

# Give them a gift they'll never forget: Give them The Wine Experience

By Gary Chapman  
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**TINTON FALLS** — Is there a *very* special someone on your gift list this year that you just simply cannot find the right present for? Perhaps it is a corporate client that you want to thank for their business or a family member that you want to give a unique, exquisite gift.

How about giving them the opportunity to make their own wine with their own personalized name and labels. Imagine their face when you



**LOU SODANO (ABOVE) OF  
THE WINE EXPERIENCE**

tell them they are going to have their own winery — albeit on a much smaller scale than the Mondavi family.

Well, that special gift can be a reality this holiday season just by contacting The Wine Experience, located on Shafto Road, here.

Three generations of the Sodano family, from Madison, have maintained the tradition of creating their own classic wines and now, through The Wine Experience,



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they offer a unique opportunity to learn the art and science of winemaking with an easy six-step, hands on, fun-filled course. During a period of approximately 10 months, "students" import a selection or variety of fine California grapes, with all the details and selection handled by Sodano. Using professional equipment, the staff at The Wine Experience teach you everything from crushing and destemming grapes, wine pressing, fermentation and removal of sediment, to bottling your own final product. Paste on your personalized label and enjoy the fruits of your labor or wrap that special gift next

year for the special people on your own gift list.

Perhaps, a full bodied Cabernet with notes of cassis, hints of blackberry, vibrant in its ruby colors and lively flavor. Or a Chardonnay, supple in texture and brimming with pineapple, cream, and spicy notes that harmonize nicely through a generous finish. Whatever wine you or your gift recipient decide to make, the rewards are well worth the efforts.

The best part of this school is the time involved, or actually the minimal amount of time. Although the overall process spans 10 months, actual instruction and the



Wine barrels (above) are set out for the wine aging and fermentation process.

hands on creating of your own wine takes just four, one-hour sessions, usually held on Saturdays.

Pressing normally begins in September when the grapes are destemmed, pulverized and put in a large fermenting vat. The contents are then put through a press and the pulp thrown away.

In just a week or so, when all of the sugar content is gone, you officially have wine. Of course, aging and fermentation are needed to achieve that smooth flavor, so the wine is poured into oak barrels until January or February.

Late spring and early summer is bottling time. With use of commercial equip-

ment it is possible to bottle an entire 50 gallon barrel in less than an hour. Finally, if you choose, you can label your bottles with personalized labels, or The Wine Experience will supply you with labels.

Wine making has become a favorite for families, groups of friends as well as wine connoisseurs. Creating a barrel of wine ranges in price from \$1,395 to \$1,750 depending on the grapes one selects, and the barrel usually produces 20 cases of 750 ML bottles. The cost of one bot-

tle works out to be about \$6, well worth the uniqueness of giving or sharing your own creation.

Some previous wine makers have won awards for their product, while others have been recognized for their label creations.

At present, there are 238 barrels of wine at the Shafto Road school and many are jointly owned by groups of friends. Three families, for instance, could all make the wine together, invest \$500

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Design and create your own private label (above) after you bottle your wine.