

» PANDIT AND SUDHA
PATIL
Narmada Winery

Narmada pairs Virginia wines

with global experience

By Kathy Dixon

From its name to some of its award-winning wines, the heart of Narmada Winery is family.

Pandit and Sudha Patil named the Rappahannock County winery after Pandit's mother, who sold her jewelry to pay for a plane ticket to send him to college. It was 1964, and he had been given a scholarship in the United States.

His family in India didn't have the money to fly him there. As they were discussing the matter, "my mom took off her jewelry, put it on the table and told my dad to pawn it," Patil said. "I feel indebted to her, so when my wife suggested we name the winery after her, I thought it was a good idea."

The couple has named wines after family members as well. The 2009 Yash-Vir red blend is named for Patil's two grandsons; the 2008 dessert wine, Primita, comes from a nickname for his daughter, Prema Patil Sharma; and a 2009 white blend named MOM is a tribute to all mothers who make sacrifices for their children, Patil said.

Situated on 51 acres, the winery is where people come to relax and enjoy 13 different Virginia wines made with grapes grown by Patil.

He and his wife bought the property in 1999, planted grapes and sold them to nearby wineries. After a few years they decided to diversify.

"We enjoy good wine, and we like talking to people so we thought we'd start our own winery," Patil said.

In 2006 they met with an architect and began building a winery and tasting room. They bottled their first wine in 2009 and have almost doubled their production since then.

They decided to offer Indian food to pair with the wines. Visitors to the tasting room

can purchase samosas, aloo tikki and other Indian fare.

Another thing that sets them apart is that they are the first Indian-American owned winery in America. "We have a slogan: 'Experience India, Taste Virginia,'" Patil said. "It's total Virginia wine made here with our grapes, and not a drop comes from out of state."

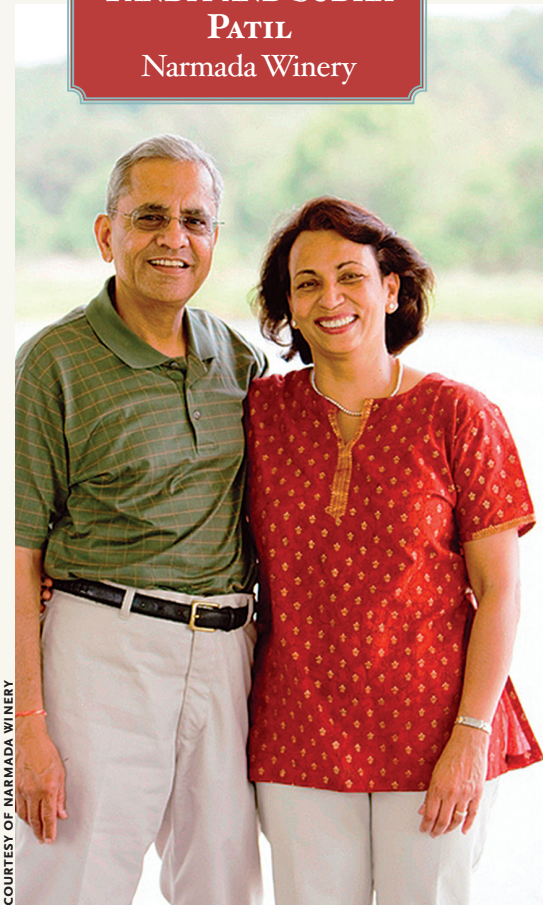
The Patils currently grow seven varietals, including vidal blanc, chambourcin, chardonnay, traminette, merlot, cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon. "We grow our vineyards in a sustainable fashion," Patil said, explaining that he uses pesticides only when needed and buys organic additives when possible.

Next spring he will plant 5 acres of petit verdot, malbec and viognier.

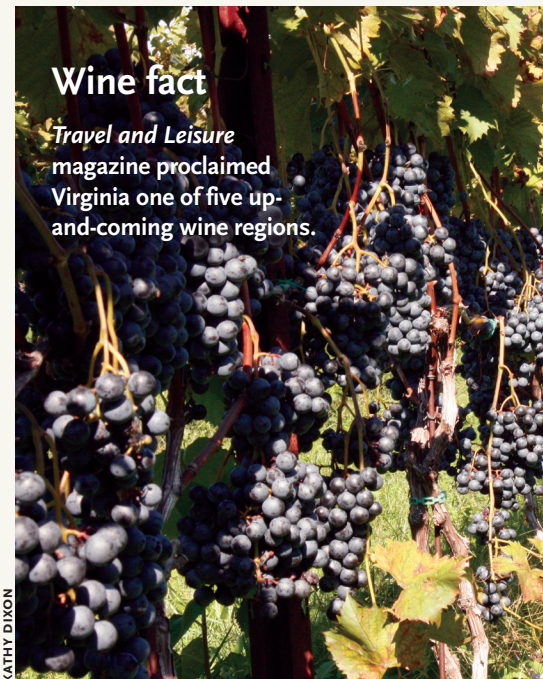
"It's a lot of fun, but the nicest part of owning a winery is meeting the smiling people in the tasting room," said Patil, who talks to visitors when the winery is open Thursday through Sunday. "That's the good part of this business. The bad part is that you're working all the time."

Like many farmers, the Patils don't make their living solely from their operation. Until last year, Pandit worked as a consultant for the U.S. Department of Energy. Sudha works three days a week as an endodontist. Pandit oversees the vineyards and manages the accounts, and Sudha is the winemaker and selects the food and gift items sold at the winery. Their daughter helps with business management and also serves as the winery's event planner.

Sudha, who holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry, is now making 13 wines. "We've gotten everything from platinum to bronze awards on everything she's made, and it's only been three years," Patil said. "Sudha's mind and soul are in this winery."



COURTESY OF NARMADA WINERY



KATHY DIXON

Wine fact

Travel and Leisure magazine proclaimed Virginia one of five up-and-coming wine regions.

"We enjoy good wine, and we like talking to people," Pandit Patil (left) said of the decision he and his wife, Sudha, made to grow their vineyard operation into a winery.