

# **Making Wine Amid Adversity**

BY KAREN A. JAMROG



Sami Ghosn had it good in sunny Los Angeles with a convertible, a girlfriend, and a flourishing career in architecture, but he wasn't happy. "It felt fake," he says. "There was something untrue about it all. I wanted to feel my roots." He yearned to return home even though, he says, "I knew I'd be heading into trouble."

Passing Sami on the street, few would have guessed that in 1975, when Sami was eight years old, he and his family were forced to flee from their home in Lebanon after a civil war erupted.

Lebanon is located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and borders Israel and Syria. It is a small country that has long been bombarded by conflict and crises. In Los Angeles, Sami thought about "friends who had given their blood or their lives" for Lebanon. "I knew to make it in the U.S., I would have to forget Lebanon," he says. "I couldn't do it."

And so, in 1992, Sami returned to Lebanon's Beqaa Valley, where he found his family's home dilapidated, their fruit





vines neglected and overgrown, and their land occupied by squatters. "I could have been killed," Sami says, but he was determined to reclaim his family's property.

Over time, he revitalized the property and decided to embrace Lebanon's rich tradition of winemaking. "Our ancestors, the Phoenicians, provided wine for pharaohs," he notes, and the ancient temple of Bacchus, the Roman god of fertility and wine, still stands in Beqaa Valley. "It's a paradise for winemaking," Sami says, with a high altitude, terroir, and microclimate that help produce grapes with exceptional depth and flavor.

With his brother Ramzi, Sami worked toward Massaya's first release—an arak, which is a traditional Middle Eastern high-proof spirit crafted with native Obeidi white grapes and a touch of aniseed. Following the successful launch of the arak, Sami and Ramzi formed a partnership with French winemakers from Bordeaux and the Rhône Valley to produce wine in addition to arak.

Triple-distilled Massaya arak begins with plump, hand-picked grapes. The arak is gently heated in traditional Moorish copper stills over vine-wood embers, infused with organic green aniseed, and aged for two years in clay jars that allow it to breathe. "It's very mellow," Sami says, with spice notes and a fresh taste. Massaya arak comes packaged in a blue bottle inspired by the Lebanese meaning of Massaya—"twilight"—and the deep blue hue that saturates the Beqaa Valley sky when the sun sets behind Mount Lebanon.

Left: The Ghosn family, early 1970s.

Arak can be enjoyed with a range of foods, but perhaps not surprisingly, is particularly well-suited for Lebanese cuisine such as hummus, falafel, and tabbouleh. Red meat, vegetables, seafood, citrus flavors, and dishes seasoned with generous amounts of garlic are also delicious served with arak, Sami says.

Massaya shuns the use of pesticides and does not need to irrigate as nearby snow-capped mountains provide natural humidity. To avoid compacting the soil and overly disrupting nature with heavy and aggressive equipment, Massaya manually plows soil around its vines with handheld tools, and the winery uses recycled glass for its bottles. Adhering to earth-friendly methods at Massaya comes instinctively, Sami says, because in Lebanon "we grew up respecting nature."

In addition to caring for the environment, the Ghosn brothers also prioritize quality. "It's been a constant since our creation of Massaya," Sami says. As the Ghosns see it, upholding high-quality standards at Massaya is essential to the winery's success and is necessary to counteract the countless media images of destruction in Lebanon viewed by people around the world. "Quality is our compass,"

Sami says. "It's what got us noticed," and is what keeps Massaya customers coming back. In fact, he says, "we can hardly cope with demand."

Sami and Ramzi hope Massaya broadens people's understanding of Lebanon. The brothers want every bottle of Massaya arak and wine to convey a spirit of "tolerance, harmony, peace, and accepting 'the other," Sami says. For centuries, ethnic minorities and people persecuted for their religion found refuge in the Lebanese mountains, Sami points out. "We have a love of life and love of the other embedded in our culture," he says. "Massaya reflects all that, distills it in a bottle."

With a message that is like balm for the soul in these troubled times of political unrest, social division, pandemic, and perpetual uncertainty, Massaya hopes to reach the hearts and minds of people throughout the world and to promote the sense of community that comes from spending time with each other to enjoy arak, wine, and life.

# Check Out This Month's Recipe



#### A Jewel in the Rough

#### **INGREDIENTS:**

1 oz	Massaya Arak
1 oz	elderflower
5 oz	amaretto
5 oz	rose water
2 oz	cream of coconut

#### PREPARATION:

- Add ingredients to cocktail shaker and shake well with ice until thick consistency and strain into martini glass.
- **2.** Garnish with floating star anise, lavender, and an orange twist.
- 3. Dream of beautiful things.



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## **Keep it Local-Flag Hill Distillery & Winery:**

Where Great Wines are Made in the Vineyard



Anyone in the world of wine has heard the saying, "Good wines are made in the cellar. Great wines are made in the vineyard." And nowhere in New Hampshire is putting this saying into practice more than Flag Hill Distillery & Winery.

New Hampshire can be a challenging area to grow anything, especially grapes which are so climate-sensitive. However, Flag Hill has found a way to grow first-class grapes that create first-class wines. Founded in 1994, they started as a winery. But they have slowly morphed into a distillery as well as a wedding venue. The current owner, Brian Ferguson, purchased the property in 2015 and has led it to where the brand is today.

One of the many things that set Flag Hill apart, is that they grow all their grapes on their property in Lee, New Hampshire. This already sets them on a path for success because of the freshness of the fruit. Instead of ordering some—or all—of their grapes from across the country, they can pick them on their property and begin the wine-making process immediately. This means they are working with grapes that are at their finest. However, their focus on wine quality begins long before the grapes are picked. They truly begin in the vineyard, focusing on their soil, the timing of the harvest, and even how the grapes are picked. It's the little things such as these that add up to the award-winning wines they produce. "Our focus is on primary ingredients," says Ferguson, "We apply that principle to everything—from our wines and distillery—to our catering."



Flag Hill has a boast-worthy collection of wines. From elegant sparkling wines and brilliant whites to decadent red wines and even ports, there's something for every wine-lover. Each wine offers a unique taste of New Hampshire within a high-quality wine. These can be seen in some of their more New England-inspired wines, such as their Apple Cranberry Fruit Wine that is made with apples picked in Concord, NH. Some of our favorite Flag Hill wines that can be found in our outlets are:

- Flag Hill Cayuga White
- Flag Hill Sparkling Apple Cranberry
- Flag Hill Sparkling Cayuga White
- Flag Hill Raspberry Fruit Wine

They apply the same principle of focusing on the primary ingredients to the distillery side of their business as well. All their whiskeys are made from the grain they've grown in their fields. This is not an easy feat, especially in New Hampshire, and the value of it shouldn't be overlooked. By using grain they've grown themselves, they can control every aspect of the process. This means they don't need to worry about pesticides or low-quality grain. By sharing land with other local growers, Flag Hill can ensure that their crops are always growing in soil that has been nurtured properly and is free of any chemicals. All of this leads to high-quality spirits that are then aged to perfection using New Hampshire's seasonal changes.



A few of our favorite Flag Hill spirits for sale in our outlets, are:

- Flag Hill Spiced Rum
- Flag Hill Straight Bourbon
- Flag Hill White Rum
- Flag Hill Sugar Maple Liqueur

Outside of its products, Flag Hill also offers a wide array of events. Some of these events, such as their Brunch & Bubbles, sell out months in advance. (We recommend

signing up for their email blast so you can be informed of the latest event listings!) Structured after brunches in the

(Continued)









# NEW PRODUCTS SALE DATES: FEBRUARY 28, 2022 – MARCH 27, 2022

Johnnie Walker High Rye Scotch Whiskey	Scotch	750mL	\$39.99 \$36.99	Code 7152
Old Soul Bourbon	Bourbon	750mL	\$49.99	Code 7191
Les Alliés Pinot Noir	Pinot Noir	750mL	\$14.99 \$11.99	Code 37533
La Spinetta II Rosé Di Casanova	Rosé	750mL	\$18.99 \$15.99	Code 37469
12 Knights Red Blend	Red	750mL	\$12.99 \$9.99	Code 37789
Cristom Willamette Valley Pinot Noir	Pinot Noir	750mL	\$31.99 \$28.99	Code 15816
Hess Select Sauvignon Blanc	Sauvignon Blanc	750mL	\$ <del>15.99</del> \$8.99	Code 10588
Ménage à Trois Sweet Collection Sultry Red	Red	750mL	\$14.99 \$11.99	Code 14951
Penelope Barrel Strength Toasted Series	Bourbon	750mL	\$62.99 \$59.99	Code 7196
Elouan Chardonnay	Chardonnay	750mL	\$17.99 \$15.99	Code 34505
Heaven's Door Double Barrel	Whiskey	750mL	\$49.99 \$44.99	Code 6897
	Walker High Rye Scotch Whiskey  Old Soul Bourbon  Les Alliés Pinot Noir  La Spinetta II Rosé Di Casanova  12 Knights Red Blend  Cristom Willamette Valley Pinot Noir  Hess Select Sauvignon Blanc  Ménage à Trois Sweet Collection Sultry Red  Penelope Barrel Strength Toasted Series  Elouan Chardonnay  Heaven's Door Double	Walker High Rye Scotch Whiskey  Old Soul Bourbon  Les Alliés Pinot Noir  La Spinetta II Rosé Di Casanova  12 Knights Red Blend  Cristom Willamette Valley Pinot Noir  Hess Select Sauvignon Blanc  Ménage à Trois Sweet Collection Sultry Red  Penelope Barrel Strength Toasted Series  Elouan Chardonnay  Heaven's Door Double  Whiskey	Walker High Rye Scotch WhiskeyScotch750mLOld Soul BourbonBourbon750mLLes Alliés Pinot NoirPinot Noir750mLLa Spinetta II Rosé Di CasanovaRosé750mL12 Knights Red BlendRed750mLCristom Willamette Valley Pinot NoirPinot Noir750mLHess Select Sauvignon BlancSauvignon Blanc750mLMénage à Trois Sweet Collection Sultry RedRed750mLPenelope Barrel Strength Toasted SeriesBourbon750mLHeaven's Door DoubleWhiskey750mL	Walker High Rye Scotch WhiskeyScotch750mL\$3399 \$3699Old Soul BourbonBourbon750mL\$49.99Les Alliés Pinot NoirPinot Noir750mL\$14.99 \$11.99La Spinetta Il Rosé Di CasanovaRosé750mL\$18.99 \$15.9912 Knights Red BlendRed750mL\$12.99 \$15.99Cristom Willamette Valley Pinot NoirPinot Noir750mL\$31.99 \$28.99Hess Select Sauvignon BlancSauvignon Blanc750mL\$15.99 \$8.99Ménage à Trois Sweet Collection Sultry RedRed750mL\$14.99 \$11.99Penelope Barrel Strength Toasted SeriesBourbon750mL\$62.99 \$19.99Heaven's Door DoubleWhiskey750mL\$49.99Heaven's Door DoubleWhiskey750mL\$49.99

8022C4√	Bosscal Mezcal Damiana	Mezcal	750mL	\$49.99 \$42.99	Code 7087
RIBELLIOUS NO MENS OR OTHERS	Rebellious Red	Red	750mL	\$ <del>19.99</del> \$16.99	Code 37338
TRIBUTE	Tribute Sauvignon Blanc	Sauvignon Blanc	750mL	\$13.99 \$9.99	Code 22620
Escupo Rojo	Escudo Rojo Sauvignon Blanc	Sauvignon Blanc	750mL	\$18.99 \$14.99	Code 19304
DALMORE	Dalmore Sherry Cask 12yr Whiskey	Scotch	750mL	\$ <del>99.</del> 99	Code 7193
BRADSHAW	Bradshaw Kentucky Straight	Bourbon	750mL	\$42.99 \$38.99	Code 7149
MONTE	Monte Azul Plata	Tequila	750mL	\$34.99 \$29.99	Code 7150
JAMESON ORANGE	Jameson Orange Irish Whiskey	Whiskey	750mL	\$31.99 \$24.99	Code 7171
SURRESTÔTS	SLRRRP Cinnamon Whiskey Shots	Whiskey	50mL	\$17.99	Code 7059
	Marqués de Riscal Arienzo	Red	750mL	\$12.99 \$9.99	Code 34989
PALE	The Pale Rosé by Sacha Lachine	Rosé	750mL	\$16.99 \$12.99	Code 16671

# Flag Hill Distillery & Winery:

(continued)



islands, Bubbles & Brunch provides guests with plenty of delicious sparkling wines but also an array of local foods that change with the seasons. All of this is presented in a vineyard-side tent on their beautiful property. They also host occasional Chef's Table Dinners, which again, provide guests with seasonal foods paired with their wines.

As for what's next, Flag Hill has plenty of plans in the works! In addition to new products, they're also expanding their property to include short-term rental villas. This will allow tourists to spend time at Flag Hill and explore the day-to-day experience at a winery and distillery. It will also support the use of the property for weddings and parties.

The next time you're near Lee, New Hampshire, be sure to stop by Flag Hill! They are always eager to share a taste of their wine with visitors. And the next time you stop by one of our outlets, purchase a bottle or two of their wines or spirits!



Distillery & Winery

297 North River Road (Route 155) Lee, NH 03861 Phone: 1-603-659-2949

Open 11:00AM – 5:00PM year round

## **Featured Product**

Massaya is the brainchild of two dynamic Lebanese brothers who have harnessed the potential of their fabulous terroir to the know-how of two French wine-making dynasties. Arak pairs particularly well with dishes that include parsley, raw tomatoes, lemon, mint, and garlic-flavors that are sometimes harder to match with wine. Arak has a beguiling aniseed flavor and freshness that cleans the palate and aids digestion.

### Massaya Arak

Liqueur

#### **SALE PRICE \$39.99**

Regular Price \$42.99 750mL, Product Code 5248



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