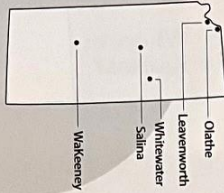




Gina Montalbano Zesiger and Bryan Zesiger stand inside their winery's retail store in Leavenworth.

Where in Kansas?



**KANSAS
DETAILS**
kansas made

Wineries

By Lisa Waterman-Gray

Kansas Vineyards Work with Local Farmers to Create Regional Flavors

Z&M Twisted Vines Wines and Winery

Gina Montalbano Zesiger and Bryan Zesiger began making wine on their farm in southern Leavenworth County. Soon, what began as a hobby led to wine tastings for family and friends and then the opening of a retail shop in downtown Leavenworth in October 2018.

Now retired from their original careers—Gina from the Park Hill School District in Kansas City, Missouri, and Bryan as an Apache aviation pilot with the Army—the two are able to concentrate on their longtime interest.

“Winemaking is on my Sicilian side of the family, and Bryan has tasted wine all over the world,”

Gina says.

“I’ve visited multiple countries, and what I saw was a common thread between all winemaking,” Bryan says. “It was and is still being done very traditionally. We appreciate traditional wines, but in many different wines I picked up unique flavors that we wanted to bring out in our wines,” he adds.

The Z&M line of just under 40 wines includes coffee wine, spicy wines and an emphasis on Kansas-grown ingredients. “We currently have four grape growers in Kansas,” Gina says. “But we also buy local fruit and vegetables from farmers in the general surrounding area of Leavenworth and Lawrence.”

“We want our wines to tell our story and we try to have fun with

it,” Gina explains. Names such as Blackhawk Blackberry and Hellfire reflect Bryan’s military background.

Gina and Bryan are now also licensed to craft cider beers and distillations. Post-Covid plans for their winery location include opening a 3,000-square-foot outdoor pavilion with weekend food trucks and live music.

“We developed wine to reflect something that we would enjoy,” Bryan says. “Our way of looking at wine is we think it should be fun and enjoyable for everybody.” **KM**

Z&M Twisted Vines, Wines and Winery
Leavenworth and rural Leavenworth County (near Lawrence)
(531) 600-8187
zmtwistedwines.com

Shiloh Vineyard & Winery | WaKeeney

Shiloh Vineyard & Winery offers 9 dry or semi-sweet whites and reds and two dessert wines. Six fruit wines feature blackberries, plums, pears, peaches, and apples. Kirk and Treva Johnston’s wines incorporate Kansas fruit, including blackberries from Big Berry Farm in Lecompton; apples, pears, and grapes from the Oxford area; and grapes from the Hoxie and WaKeeney areas. Open Saturdays and Sundays, 1–6 p.m., or by appointment. **(785) 743-2152**
shilohvineyard.com

Smoky Hill Vineyards & Winery | Salina

Owned by George Plante and Brock Ebert, Smoky Hill is one of the state’s largest grape-producing farm wineries. Twenty wines range from sweet whites to rosé and reds. Fruit-forward varieties include Red Raspberry, Simply Peach, Restless Summer (a strawberry and rhubarb blend) or Midnight Meadows—a blackberry and Norton grape wine available only in Kansas. (Tour/tasting appointments available, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.) **(785) 825-8466 | kansaswine.com**

Grace Hill Winery | Whitewater

Physicians David Sollo and Natalie Sollo planted grapes here 17 years ago. Wines such as Dodging Tornados (Chambourcin grapes) and Eclipse (a dessert blend of Seyval and muscat grapes), are always on hand. In the tasting room, the Cellar Series features small batch, rotating varietals. In addition, Grace Hill Outlet at Wandering Vine operates a retail outlet at the Wandering Vine event space and restaurant in Shawnee. **(316) 799-2511**
gracehillwinery.com

PHOTOGRAPH Kevin Anderson