



Left to Right: Lou Damiani, Phil Davis, Glenn Allen at Davis Vineyard

Meet Glenn Allen, co-owner of Damiani Wine Cellars...

1. Describe Your Business:

Damiani Wine Cellars is a small farm winery in Burdett, NY. Damiani Wine Cellars is well known for their red wines. "We started our business focused on red wines, which was a little bit different than the typical at the time," Glenn said. "The region is well known for white wines, but Phil Davis and Lou Damiani who started the winery were in love with the full red wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux. From the beginning we focused on Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and a blend called Meritage." In addition to their well-known red wine, they also have several varieties of white wine. All of the grapes for their wine are 100% sourced in the Finger Lakes.

2. Tell us your story:

Phil Davis and Lou Damiani, the founders of Damiani and co-owners along with Glenn, grew up together in Hector, New York. Phil Davis is a second-generation grower, as his father had already been growing grapes to supply some of the other wineries. Lou and Phil both started planning grapes to make their own wine starting in the 1990s and continuing in the subsequent years. "They had a small, one-ton basket press. They'd make the wine just for their own consumption and for friends and family," Glenn explained. "Then they started making it for more and more friends and family. It just kept getting bigger and bigger." By 2004 it had reached the point where they decided to go commercial. "In 2007 they hired me," Glenn said. "I was a business consultant, and we met through a mutual friend who knew I was interested in the wine industry. I worked with them as a consultant, and after a while they asked me to become the third partner. It worked out great because I had looked into going into the wine industry myself, and concluded that I knew everything there was about the wine industry except for two small details: I don't know how to grow grapes, and I don't know how to make wine. And here were two of the best wine makers and grape growers in the business who needed a business guy. So, the fit was perfect. I've been here now about ten years."

3. What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

"I personally have learned quite a bit over the years. Agriculturally, I knew very little, but I ask a lot of questions and Phil Davis has a wealth of knowledge," Glenn said. "In wine making, I was very familiar with the finished product, but had little idea as to what actually goes on in the wine-make process. So, talking with Lou has been very informative as well. And that same inquisitiveness that I have towards them they have toward their own business. We are constantly exploring new techniques, new things to improve what we're doing. I think that's one of our hallmarks. We aren't afraid to try something different and embrace that." One example Glenn gives of this is that Damiani bottles wine that is unfinned and unfiltered. "Most wine is both fined and filtered," Glenn explained. "They are both processes for clarifying the wine and removing things you might not want there. But you also end up removing some things you do want. It's a balance. We do fining trials every year, but unless there is a specific problem we're trying to solve we typically bottle our wines unfiltered and unfinned. That is part of the reason our wines have a bigger mouthfeel and bigger body."

4. What inspires you?

"We're coming into harvest now, and it's that payday of all the hard work and toil when you come to the end of the harvest season and you've produced fantastic grapes. There's a tremendous satisfaction in that," Glenn said. "It's also a learning process. You get to learn once a year how the things you did differently all played out." Glenn added that they also do a lot of their bottling about this time of year. "For the winemaker, it has been a cycle of a year or two of wines going through fermentation, then aging in barrels. Then you put it in the bottle, and the winemaker's job is done. It's instant payback and satisfaction knowing that you've created something beautiful. This process for all of us is about the artistry and passion that goes into it. The inspiration comes from the payback you see when you've produced something fantastic."

5. What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

"There are always times in the year where stress is caused by one extreme event or another," Glenn said. "This latest one with the flood was pretty weird. We feel pretty lucky that we didn't get more damage than we did. Every year there is something. The challenges growing in this area are constant. Every once in a while, we'll have a pretty easy year, but I think in the ten years I've been here we've had maybe two years that were kind of easy."

6. What is your favorite local activity?

"There are more and more fun things to do locally. There are new businesses popping up all the time," Glenn said. "When we first opened the basement area in the winery, there wasn't much to do in the after hours in this area. We thought it would be nice to have some music, local ciders and beers as well as wine, and set up a bocce court. Now, a lot of the wineries have similar things. There's no shortage of fun things to do."