

Deanna Rosolen

**Eric Thompson**

Partner, Moon Shadows Estate Winery and Maple Moon

Sometimes you can turn a hobby into a small business. But it's not that often that a small business yields another sideline and a whole new previously unheard-of category. But that's exactly what happened to Haliburton, Ont.-based Eric and Carol Thompson. Eric and his wife Carol started out making maple syrup about 20 years ago. Shortly after, they turned that into a registered business, Maple Moon, which they ran from their home. Then a conversation with Eric's dad, who made his own wine, sparked an idea – what about making maple wine? Using his father's equipment, it took two years to come up with a wine that hit the right notes. But the couple didn't launch it immediately, and instead waited until they found a new property for the businesses and until they had both retired. The winery, Moon Shadows Estate Winery, officially opened in 2005 and now offers 30 different wines. The couple still runs Maple Moon and a gift store at the same site.



## Q&A

**What do you love most about your job?**

“Being a pioneer with the business, the winery. It's a new category; it didn't exist before in Ontario. We worked with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario for two years to actually get the category developed and then worked on developing these new wines. I also love sharing the experience of how we got to where we are with the public – people are very interested in the fact that we're the first and what it's all about.”

**What is your management philosophy?**

“It's a partnership, my wife and I, so I guess the management philosophy is getting along. For the most part we agree on pretty well everything. It's a matter of coming together on decisions.”

**What is the most challenging part of your job?**

“For us it's the awareness; how do you get the word out to people that you exist, what you're all about? Someone living 20 minutes away heard me on the radio and went to a number of area businesses that had no idea we existed. Yet that same week I got phone calls from people in the U.S. asking how they could get our wine. That's the biggest challenge – making more people aware that we exist.”

**What issues is your sector facing?**

“A level playing field in the Ontario winery industry. There

are rules that affect some of the bigger wineries in different ways than the smaller wineries. Under our license, for example, we are restricted to 100-per-cent Ontario fruit, and it doesn't matter what the crop is like. A number of years ago the grape industry had a very poor year, so they were allowed to import grapes and use those in their wines and still be called Ontario wines. We all pay the same price for our licensing, we all have the same kind of levies, but there are certain things that apply unequally. Really we're looking to be treated equally.”

**What opportunities are opening up in your sector?**

“We're not a fruit winery, but we have a lot of fruit wines that are maple-based. I believe consumers are opening up to wines that are not made with grapes; that there's more to explore out there. Getting that word out to people, going to shows, making people aware that there are other things they can try – those are opportunities. More people are also getting out there looking at small cottage industries, enjoying products not from big producers, the ones who they're familiar with. And another opportunity we're working on is exporting, maple being a real Canadian kind of thing.”

### INTHE SPOTLIGHT

**FIRST INDUSTRY JOB:** “This is it.”

**FAVOURITE FOOD:** “I'm a meat-and-potatoes guy.”

**INDUSTRY MENTOR:** “Brian Moreau, a wine consultant.”