

A Life to Savor

This wine importer turned his passion into his career

It's only polite to believe that when you find something that is truly good you shouldn't keep it to yourself. One of the first things school children learn is to share. That's why Cherry Hill native Ronnie Sanders turned his passion for wine into an importing business. His wine adoration began when he was only 15-years-old, but the transition from being a self-described wine geek to a major wine importer needs what all fine wines require — time and maturity.

With a taste for fine Bordeaux from many years of dinner table imbibing, Sanders left for the University of Hartford in Connecticut to study business. After graduation he moved to New York City to work in the textile industry before returning to Cherry Hill to serve as president of his family-owned textile importing business, Materials International.

Then, when Sanders was only 27, his father passed away and left him his personal collection of 3,000 bottles of wine. Sanders became a collector of rare and artisanal wines, which was how he met the person who planted the seed for Vine Street Imports — his friend Michael Twelvetree.

"I met Michael because he and I are both wine geeks and he started brokering really high-end Australian wines to Americans," recalls Sanders. "He sold wine to collectors and I was his customer. We soon became friends."

Eventually, Twelvetree had an idea about starting a winery. He asked Sanders to be his importer because he knew Sanders was importing textiles at the time and was also knowledgeable about wine. At that time Sanders had amassed about 10,000 bottles of wine in his personal collection and he opted for the career change.

"I decided it was a good idea for me to combine my passion with my experience and start importing wine instead of textiles," says Sanders.

So, in 1999, Sanders closed Materials International and started working with a



partner to build a client list for his newest venture — Vine Street Imports. His genuine personality had formed many relationships with winery owners over the years. Sanders decided to begin working with only a few Australian winery owners,

but very quickly the word spread through the proverbial grapevine, and other wineries in Australia sought Sander's help in exporting their own brands.

"Almost all of the wineries that we do business with are friends, or friends of

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