



# THE WINE MAN

BY ROBERT KENNEDY

## The young winemaker

**J**OSEPH PAPARONE is, by far, light years ahead of his time. At the ripe old age of 21, his mature oenological intellect is as sharp and clear as Riedel's finest crystal stemware. This young man has developed a real penchant for wine and wine-making at a very early age.

Paparone was just 14 years old when his family sent young Joseph back to Italy to connect with the family's Italian heritage in Capo d'Orlando, Sicily. It was there that Joseph experienced Italian family life. He became known as Giuseppe un po to his extended family in Sicily, which means "Give Joseph a little." What was born from that time in Italy, having visited a Tuscan vineyard, only further cemented his strong viticultural bond and his passion for winemaking that remains aflame today.

Fast forward to Paparone's college years at James Madison University when most other college kids were drinking beer at dorm parties, it was Joseph who brought his wine libation to the gathering. During the summer of 2018 his passion was further ignited by these formative college years. It was at this time that Joseph convinced his brother, Sam, to make the very first batch of Papa Vino, a play on the Paparone name and the Italian version of "Dad's Wine".

After researching how wine was made, and reading Jens Priewe's *Wine from Grape to Glass*, the Paparone men were ready to undertake their first-ever homemade red wine. Since there were no grapes to be sourced close to home, the young winemakers decided on a Pinot Noir grape juice concentrate. Armed with a "How to make your own wine from home" kit, and a true excitement for winemaking, Paparone went about his business fermenting grape juice, yeast, oak, and other special family ingredients first in food-grade plastic containers, then in glass carboys. Aged for three months, this lighter bodied, 12.5% ABV, was smooth on the tongue, but a bite at the finish. Propelled by his ambition and passion, it was a very large undertaking for such a young man, but Paparone was determined to succeed.

What drove Paparone was his love of wine and winemaking, but he was seeking more.

What intrigued Paparone the most was his desire to get out and educate others about this magical pastime of his. Starting a blog in the footsteps of his first pass of winemaking during that summer of 2018 with his brother, he was impressed by how many followers he attracted.

**P**APARONE WAS ON HIS WAY to accelerating his love of viticultural learning, of not only winemaking, but of the wine business. He wanted to help the public understand that making wine is something anyone can do if they have the right enthusiasm. Paparone also recognized the platform his Instagram blog brought him, giving him access to some of the most educated and experienced wine people in the world—sommeliers, and other extremely informed wine aficionados worldwide. Today, Joseph has approximately 2,500 followers, of which only 33% are from the U.S., while others are from all around the world, including Germany, Italy, France and Japan. (Paparone's blog can be found on his social media @papavino.wine on Instagram and Facebook.)

The next stop for this young man was a semester abroad in Florence, Italy, where

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Paparone enrolled in a viticultural course, expanding his horizon and fueling his insatiable appetite to learn more about his delightful hobby. Here Paparone went out on tastings led by sommeliers, learning so much more about the sights, flavors, and aroma profiles of finer Italian wines, such as the Barbera's, Barolo's, and Barbaresco's of the Piedmont appellation.

When Paparone returned to the U.S. during the spring of 2019, his next steps of self-learning would take him to a vineyard in the



Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. There, at the M&R Vineyard, his already very keen skills would further develop. Winter and spring pruning were something he undertook with fervor, while gaining and adding invaluable "farming" experience to his emerging resume.

While at the M&R Vineyard, Joseph continued to expand the depth of his winemaking with the family's owners. There Paparone produced a blended red of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cab Franc, Petit Verdot and Chambourcin grapes. The fruit was fermented and aged in both American and French Oak glass carboys between eight months and a year. This light-bodied wine had subtle flavors of raspberry, dark cherries and was rich in minerality. Mr. Paparone decided to label this 2019 vintage, "Villa Paparone."

After COVID-19 this year, Paparone returned home, and joined the Shenandoah Valley Wine Trail to further propel his desire to continue learning. The association introduced him to many more winemakers, and he helped make wine this past year for the SVWT.

The next stop for this "Gen Z" man is to see the Paparone Blog grow, continue learning how to be an amazing winemaker, and to someday own, manage, and become the winemaker of his very own Paparone Vineyard. For Joseph Paparone, his future in the wine business is extremely bright, given what this young man has already accomplished at such a young age. Something tells me we'll be seeing the Papa Vino and Villa Paparone wine labels on store shelves within the not too distant future. ■

For comments, questions, suggestions and/or feedback, contact Robert Kennedy at [rkj@Kennedy-companies.com](mailto:rkj@Kennedy-companies.com).