



PHOTOGRAPHY • CRESTINA MARTINS

## A New-found Passion

With retirement looming, Dennis Grimm, a local accountant, went looking for something completely different. So he and his wife, Candice, built a vineyard under the Andes mountains in Argentina

BY LUISA D'AMATO

Dennis and Candice Grimm didn't just retire. They seized an adventure at the other end of the world.

The Conestogo couple built a vineyard in Argentina. They grow the country's signature Malbec grape, with the snow-capped Andes mountains as a backdrop.

A river winds through their six-hectare property in the green, picturesque Uco Valley, about 1,000 kilometres west of Buenos Aires. The valley is part of the Mendoza winemaking region, an area of wineries, boutique hotels and innovative restaurants that is fast attracting tourists. The New York Times has called Mendoza "Argentina's Napa Valley."

"I just fell in love," said Dennis about his first visit to the area.

"The people were unbelievably wonderful, the country was delightful ... I said, 'Candice, we're going to buy a vineyard.'

So they did. They planted 20,754 vines on five hectares, bearing Malbec, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay grapes.

Their Epitome vineyard has created some beautiful wine that Dennis exports to individuals and wine stores in Alberta, and to a few individuals, groups and restaurants in Ontario. Plans are in the works to bring it to the United States this fall.

It has all been a big change from his career in southern Ontario. Before his retirement in 2010, Dennis, an accountant, had been managing partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers in its Waterloo office.

He also had a long history of service to the community, including vice-chair and founding board member of Canada's Technology Triangle and a founding director of the Homewood Foundation.

"I worked hard all my life and loved

## SMILES ATTRACT... Does Yours?



A healthy smile is youthful and magnetic.

We have been creating beautiful smiles for over two decades.

Discover yours at de Man & Höediono Dentistry



Drs. Höediono, de Man, and Shigapov

→ Ask us about our 40 min. in office Bleaching Special! ←

**de Man & Höediono**  
DENTISTRY

www.KitchenerDentist.com | 519-742-8303  
1058 Queen's Boulevard, Kitchener

it," he said.

But retirement was looming on his 60th birthday. Like many people who focus keenly on career, Dennis wondered how he would manage when it was no longer there.

He was convinced that retirement should offer an opportunity to do something completely different.

"He was looking for passion," said Candice, who has been with him since they were high school sweethearts at Eastwood Collegiate Institute in Kitchener.

Dennis went back to school part time. He earned a diploma as a "master taster" of wine from Niagara College in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He found the study of wine extremely interesting. And it was "reinvigorating" to work with the younger students who were just starting their professional careers.

This was what he wanted. Instead of being clouded with uncertainty about his future, "I had blue sky," he said.

He thought about buying a vineyard. Just a couple of acres, "something I could do when Candice has to go to book club and play bridge," he said with a wide smile.

Niagara seemed an obvious location. But it posed all kinds of problems: high prices and taxes on land purchases, plus many development restrictions in an area designated as part of the Greenbelt.

Italy and France were exciting and romantic, but out of his price range. There is "very little room for new vineyards, and old ones are just not for sale," he said.

Then he discovered Argentina on a visit in June 2008.

It was winter there, but sunny and remarkably warm, with temperatures about 15 C.

"It was so beautiful, the wines were so good," he recalled. And the cost of living was much lower there. "I could live there for a third of what it was costing me to live here. So we did it."

"All his friends thought he was out of his mind," said Candice, who didn't visit until a few months after the land was purchased.

Dennis promised her that if she didn't



In 2008, Dennis and Candice Grimm of Conestogo purchased a six-hectare property in Uco Valley, under the Andes mountains in Argentina. They've planted 20,754 vines bearing Malbec, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay grapes.

PHOTOGRAPHY  
COURTESY OF THE GRIMMS



PHOTOGRAPH • COURTESY OF THE GRIMMS

like it there, they wouldn't build a house. They'd just have a vineyard. But he wanted it to work out and used every opportunity to persuade: When she did arrive, he made sure they stayed in a five-star hotel and ate in the best restaurants.

Building a house took three years. It was longer than they expected. Deadlines are not rigidly adhered to in Latin America. Instead, there is a feeling that "life is to be

lived today," Dennis said.

Meanwhile, the language barrier was considerable. The locals were excited to have people with whom to practise their English. But neither one of the Grimms speaks fluent Spanish, although they have taken lessons. In the local town near the vineyard, Dennis became fondly known as "the Canadian who speaks with his hands."

The Uco Valley is semi-arid, but gets

plenty of water from the snow melt that flows down from the mountains. It's also an earthquake-prone area, so the house is constructed to resist them. Built of brick and cement with terracotta tiles on the roof, it has no basement. It is built on reinforced concrete pillars that are sunk deep into the ground.

The couple enjoy being embedded in Argentina's culture of inclusion and zest for living. They still laugh about the time they tried to hire an electrician to install some lights in the house. They waited for three weeks before he finally showed up. And when he did, his timing was perfect. The Grimms were having an asado — a barbecued meal that can last five to six hours. The electrician joined them for the meal. Then he took his leave. "He had never even taken the screwdriver out," said Dennis in wonderment.

The electrician said: "I'll see you

tomorrow." And although he did not come back the next day, he did come back some time later and did the work.

"You have to remember you're not in North America anymore," said Candice.

The winemaking has been a success, with the assistance of celebrated Argentinian vintner Laureano Gomez. Grimm says the dusty, alluvial soil of the valley (from millions of years of volcanic ash from the Andes) is actually good for growing grapes, since vines perform best when under stress. Meanwhile the constant sun means delicious ripening and concentration of flavour, while the contrast of warm days and cool nights (thanks to the high altitude of the area) provide the acidity needed for good structure.

The first harvest was in 2012. The inaugural Malbec, aged in French oak, was a huge hit. All 1,800 bottles are sold out, mostly to higher-end restaurants and indi-

vidual wine aficionados in Waterloo Region.

With its ripe cherry and blackberry aromas, and the spicy notes that develop at the back of the mouth, the Epitome Malbec wines grace the menus of fine restaurants like Langdon Hall in Cambridge and Enver's of Morriston. (For a full list of local restaurants that carry Epitome wine, and to order for wine clubs, go to epitomewineyard.com.)

"I think it's incredibly well made," said Terri Manolis, owner of Enver's.

Part of the appeal of Epitome wine is the fact that it's uncommon. Dr. Michael Garboll, a wine aficionado from Waterloo, discovered the wine when he was looking for something a little unusual. The wine consultant at the LCBO put him in touch with Dennis. Garboll bought six bottles of the 2014 Malbec.

"I loved it. It was special," said Garboll, who praised the elegance of its soft tannins

and what he described as the wine's "smoked wood mouthfeel."

He said the discovery fits perfectly with the wine-lover's quest for "finding the hidden gem, something someone else doesn't have ... but still having enough that it's very special and you can share it."

Last year, in addition to the Malbec, the Grimms made for export a rosé wine with their Merlot grapes. They called it "Because...."

This year, 10,000 bottles of Malbec are being produced, along with another 10,000 bottles of Because.... The rosé and 2015 Malbec will arrive in North America in March 2017.

It is a huge satisfaction for the couple to see their wines listed at some of the best restaurants in the country.

Never one to let grass grow under his feet, Dennis became a certified sommelier in 2011. He is also a licensed agent with the

Fabulous finishes, amazing amenities & stunning park views in Uptown Waterloo

# WE MAKE RENTING A BEAUTIFUL THING.

ALSO AVAILABLE:  
FULLY FURNISHED SHORT-TERM EXECUTIVE SUITE RENTALS

CHOOSE FROM LUXURY RENTAL SUITES  
IN THE COOPERAGE OR THE ONYX AT  
THE BARREL YARDS COMMUNITY  
**519-883-8383 | BARRELYARDS.COM**

OPEN HOUSE HOURS  
MON-THURS 11-7PM  
FRI 10-6PM  
SAT 10-5PM  
SUN 11-5PM

  
The BarrelYards  
experience life uptown

**ROCKWAY**  
MENNOMITE COLLEGIATE

A SMALL SCHOOL FOR A BIG WORLD



"As a parent I feel my kids have had a universally positive experience at Rockway. It is a small school with small class sizes. What I like most, however, is that the teachers are wholly committed to these kids and see them as valuable people beyond their responsibilities in the classroom."

~ Laura MacGregor

**Grades 7-12**  
[www.rockway.ca](http://www.rockway.ca)  
[admissions@rockway.ca](mailto:admissions@rockway.ca)



Rockway Mennonite Collegiate  
110 Doon Road | Kitchener | N2G 3C8  
[www.rockway.ca](http://www.rockway.ca) | 519-743-5209





**CALL THE EXPERTS  
WHEN YOU ARE  
LOOKING TO INVEST  
IN QUALITY, COMFORT AND  
ENERGY SAVINGS.**

We Take Pride in Serving Our Region  
For Over 43 Years

*Well done by*  
**Dunn**

Heating • Air Conditioning • Fireplaces  
SINCE 1973

K-W SHOWROOM: 519-746-6000 | CAMBRIDGE: 519-658-0543  
GUELPH / FERGUS: 519-787-0965 | FAX: 519-746-6015  
[www.dunnheating.com](http://www.dunnheating.com)



**JEFF DILLON**  
FINE ART

[www.jeff-dillon.com](http://www.jeff-dillon.com)  
519.574.6633  
[jeffdillon1@mac.com](mailto:jeffdillon1@mac.com)



PHOTOGRAPHY • CRESTINA MARTINS

*“I just fell in love,” said Dennis about his first visit to the area. “The people were unbelievably wonderful, the country was delightful ... I said, ‘Candice, we’re going to buy a vineyard.’ ”*

LCBO, which is required if he wants to sell his wines in this province.

Dennis made sure that, between the lower cost of living in Argentina and the income from the wines, their experiment in viticulture has never created a risk for their life in Waterloo Region. They're home in Conestogo for Christmas and in the summertime, and they enjoy travelling, but they spend about four months a year in Argentina, in our fall and winter. It's a 22-hour journey, door to door, but there is almost no jet lag because there is only one or two hours difference in time zones (Argentina has no daylight-saving time).

Their Argentinian adventure may have seemed risky, but the results have been idyllic. “It’s a lifestyle, it’s not a business,” Dennis said. “I can’t tell you how many

hours and days I spent sitting in that vineyard. You sit there and look at the mountains and the vineyard. It enriches your life.”

They've enjoyed growing closer together as a couple, while they worked together on the project.

Because the seasons in the southern hemisphere are opposite to ours, the Grimms also get an unanticipated bonus: a second helping of spring every year. They leave the orange and white pumpkins of Argentina to enjoy the daffodils of Waterloo Region. Half a year later, when the air turns cold and the leaves turn red in Waterloo, they fly south again, to be greeted by a display of spring flowers.

“I love spring,” Dennis said, “and we get it twice now.” 