



Biographies – Debra S. Whiting, executive chef, co-owner / David B. Whiting, winemaker, co-owner

Red Newt Cellars is located on the east side of Seneca Lake in the hamlet of Hector in the Finger Lakes region of New York. In addition to producing wines from east Seneca Lake vineyards, Red Newt Cellars offers innovative Finger Lakes cuisine in the Bistro.

Red Newt Cellars was founded in 1998 by David and Debra Whiting. Wine production was started with the 1998 vintage with a mere 1,200 cases of Chardonnay, Riesling, Vidal, Cayuga, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The first white wines were released at the grand opening of the winery and restaurant in July of 1999.

In the Bistro, Debra builds an eclectic and seasonal menu which changes about every three weeks. The Bistro has been especially noted in its emphasis building relationships with local farms and producers and fostering the concept and practice of regional cuisine. As chair of the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, an organization founded in 1999 to promote culinary relationships between farms and restaurants, Debra continues to not only foster these ideas, but to practice them daily in the Bistro.

The Wine Spectator describes David and Debra as “untrammelled lovers of the Finger Lakes scene,” and it couldn’t be more true. Debra and David Whiting met in the late 1980s. At that time David was working as cellar master at a Finger Lakes winery. Debra was supervising microbiology labs at Cornell University. Following a passion for food and wine, David continued his oenological career as winemaker at three different wineries in the Finger Lakes. Debra’s path led her into a first a gourmet cheesecake business and then an upscale catering business. When the opportunity arose in 1998, David started wine production with the 1998 vintage and the following summer Debra opened the Red Newt Bistro concurrent with the first wine releases in June of 1999. Red Newt Cellars represents the achievement of David and Debra’s longtime goal to combine their efforts and expertise in the exploration of regional wine and cuisine. Their focus is on not only producing exceptional wines and food, but also creating a synergy between them.

David is one of the top winemakers in the Finger Lakes. His career spans three of the most exciting and progressive decades of the Finger Lakes wine industry.

Debra’s passion is translating the food of the earth to the gifts of the table. Unhampered by formal culinary training, Debra has an approach that is to seek an expressive interpretation, an inspired solution, to every culinary challenge. The result is a culinary palate whose colors express the bounty and seasons of the Finger Lakes.

Debra and David have received recognition from local and regional press as well as from national publications such as “Food and Wine”, “Nations Restaurant News” and “Wine Spectator”. Debra has served for many years on the executive board of the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty—an organization committed to increasing the awareness of regional products and to establishing and developing relationships between regional chefs and farmers. In the few years since joining the organization, Debra has seen the regional restaurant farm scene transform from a handful of committed local, sustainable farms to a region with dozens of farms producing greens, produce, meats, and artisanal cheeses.

The Bistro at Red Newt Cellars is committed to presenting cuisine that reflects the subtle seasonal variations of the region’s agriculture. To that end, Debra changes the entire menu every 3-4 weeks. She starts by contacting local farmers to obtain feedback on what is available right then and what is the freshest and the best. From there, she creates original recipes and dishes *literally* from the ground up.

In addition to her efforts in the bistro kitchen, Debra is very active in promotional activities and teaching. Her cooking classes at 171 Cedar Arts Center in Corning, NY sell out consistently. In conjunction with the Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, Debra has been a regular supporter of Senator Hillary Clinton’s “New York Farm Days” in Washington DC, which promotes regional products. She has presented numerous classes at the NY Wine and Culinary Center in Canandaigua, NY—both as lectures/demos and as hands-on workshops in the hands-on facility. She has presented Master Classes at Vintage New York in Soho, and has cohosted “a Finger Lakes Regional Dinner” at the James Beard House in New York City.