

# A Vintage Ghost Story Blooms at Miles

By Gwen Chamberlain, *The Observer*,  
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HIMROD – Doug Miles and Suzie Hayes hope the bottles of one of Miles wine Cellars newest blends will fly off their shelves.

They just want it to fly into enthusiastic customer's hands.

Ghost, a blend of Chardonnay and Cayuga wines, will be bottled in early September and ready for release in late September, but the great anticipation swirling around the release of the wine is as much about the unique packaging as it is about the blend.

When the couple decided they wanted to produce a white blend, it didn't take them long to settle on a name that tied it to the personality of their young wine cellars.

Ghost is a tribute to the special spirits found outside the wine bottles at Miles Wine Cellars, located on Randall Crossing Road, off Route 14 in the town of Milo.

Clairvoyants who have visited just to taste wine tell them spirits live in the house, but that wasn't news to the Miles or the generations of other families who lived in or visited the impressive mansion.



## The Stories

Miles Wine Cellars is located in a Greek revival mansion overlooking Seneca Lake at a location that was once the site of a ferry crossing.

The Miles family, who have lived and worked at the location since the early 1980's, have had their share of encounters with whomever lives in eternity there, and so far the encounters have been more of an inconvenience than frightening.

One day about 10 years ago, Miles was in the office and Hayes was in the nearby kitchen. She walked



into the living room just outside the office, and then opened the door to walk up the back stairway to the second floor.

Miles heard the door to the stairway slam, so he went to the stairs to ask her what angered her to the point of slamming the door.

As he stood in the doorway, he heard a footstep in the kitchen. When he looked into the kitchen, which is immediately next to the stairway door, he saw a mist rising from the floor. It formed at a height nearly equal his, then flew through the living room and what is now a retail room and out of the house, slamming several other doors along the way.

It didn't take Miles long to join Hayes upstairs, where they spent the rest of the night. They say there were enough times when they were frightened enough that they spent the night in their care when they first lived there.

Miles's father was routinely awoken during the night by someone pressing on his back, and the comforter from his bed was frequently flung across the room. It is still quite often found crumpled at the base of the bedroom door.

The initial fears have developed into acceptance, with Miles and Hayes deciding to aim

for ways to please the spirits. On the advice of some of the clairvoyants, they don't host séances or try to actively stir things up with the spirit world.

In addition to the 17 years of work Miles has put into restoring and remodeling the house, he has put considerable effort into cleaning and maintaining the family cemetery. "If the ghost isn't happy, nobody's happy," he jokes.

### The Bottle

The couple wanted a unique bottle to package their Ghost blend, so they hired Fred Wickham, of Canasta Designs in Watkins Glen, to dream up a fitting label.

By the time Wickham, Miles and Hayes had agreed on the finer details, they had designed a one-of-a-kind silk-screened bottle that casts an ethereal feel.

An empty sample bottle on display in the wine cellars tasting room has already attracted a lot of attention from visitors. Hayes says one visitor offered to pay \$20 for the bottle alone.

The image on the front of the bottle is a ghost-like silhouette of a woman. Through her skirts and the wine is the bottle, one can see a line drawing of the house, which appears on the back of the wine bottle.



Two tiny figures – a man and a woman (see illustration at left) – are embracing on the front porch of the house (see illustration above). The couple's image is repeated on the cork.

"They had an idea they wanted to do a ghost bottle and I knew the story," says Wickham.

One of the theories Miles and Hayes have heard about their ghosts revolves around a young couple who may have died tragically at the house. They haven't been able to trace the legend to true roots, but were intrigued by the story and the recollections of the elderly woman who told them of her childhood experiences at the house. She never minded being punished when her parents sent her to her room, because she always had the company of a nice man and

woman who would come out of the walls and visit.

Wickham initially thought about using tombstones and other ghostly details, but then decided to focus on the couple.

Arcing about the silhouette on the front of the bottle, Wickham incorporated some of Miles's words, "Sometimes when I'm walking, I'll see two people standing on the porch. A man in black and a woman in white. But as I draw closer, they die away."

The back of the bottle includes advice from Hayes, "Experience the spirits within," as well as an invitation to visit the wine cellar's web page to read some of the ghost stories or to add your own experience.

Wickham, who had gotten away from the wine label business, was drawn back into the work by this project. Now he's putting the finishing touches on another label design for Miles Wine Cellars as well as for a few other wineries.

"This is the first silk screen wine bottle I've done. It was fun because it had the story," says Wickham.

The bottles are made in Waterloo, and then sent to a printer in Canada, where the silk screening process is done. Printing the bottles has been delayed by continued rolling blackouts in Canada, meaning the wine won't be bottled as early as they wanted.

After the label approval process, Miles and Hayes have other horror stories to share. All wine labels need to be approved by the Tax and Trade Bureau of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Typically, label approval takes less than a month, but the process stretched from March to July for the Ghost packaging, when applications were rejected, first because the sample label was attached to the application wrong, and then because the label exceeded the size of the form.

### The Wine

Ghost is a blend of Chardonnay and Cayuga, prepared by Fox Run Vineyards Winemaker Peter Bell. It's residual sugar should be somewhere between 1.5 and 3.0 according to Doug.

When the Miles bottling crew gets to work, they plan to cork 5,040 bottles of Ghost.

That's 420 cases that will be on the market just in time for Halloween.