

FAMILY LEGACY

BEING CREATED



FARMER'S DAUGHTER VINEYARDS



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PHOTOS BY
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PHOTOGRAPHY

Charlee Moss inspects a bunch of grapes on her family's vineyard.

Georgia Wine to Flow



Four-year-old Charlee opens the front door to her Thomasville home with excitement. Her bright blue eyes twinkle a welcoming confidence, as if she already knows she is the namesake for Farmer's Daughter Vineyards. Charlee is a natural hostess along with her parents, vineyard owners Clayton and Renee Moss who will open the Farmer's Daughter Vineyard Tasting Room "on the bricks" in downtown Thomasville this May.

"We are proud to open our doors a mile from where we live," Renee said.



"We love living in this community and want our customers to feel at home as they taste our wines."

Clayton and Renee Moss at Farmer's Daughter Vineyards.

Photo by Sarah Hendrix

Clayton and Renee Moss expect to bring wine lovers in the region nothing less than delicious, competitive red and white wines. Instead of Muscatine grapes, Farmer's Daughter Vineyards uses a French-American hybrid grape, perfected by University of Florida professor Dr. Emile DuBois, who bred the grapes in Leesburg, Fla., in the 1980s. They are proven grapes that thrive in heat.

"We are over the moon with the quality of what these grapes could palletize," says Clayton, who is growing the vineyard on his family's third generation farm in Pelham.

His grandfather Moose (Robert Charles), a World War II Flying Tiger and Charlee's namesake, began farming in Pelham after the war and with his son Rick, Clayton's father, the two men sought to create a farm that was cutting edge in research and technology. The family's Hawthorne Farms has withstood the tumultuous ups and downs of row crop agriculture due to their forward thinking.

Clayton feels vineyards represent the future for the third and fourth generations of the Moss family. He is a



John Cayman, Renee, Clayton and Charlee Moss.



Charlee playing in the dirt among the featured Blanc duBois and LeNoir "Favorite" plants.

professional in agriculture and looks at Farmer's Daughter Vineyard as the new direction for his farm. He wants it to be a legacy his daughter and son will one day inherit.

Still, Clayton and Renee are surprised they wound up farming. Their story began in Atlanta several years ago when the only wine they discussed was the wine they were drinking. Avid athletes, they fell in love through their passion for triathlons.

Both were professionals in the business world, Clayton in Agricultural Economics and Renee in Marketing and Design. They had just purchased their first home, where they planned to live after their upcoming wedding. Their plans for the future seemed clear.

Then, Clayton's father broke the news he was retiring and the farm was Clayton's if he wanted it. His first inclination was to say no. He was starting a new life in Atlanta with Renee, but he found the idea to take over the farm wouldn't go away. One night he woke up in a cold sweat and knew what he had to do.

Renee worried Clayton had cold feet about the upcoming wedding, but he was actually worried about how to tell his city bride he wanted to be a farmer. The couple decided to put their house on the market and felt if the house sold quickly, it was meant to be. Their Atlanta home had an offer within 48 hours and they knew farming was their destiny.

Leaving Atlanta was a big step for the Moss family, who hoped to move to a community near the farm and vineyard. They rented in Moultrie, but fell in love with the charm and magic of downtown Thomasville and decided to make the city their permanent home. Clayton and Renee renovated a mid-century home close to downtown and it is now filled with the laughter of Charlee and her 18-month-old brother, John Cayman.

Like his father and grandfather, Clayton is forward thinking in his approach to farming, and he realizes there needs to be alternatives to row crop agriculture for his children to have an opportunity to continue the farm. He and Renee have a passion for quality wine and his father supported his idea to plant a vineyard and



Clayton last spring holding young Blanc duBois grapes, the start of the development of the first fruit.

bottle wine. He told Clayton, "do what you want to do, this farm has been my dream, now you live yours."

Clayton's first task was to remove 50 acres of timber to plant the grapevines. Farmer's Daughter was first planted in 2014 with Charlee playing in the dirt among the featured Blanc duBois and LeNoir "Favorite" plants. In 2015, they added Lomanto.

Bottling date for the inaugural wine is the end of March and the wine will be ready in April.

"We make wine in the field – tanks are for finishing," Clayton explained. "Our grapes are handpicked to assure no damage to the fruit; they then are cold pressed in our vintage 1950s crush press."

Clayton prefers the older press because it is easy to repair and works as perfectly now as it did new.

Presently, the new vineyard boasts nine acres of wine grapes. First harvest will bring the Farmer's Daughter

Vineyards 300 cases of red and approximately 1,000 cases of white, which they will divide between sweet, semi-sweet and dry. They expect to have 1,300 cases of wine for sale this year and 2,000 cases in 2017. Ultimately, the vineyard can plant up to 11 acres of grapevines.

Clayton continues to farm traditional crops of cotton, corn, peanuts, and pecans at Hawthorne Farms; he also immerses himself in the science of grapes.

He is the youngest winery owner in Georgia and takes his place and the future of Georgia wine seriously. Clayton sits on the board of the West Georgia Vineyard and Wine Association, as well as the Georgia Wine Producers. He also is on the Georgia Wine Board.

"Georgia wine has been around a very long time," he said. "There were 14 wineries in the state in 2003 and now there are 50."

The opening of the Farmer's Daughter Vineyard Tasting



Grapes are handpicked to assure
no damage to the fruit.



TOP: Unloading fresh Blanc duBois that was harvested and chilled overnight into the vintage 1950s Wilmes Press.



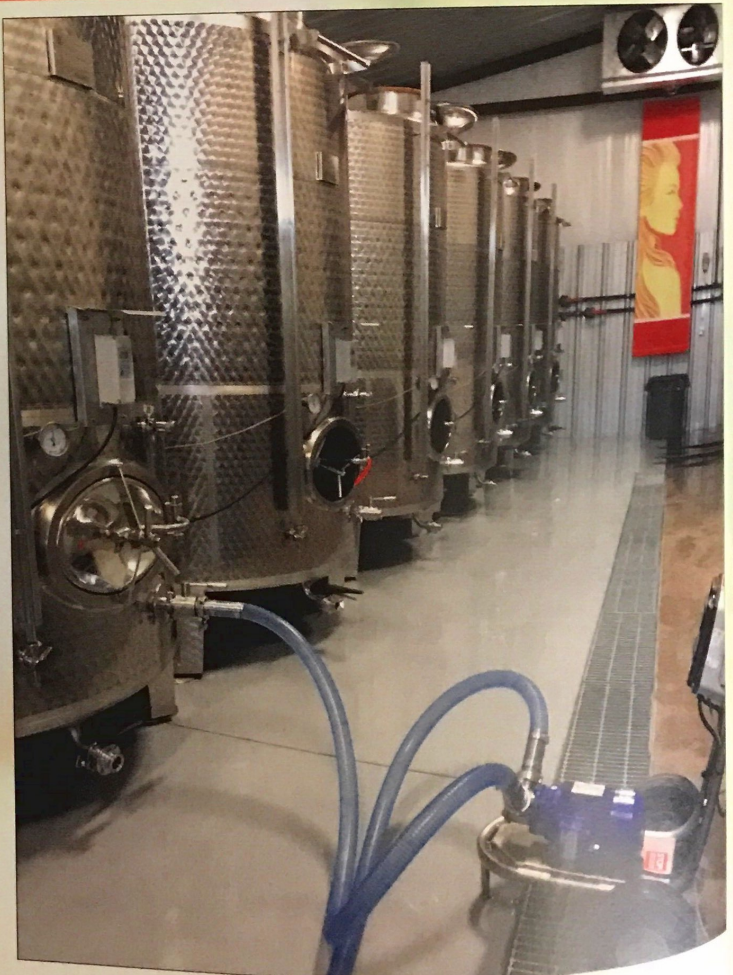
RIGHT: Clayton checks on a juice pumping process.

Room is in May. Located at 106 N. Broad St. in downtown Thomasville, it will be a traditional wine tasting room where wine lovers can choose a glass, stay and relax.

The Mosses have no intention of the room becoming a restaurant.

“We will offer nibbles, cheese and chocolates, and we welcome customers to bring their own food to eat while they taste the reds and whites on the menu,” Renee explained.

The couple is particularly excited to have local restaurant Liam’s host a tasting dinner to help welcome the new venue ‘on the bricks’. No further information was available about this event as of press time.



Custom made stainless steel fermentation tanks.



Farmers Daughter Vineyards is a dream come true for the Moss family.

Little Charlee doesn't know yet how she inspired wine production in the region, but for the Moss family, Farmer's Daughter Vineyards is a dream come true and they are excited to share their love of wine with the community they also call home.

Visit the website farmersdaughtervineyards.com and "like" them on Facebook to be the first to know release dates for new wine. ■

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