

Telling the story of music in the Texas Hill Country

A Place in Pontotoc



Pontotoc is a small historic town halfway between Llano and Brady. It was established by German immigrants in the 1870s, with an economy based on agriculture. Today, that means wineries.

But you don't have to go to Pontotoc to experience it. That's because Carl Money and his wife, Frances, brought Pontotoc to Fredericksburg. In January they opened the Pontotoc Vineyard Weingarten. The courtyard/tasting room is tucked away behind a rock wall, at 320 West Main, between the Itz Inn and Timeless Menagerie. It's a little hard to find.

"Nobody looks over that wall," he said, pointing to the rock wall facing the street. But he is well on his way to putting the Weingarten on wine lovers' maps.

Money's own journey with wine runs through East Texas, Austria, Spain, and finally Pontotoc.

Money attended school and learned about growing grapes and winemaking while attending school in Vienna. In Spain, he had a friend who owned a vineyard.

"He grew tempranillo grapes," said Money, who was raised in a family of cotton farmers in East Texas. "It was the same climate, the same soil, the same everything as here, so I knew they would grow."

"Here" was Pontotoc. While he liked the town for its history and buildings, Money had an intuition that it would be the perfect place to grow vines. He noted the red, sandy soil (good for getting water off the root system), accessible water (he hit water at only 25 feet), its high relative altitude (so as not to suffer from late freezes), and the surrounding bluffs (to block the brunt of northers).

"It creates a favorable microclimate," he concluded. "I knew German settlers wouldn't build a house that big in the middle of nowhere if the land didn't sustain life."

Money started buying buildings in Pontotoc about 12 years ago. He acquired the hardware store, grocery store, post office, saddle shop/barbershop, and old movie theater, and began redoing them. With help from his family, he tilled the fields and planted tempranillo vines, among the first in Texas to grow that variety.

While establishing his vineyards, Money scouted for a favorable location for his tasting room in Fredericksburg, where he always wanted to live and raise a family. He walked up and down Main, looking for a place to put in a tasting room. He found the property, with one of the three oldest log cabins in town. It is now home to his Weingarten, Weinhalle, and Wienkeller, or wine cellar, where he holds private tastings.

"The whole idea of the courtyard came from the Weingarten like where I went to school in Vienna," he said. "The idea is to have a community, family oriented winery."



It is enclosed, so children can run around. He used long German-style wine tables so people will congregate and visit, and is adding regular live classical and jazz music. When weather permits, he shows old movies on the wall of the adjacent building.

Frances' skill as a pastry chef comes into play as well. She puts together picnic baskets of homemade Pontotoc pimiento cheese on homemade bread, with brownies, spiced pecans, infused olives, and other gourmet treats. Customers can enjoy the meal on site, or pick up and take for a picnic, with some Pontotoc wine, of course.

Not that you'd want to leave. "It's so peaceful here," Money said.

"You have the beautiful view of St. Mary's Church and the Pioneer Museum windmills. It's so nice to sit here, listen to top notch music, eat, and drink high quality Texas Hill Country wine."

Money is especially proud that he uses only Texas Hill Country fruit in his wines. It comes from equally non-metro towns such as Hilda, Doss, and Comanche.

“More and more vineyards are coming on line that satisfy our demand for a boutique winery,” he said. “I try to get grapes from the Llano Uplift. I don’t want to be a volume winery. We want to make the best wine you can make with grapes from the Texas Hill Country.”

Back to Pontotoc. While it is currently not open as a destination, it will be eventually. Meanwhile, if you are a member of the wine club, one of the benefits is an invitation there for the harvest and bottling, with live music, and other activities.

“It’s a lot of fun, but it’s also a lot of work,” Money said. “Because we hand harvest and hand select every grape we use. That’s the sole goal we have—making the highest quality Texas Hill Country wine possible.”

Pontotoc Vineyard Weingarten
320 West Main, Fredericksburg.
Open Fri-Sat from noon to 8 p.m
Sun from noon to 5 p.m.
pontotocvineyard.com
(512)658-0023.

Photo by Phil Houseal

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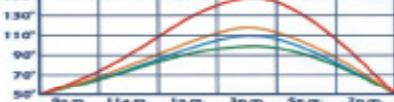
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