

Ben: "You go to the vineyard in March and it's just bare wood and cane. Then in 18 months' time, those grapes are going to be in a bottle and hopefully everybody's going to enjoy it. And there's something beautiful about that. We can see something natural evolving over time."



Ben spends time pruning in the vineyard.

Relationship to the Land



Ben: "In the wine industry, you have to have an appreciation for the land. Terroir is massively important in winemaking... Each [vine] is an individual, their own living thing, and you've got to make sure that vine is balanced and has everything it needs."

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Ben and Kimberly lease land at another location as well. **Ben:** "[The land we lease] is very rich in most nutrients. It's good soil, and it's heavy clay. The problem with this site is it has no drainage and the vines just suck up all the water—it can split the grapes. Puddles start to appear. Plants don't like wet feet, so we're looking at building an underground drainage system to ensure that we can give these vines a healthy life."



To process their wine, Ben and Kimberly created a winemaking facility that lies behind the tasting room, complete with stainless steel tanks and French oak barrels. **Ben:** "This will be roughly, when we bottle it all, about 2000 cases."



Working Together: Ray, Kimberly and Ben stand in the Tasting Room in Clermont, NY. **Kimberly:** "We don't have a distributor. We're just us...it's the two kids in the back of the car, and I drive to wherever the wine is going, and I think people really love that it's so genuine and it's family. You're going to see Ben, my dad, or I... We're all out there as a family."