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Celebrating 10 Years at Truro Vineyards • Alasdair's Burger Quest • Atlantic Spice
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Truro Vineyards + South Hollow Spirits

What a Difference a Decade Makes

By Tom Dott



Dave Roberts, Jr., Kristen Roberts and Dave Roberts Sr. in South Hollow Spirits, the Cape's first legal distillery since the Prohibition.
Photo by Tom Dott.

Turning onto the Route 6A extension in Truro, I had given up on trying to come up with clever interview questions. When these romantic moods hit, I tend to write less of an editorial piece, and am prone to veer off into something that resembles a mushy love letter. Wineries, whether from various parts of Europe to the tip of Long Island and throughout California, haven't just warmed my heart; each has changed me in some small fashion.

Spending a relaxing hour or two on a vineyard is a perfect recipe for the soul, given the right sunshine and temperate climate, highlighted with gulps of crisp and smoky chardonnay, or a Syrah so big, spicy and bursting with tannins it packs a peppery sneeze in the finish. Sprinkle in the perfect company (in the case of a winery, it's the folks who work vines, swirl glasses and design labels) and you might just have an afternoon as close to Nirvana as you'll ever get. So, while my car tires made the delightful crunch on the approach up the vineyard's seashell driveway, my brain had already forgotten our little talk and started musing poetically. I drifted back to 2007, the year I wrote my first article for *Edible Cape Cod*, the same year I first met Kristen Roberts during a magazine party, and the year my love affair with Truro Vineyards began...

Kristen Roberts was new to the neighborhood in 2007. That year her father, David Roberts, Sr., took a bike ride down the road, and returned with a winery, or so the legend has it. But the seeds of this bold move were planted back in the 1950s when Dave started vacationing on Cape Cod, which eventually included a 1965 Truro honeymoon with his new bride Kathy, and then an escape to Truro every year thereafter. But Dave Roberts had more cards up his sleeve than a bike ride and a dream. Previous to his Truro endeavor he had represented more than 500 producers and visited over 100 wineries while working his way up the industry, from a trainee at British beverage company, Diageo, to eventually becoming Chief Executive Officer of United Liquors. When word got out that Truro Vineyards was for sale, he brought the idea to his family, and with their support and full commitment to involve themselves in every aspect of the business—from working the fields and slapping the labels on the lighthouse-shaped bottles, to marketing, stocking and everything in between—the rest is history.

For an outsider, the Roberts family has made the last ten years on their vineyard look as easy as a stroll down the boardwalk, but it's not. Owning and running an operation that continues to expand each year, whether in acreage or product, demands a vast knowledge of the industry, as well as their consumer, and a keen sense of "is this going to work or not?" To this wine lover's memory I can't recall ever seeing (or tasting) a misstep in Truro Vineyard's decade-long run.

Cape Codders and visitors alike have witnessed in a relatively short period the additions of an outdoor pavilion, a scenic venue for a wedding, rehearsal dinner or other special occasion event; wine making facility; food truck; a greatly expanded gift shop and tasting room; a distillery; larger restroom facilities to handle the crowds; and let's not forget a line of wines that gets more luscious with each year. I understand that the changes are all carefully calculated because I know the Roberts family (their passion is as palpable as a pinot) but I have to wonder, are there ideas that didn't work? Dave pauses and thinks about it, as if the thought never crossed his mind, and, without a hint of braggadocio but with his signature twinkle and grin, answers,

"Well, we've been lucky. The ideas that weren't home-runs have been solid triples."

Certainly one of their grand slams was the addition of a 2000-square-foot South Hollow Spirits, Cape Cod's first legal distillery since the Prohibition. Head distiller David Roberts, Jr. isn't just a chip off the old block, the guy's an impassioned liquor wizard. He started homebrewing over 20 years ago, which led him to brewing courses at the Siebel Institute in Chicago, which started Dave on his own personal yellow brick road to the Flying Monkey Brewing Company in Kansas City and eventually SweetWater Brewing Company in Atlanta (where production increased over 1000% during Dave's eight-year tenure).

In 2007, David, Jr. signed on with the rest of the family and started distilling under the watchful eye of then head wine maker Matyas Vogel. In the last ten years the amount of time Dave has dedicated to perfecting his craft must be mind-boggling. You can taste his dedication with just one sip of his award-winning Twenty Boat Spiced Rum, the more recent White and Amber Rums, and his latest creation, Dry Line Gin, made with Truro-grown red cedar juniper berries and angelica root. While the rest of the family might be meeting, greeting and overseeing the bustling winery, tasting room and gift shop, Dave, Jr. is, as usual, back in his distillery with its testing tubes and tasting beakers, and all the other things that give the impression that he's the family mad scientist. My short visits with Dave are always a high point, and at the same time render me pretty useless for the rest of the day.

I catch up with Kristen on the sweeping front lawn of the vineyard. Always poised and pleasant (and sharing her father's contagious twinkle), Kristen represents her family and her family's lifework beautifully. She is always generous with her time and happy to talk shop. Her achievements over the last decade are obvious, from a booming business, to her selfless humanitarian work throughout Cape Cod, to her two precocious daughters. It all seems so perfect.

"It ain't all perfect!" she says playfully. I inquire about the biggest setbacks. "One time we had thousands of labels show up with an upside down design. That was a disaster, but you get over it and move on." Ironically, five minutes later, that very statement would give me great insight into Kristen's attention to detail. I hadn't been on the property in about a year, and as we enter the main building, I am awestruck by the addition of an inviting wrap-around deck, as well as a greatly expanded and attractively redesigned gift shop.

"When we decided to renovate we discovered that the building really didn't have a foundation, so we had to lift the building and start from there." And that to me is the essence of Kristen Roberts. When upside down wine labels take precedence over raising an entire building during a conversation about dealing with hurdles, well, it's the mark of someone who takes complete ownership in everything they do.

In celebration of their decade of wowing people from around the globe, the Truro Vineyard + South Hollow Spirits hits just keep on coming. This year brings a new addition to the Truro Vineyards family in wine maker Milan Vujnic. Vujnic was captivated by the art of wine making from a young age, growing up on his family's vineyard in Croatia where they made wine from indigenous grapes. Since then, Vujnic has immersed himself in his trade, earning a B.S. in Enology



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Organic Photography



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and Viticulture at Yugoslavia's University of Pristina, which lead to working small, high-end pinot noir and chardonnay producers. He has since honed his craft through positions at heavy hitting wineries such as New Zealand's most awarded winery, Villa Maria Estate, as well as Stag's Leap and Raymond Vineyards in Napa.

June will mark the beginning of summer-long Wednesday Wine & Dine evenings where guests enjoy a five-course small-bites tasting menu in the Old World-esque barrel aging room. At these mini-galas, the local and seasonally-inspired offerings of chef Brian Erskine of The Crush Pad, the onsite food truck, are paired with selections from the vineyard's wine and spirits portfolio. To complete the sensory experience, dinner guests enjoy live music while viewing new exhibits by local artists. Reservations are a must.

Also in store this summer are a few new additions to the liquid assets: a 10th Anniversary Muscat release; a Signature White Port release; and the "Roberts 10" specialty cocktail made with Dry Line Gin, Truro Vineyards Diamond White, elderflower and soda, which is available for purchase at their Hollow Bar.

Heading across Truro Vineyards' great lawn toward my truck, past the picnic tables, the shade trees and the Adirondack chairs, I caught that same feeling that only a winery can deliver. Sure you can say in part it was the sip of gin or the taste of amber rum. You certainly might not discount a lively wine tasting with new friends under the pavilion...and of course the sunny day and perfect temperature were in place, too. But it was Dave Sr.'s parting words that really hit home. I asked him what the most rewarding part of his first ten years at Truro Vineyard was. Without skipping a beat, he pointed one hand at the winery and the other across the lawn at the distillery, and said, "That's easy. Watching what my kids can do is the best part of it all. Ten years ago they gave their commitment, and I'm amazed by what they've achieved."

Cheers to the Roberts family and Truro Vineyards + South Hollow Spirits.



Truro Vineyards + South Hollow Spirits

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