

## Wine-making in Danbury? Yes, you can!

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Published 9:48 pm, Tuesday, April 29, 2014

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DANBURY -- Centuries of tradition and expertise in wine making are available to area residents who want to make bottles of their favorite varietal to share with friends, family or coworkers.

[Giovanni Petretta](#), whose family has been making wine in Italy for more than 500 years, opened the [Shelter Rock](#) Winery in Danbury and is offering club memberships to those who want to make their own barrel or share the experience with others. "I love introducing people to the process of making their own wine," said Petretta, who was raised on his family vineyard in Italy before moving to the United States in the 1980s. "It's a tradition that needs to be carried on."

Since 2008, Petretta has been offering his expertise to wine enthusiasts through the Santo Stefano Winery in Westchester County. But after spending the past few years commuting more than two hours a day from his home in Danbury, he decided to move the operation to the Hat City.

"I can really dedicate more time now to the winery," he said. "Wine making is my passion. When I'm making wine, I'm happy. If I can make a few dollars to pay the bills, it's that much better."

For those who are new to making their own wine, Petretta can guide them through the process of crushing the grapes, fermenting the juice, racking the barrel and eventually bottling their wine with their own labels. It's a process that starts around the time of the harvest in October until the wine is ready to be bottled in June.

"Wine isn't something that takes care of you, it's something that you have to take care of," he said of the process.

The cost of producing your own barrel of wine is about \$4,000 and results in about 24 cases. There are also less expensive options for those on a tighter budget. A barrel can be shared with up to six friends or co-workers as a team-building exercise.

"Giving a bottle of your own wine, with your own label, can be a great present for the holidays to give to your friends, co-workers or clients," Petretta said. "It's really a social experience. Anyone can get involved in the process and can taste what they've made with their own two hands."

[Anat Schneider](#), of Brookfield, who has been making wine with Petretta since before he opened his operation, said once you taste the wine, which is all natural and doesn't contain any sulfites, you'll never go back. "The taste is much better than what you're accustomed to through commercial wineries," she said. "There is really no comparison."

Schneider said she had already reserved a place for the next harvest so her family can make a barrel of wine that will be bottled under their own label for her daughter's wedding next year.

"We're going to make the wine together, and drink it together," she said. "The wine is great, but it's really about the people."

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