

Penn Yan winery to make its reds and whites green

Kate Perry • Staff writer • June 2, 2009

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The wines at Red

Tail Ridge are pale buttery yellow and soft rosy red, but soon they'll be green, too.

Back behind the vineyard rows off Route 14 in Penn Yan there's a new building taking shape that will be different than anything in the region.

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It's just a cement and steel beginning now, but by fall it'll be an environmentally low-impact wine production building, and Red Tail Ridge owners Nancy Irelan and Mike Schnelle will be inside crushing grapes for their newest vintage.

The couple is seeking silver LEED certification for the building from the U.S. Green Building Council. Earning a LEED certification — the four levels are

certified, silver, gold and platinum — means a

building meets certain criteria in regard to energy savings, water efficiency, carbon dioxide emissions, indoor environmental quality and "stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts."

There are currently no wine production facilities with LEED certification in New York, according to the U.S.

Green Building Council, and Red Tail Ridge is the only one registered, the precursor to certification.



Photo gallery:



Red Tail Ridge Winery



Geothermal slinky loops await installation at Red Tail Ridge Winery in Penn Yan. (Provided photo)

Sustainability is a growing trend in the industry, but Irelan also said it's important to her and Schnelle, who already employ sustainable practices in their vineyard.

"This is the only winery we're ever going to construct, and if we are going to make that kind of investment we ought to make sure that it reflects our values," she said.

The completed building will be the culmination of a long sought after dream for Schnelle, 47, and Irelan, 48: making wine from their own grapes grown in their own vineyard. Irelan worked in the California wine industry for 20 years and serves as a consultant to vintners across the country, and Schnelle's background is in heavy equipment. But the couple, who live in Penn Yan, have long wanted their own winery.

Irelan became aware of the Finger Lakes region during visits to Cornell University for work, and the couple picked it for their business because it was affordable and showed promise. In 2004, they purchased 34 acres and Schnelle began clearing the land. By 2005, they were planting their first Pinot Noir vines and over the next two years planted Riesling and other varieties.

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An artist's rendering of what the environmentally low-impact production building will look like. (Provided photo)

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Last summer they sold the first wines made from their grapes: a Pinot Noir, Dry Rose and Dry Riesling. While their tasting room was open for business and their wines were on tables in restaurants and homes, all of them were produced in neighboring facilities.

It was time to move forward with the next big step.

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Schnelle and Irelan hired Allen Rossignol's Edge Architecture to design their production building. They wanted the winery to build on the environmentally sound practices already at work in the vineyard — Schnelle farms the grapes with no herbicides, uses only netting to keep birds from picking the ripe grapes and uses pesticides sparingly — and Rossignol's Rochester firm specializes in green building and LEED certification.

The 4,000-square-foot facility will be packed with features to earn certification. A geothermal system will heat and cool the building and its water, reducing energy use. Special tanks will hold rinse water from wine production tanks to be reused in irrigation. Plenty of windows reduce the need for daytime lighting. The metal used for the exterior walls contains recycled materials and was purchased from a local vendor to [reduce energy](#) use during transportation.

While the building was more expensive to construct upfront — Schnelle wouldn't reveal the cost — it will pay back some of the investment over time. Rossignol said it will save \$8,000 annually in energy costs. Red Tail may also get some of its money back

on the project from the New York State Energy [Research and Development](#) Authority. The winery is in the early stages of NYSERDA's New Construction Green Buildings program, which provides reimbursements to approved applicants for energy efficiencies, said authority spokesman Sal Graven.

Schnelle said the return on the building in terms of energy efficiencies is just one reason it's a sound investment. The winery could even lead to [increased sales](#) as consumers become more conscious about the environmental impact of their purchases.

"In the tasting room a lot of people seem happy that we are doing this," he said