

Unanswered Prayers

The Death and Life of Truman Capote

NEW YORK

By
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Baumgold



YOU CAN SMELL GRAPE juice outside Schapiro's Wine Company, Ltd., on the Lower East Side. But it's nothing compared with the winy cloud inside Schapiro's offices and in the nine deep, dark, cool basements, which are filled with massive wood casks.

Aboveground, the neighborhood is more Spanish than Jewish these days; underground, not much has changed since Samuel Schapiro gave new immigrants free bottles of homemade mead, or honey wine, almost 100 years ago.

Tastes have changed, however, even in kosher wines. Schapiro's still makes mead ("from 100% New York State Buckwheat honey"), but it also produces 32 other wines, including well-made Valpolicellas (\$4.39) and Bardolinos (\$4.39), a full red Château du Chevalier Bayard (\$7.50), and a dry red Baron Rocheau (\$6.39). All are kosher; all are made from New York State grapes. The most popular wine: Extra Heavy Concord, sweet and syrupy (\$2.79). Passover wine. "Wine you can almost cut with a knife."

(I had always assumed that kosher wine was sweet for sacramental reasons. But American kosher wine is sweet because Concord grapes are high in acid, so sugar must be added for fermentation. To make wine kosher, there's only one requirement: Observant Jews must produce the wine from the crushing of the grapes to the boiling of the must.)

At one time, the grapes were pressed on Rivington Street. The wood press is there to prove it. Now the juice, from grapes crushed in the firm's Buffalo plant, is trucked in after the fall harvest. It ferments twice, then is aged in oak barrels and bottled by machines that might have been designed by Ronald Searle. And Norman Schapiro—grandson of the founder—is present to see that everything's done right. He expects his three teenage sons to follow in his footsteps.

The place is an attraction for people whose families passed through the neighborhood when they came to America. On Sundays, after they stock up on halvah at Economy Candy, half a block away, they take a tour of the winery, given on the hour from eleven to four. But you don't have to be Jewish. On one of my visits, I joined a party of Catholic housewives from Long Island; we toasted one another with Schapiro's Pineapple-Coconut Cream.

Why does Schapiro, an urbane man who lives on the Upper West Side, keep a winery that must be inefficient? "We

can't move away," he says. "We're a tradition."

Schapiro's Wine Company, Ltd., 126 Rivington Street, 674-4404. Open for tours on Sundays, and for wine-selling Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Fridays till 2 p.m.

UNDERGROUND FOOD

LOBSTERS IN THE BASEMENT,
AND OTHER
DOWN-UNDER SPECIALTIES

BY IRENE SAX

