

Joy Kull/La Villana

Profile

Hey, we finally import wine made by an American!

Joy Kull is of Swiss origins but was born and raised in Connecticut. While in college, a summer gig at her father's newly opened wine-shop got her hooked on the vino, resulting in an immediate change of majors to beverage management. After working as a sommelier for a few years, Joy changed directions to join Gilt Taste, a now defunct online food and wine market subsidiary of the website gilt.com.

The Gilt Taste gig, along with an increasing distaste for the pomp and pretense of her WSET classes, left Joy unfulfilled and at a major crossroad. Feeling drawn to wine but at the same time disconnected, she decided to go directly to the source; enamored by the wines of Italy, Joy planned to move there in hopes of finding an internship at a winery.

While discussing these plans with her friend Joe Campanale at one of his restaurants, he mentioned that the bottle she was drinking, produced by avant-garde naturalistas Le Coste, was "just outside of Rome". Joy was already planning to begin her trip there, so the perceived proximity was tempting. Despite quickly learning that Gradoli is actually two hours away, she nonetheless wrote to Le Coste, who gladly took her on as an unpaid intern.

Almost immediately, Joy fell in love with vineyard work and the Lazio region, particularly the breathtaking Bolsena lake. She briefly flirted with the idea of returning to the USA to start a winery, but Joy's newfound love for Lazio got the upper hand. Against all odds, she decided to use all of her savings to purchase a hectare of land and go from there.

Upon mentioning this plan to an Italo/American friend, that friend unexpectedly told Joy that she was looking to invest in a country house in Italy, but didn't want it to be uninhabited. If Joy was interested, she would build a farm where Joy could live and work in exchange for taking care of it. This effectively changed everything, and with her savings Joy was now able to invest in proper viticultural equipment, as well as purchasing micro-plots of vines from retiring contadini who did not want to see their land go abandoned.

After making her first vintage "rogue-style" in 2015, the first official vintage of La Villana was produced in 2016 with the equivalent of 2.5 hectares of vines spread across six parcels. In 2017, Joy planted about 1.5 hectares on her farm, all ancient white varietals planted on a gorgeous amphitheater overlooking the Bolsena lake. A hectare of red will be planted in 2018.

The name of the estate, La Villana, is a derogatory slang term shepherds use for farmers. Joy just so happened to have married a local shepherd, so the name is a playful riff on her home life. The joke extends to the wines' beautiful hand-drawn labels by children's book author/illustrator Jamison Odone; each label represents a friendly sheep involved in a step of the winemaking process. The wines themselves follow this lighthearted approach, and are just as playful as the labels.