

# MONTALUCE



Photos by Chris Hornaday  
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Uncorking the Tuscan life at North Georgia's newest winery concept

By Cindy Klinger

They say fine wine gets better with age, but as Georgia will soon discover, a fine winery doesn't necessarily need much time to ripen. Montaluce Winery and Estates is the newest wine producer and the newest wine-centered concept to land thoughtfully and oh-so gracefully in Dahlonega, Georgia's small wine country. The 400 acres—previously the site of a chicken and cattle farm—will be unlike any of the other wineries in the area. Montaluce's state-of-the-art winery will be a destination for those seeking a brief respite from city life, as well as a way of life for those who choose to purchase one of the 300 cottages, villas and estates in the small Tuscan-inspired villages. At Montaluce, the winery itself isn't the land's only draw: Streams, rolling hills, hiking trails, picnic pavilions, a luxurious spa, outdoor amphithe-

*“Bringing Tuscany home means enjoying wine with friends.*

*It means rising to your feet to toast many of life's large and small celebrations. It means uncorking three bottles at once for the table, not the judicious opening of another only when one is finished.”* —Frances Mayes, *Bringing Tuscany Home*

ater, tennis complex, pool, clubhouse, mile-long portion of the Etowah River, and the pièce de resistance—neatly rowed vineyards—all offer views of the breathtaking Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance. Tuscany? Who needs to leave Georgia?

And that's just the outside. Inside, the more-than-23,000-square-foot M Vineyards Winery—the soul of Montaluce—is a Tuscan-style villa harboring gigantic, rustic beams that look down upon a processing facility, barrel room, large tasting area, gourmet restaurant, gift shop, demonstration kitchen, owners' club and private cellars, and a large event space with large, unobstructed windows overlooking the vineyards. Nature is enhanced with the culinary mastery of Chef Steve Hewins, a graduate of The Culinary Institute of America who lived in

**February 14, 7-10 p.m.**

Valentine's Dinner; \$75 per person for a five-course dinner with wine

**February 16, 6-7 p.m.**

A Wine Makers Dinner (Italian Wine Lover's Night) with master sommelier Michael McNeill includes a cooking demonstration; \$100 per person for a six-course meal and wine

**February 23, 7-10 p.m.**

Open That Bottle Night with Gil Kulers, AJC wine writer; \$40 per person

## EVENTS

## this month at Montaluce

Europe for about 15 years, cooking his way through several countries. And what about the lovely grapes hanging on the vines? That part of the vineyard operation is overseen by winery and restaurant manager Paul White. He left a law practice in California to get involved with vino. However, the first harvest will take about three years to come about. For the 2008 bottles, Montaluce will blend grapes from California before switching over to Lumpkin County grapes.

The equipment in the winery—stainless steel tanks, de-stemmers, crusher, etc.—all comes from Italy and is state of the art. Large windows give visitors a peek into the winemaking process, step by step. It's all *la vita bella* (the beautiful life) beyond these walls, but in here, it's hard work.

The visionaries behind the project are Beecham Builders, a successful Atlanta company run by brothers Brent and Rob and dad Harry. They partnered with nationally recognized Harrison Design Associates and Greenway Construction to create a blueprint for a new way of living. "Our idea is something that hasn't been done in the United States, anywhere," Harry says. Most other wineries in the country, he says, are built around a day-trip concept, without amenities for overnight guests or prospective homeowners. But what about individuals who long to stay for a night or perhaps a lifetime?

Those who decide to live at Montaluce will have a European-type lifestyle handed to them along with their keys. Harrison Design Associates went to Italy and studied satellite views of Tuscan villages to fully understand how the homes and towns were set up so they could recreate them at Montaluce. The rustic-looking but high-quality homes are unparalleled, with beams, travertine floors, stucco wall finishes, fine cabinetry, wine cellars, stained concrete decks, outdoor fireplaces and imported Italian red-tiled roofing coming standard on each home, no

matter how large or small. The residences in most of the gated villages are positioned close together to foster a sense of community—and each small neighborhood will have a common courtyard with an amenity like a bocce ball or basketball court to bring neighbors together. In this vein, Harrison Design Associates tried to duplicate the *casa aperta*, or open house approach, which blends exterior and interior spaces.

Once neighbors become friends, the hope is that they will gather together to take part in the winery's offerings. They will have the opportunity to help make the wine that's produced here, and can even buy their own barrels, labels and rows in the vineyard. They'll also have access to an individual private locker reserved for each homeowner where they can store any bottle they'll want to uncork while they're dining at Le Vigne Ristorante, the gourmet restaurant on the property.

For those who haven't made such a commitment and remain visitors to the property, there are cottages for rent, winery tours, wine tastings, culinary classes and demonstrations, and educational wine seminars—all a few minutes drive from the historic town of Dahlonega and bordering the Chattahoochee National Forest. Harry says they're also hoping to host farmers' markets and artist showcases in addition to jazz brunches. Once you've worked up an appetite, you can work it off on some of the 60 percent of Montaluce's property that is preserved as natural habitat. Or perhaps you'll want to get a massage while your partner spends the afternoon improving his swing on a nearby golf course. Whatever you end up doing, you'll wish you had more time to do it all over again the next day.

By the way, Montaluce, loosely translated from Italian, means "mountain of light." That's certainly appropriate for a lovely piece of land just north of Atlanta. ❖

### Montaluce Winery & Estates

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