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### **Artful Aperitifs: New San Juan Island Wine Sparkles**

#### *Archipelago Beverage Company Unveils New Label, New Wine, and New Shop*

FRIDAY HARBOR, WA... Galileo Galilei once said, "Wine is sunlight, held together by water." In the San Juan Islands, local winemakers Marti McConnell and Chris Lawler have taken that sentiment to heart with their new label, new vintages, and new winery in Friday Harbor.

Marti and Chris converged on Friday Harbor from different directions and with complementary passions for winemaking. The two joined forces, first at San Juan Vineyards and then as Archipelago Beverage Company in 2019.

A small stainless-steel tank held the humble beginnings of their joint venture. That first vintage, Sparkling Siegerrebe, hand-harvested at Lopez Island Vineyards, was perhaps the most important one of their careers. Their first sparkling wine was selected as one of the top 5 white wines in Washington by Compass Wines in Anacortes and was on the menu at The Willows on Lummi Island in 2019. The few bottles that are reserved in the archives are quite ethereal.

The 2020 COVID shutdown offered Chris and Marti time to dream big and launch a distribution brand in cooperation with Orcas Island Winery. AO Wines, a new label, was born in the spring of 2020. AO is the superhero of the Washington wines they love. It can be found in the Islands and the greater Seattle area.

Now in their fourth vintage together, that one little tank is still in use, but it is no longer alone. The new facility is an opportunity to expand and improve production. Archipelago purchases fruit from local sources whenever possible and travels as far as the Columbia Gorge for fruit that suits the Salish Sea food and beverage culture. They specialize in sparkling wines made in the petillant-naturel style, with minimal intervention. The wines are lovingly hand-crafted: hand-picked, fermented and fed, bottled, and they apply their self-designed labels one by one. Their winemaking style lies somewhere between natural and international style wine, which they call analog wine. Much like a live music performance, their winemaking is a passionate expression—authentic, raw, not over-produced.

Rather than conventional tastings, Chris and Marti create customized wine experiences. As Marti says, "we're inspired to make wine more approachable, more every-day, more casually enjoyable. Appointments suggest some level of exclusivity...but this isn't exclusive at all. It shocks people. It works. People come to a wine encounter expecting pompous wine makers and stuffy rules about wine and food, maybe even 4 forks at the place setting, and then we pull out the BBQ potato chips. Each encounter is about this place, this moment, these people, these memories we build with our guests."

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