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# Up Close: Reinvention 101

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## UP CLOSE

## REINVENTION 101

*What happens when the smart plan gives way to the ideal plan?*

It was her senior year at Furman, and **Martha “Marty” Wicks Müller ’04** had her career mapped out. Except her plan didn’t excite her. In fact, the more she thought about it, the more burdened she felt.

“I was going to get my master’s in chemistry, and then work in the pharmaceutical field for a couple of years before I applied to med school,” she explains.

Her advisor, Dr. Laura Wright, called a meeting.

When Wicks Müller recited her plan, Wright sensed something was off. Wright looked at her, said,

“Okay, well, idealistically, what would you like to do?”

In truth, Wicks Müller couldn’t imagine working in a lab. It didn’t suit her laid-back personality. Growing up, family friends had been wine importers, so she knew something about the industry. She asked Wright if a person could study the chemistry of wine—never believing it was possible.

“Absolutely, you can,” Wright said. At that moment, a “huge weight” lifted from Wicks Müller’s shoulders.

“I had another direction,” she says.

Following graduation, Wicks Müller worked in a clinical lab at the University of North Carolina as she took the biology courses she needed for grad school. She earned her master’s degree at the University of California-Davis, world-renowned for its viticulture program.

In June of this year, she finished a two-year stint as winemaker for Barren Ridge Vineyards in Virginia, where she used her science background year-round.

“Wine pH is really low,” she says. “Your wine wants to go to vinegar. You’re trying to prevent that. You want a solid pH between 3.2 and 3.6 before you start fermentation because your pH will go up. You’re monitoring your fermentation using chemistry. Not just chemistry, but biochemistry and microbiology. There are a lot of corrections you can make to lower or adjust the pH and to help the taste and mouthfeel of the

wine later on.”

This year, several of Wicks Müller’s wines earned silvers and bronzes in the Governor’s Cup competition for Virginia wines. And much as she hoped, she feels at home in the field (and fields) of wine.

“The whole industry is very grounding because when it comes down to it, we’re farmers,” says her husband, Jonas Müller. “We’re dependent on the weather. This is what Marty likes about it, what suits her personality well. You can do all the science you want, but it’s a very humbling, very grounding thing.”

The Müellers recently moved to Germany so that Jonas, a native of that country, can pursue a PhD in winemaking. While in Germany, Wicks Müller plans on learning about biodynamic winemaking, which is more stringent than certified organic farming. The game plan is for husband and wife to run a winery together someday.

“I really hope that chemistry majors and microbiology majors can see that there are many fields out there that don’t necessarily have to be in a lab,” she says.

—Lynn Tryba