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- The Grist is a brewery & restaurant located in Niagara-On-The-Lake
- The restaurant is situated in a revived barn that was previously a fruit packing shed
- The Grist is a place to gather while enjoying food, drinks and an authentic location

Line of business:

- Restaurant

Products used:

- IWL220
- V400M





The Grist

The Grist opened for business in July 2021. The family-owned business offers local pizza and beer in a barn that was transformed into a modern restaurant, while incorporating pieces from its heritage for décor.



It's important to me to work twice as hard as my employees. In any small business, particularly in hospitality, if you are not hands on as an owner, you won't survive. You have to talk to the guests that come and understand their experiences. You have to show your workers you are equally willing to do the work you ask them to do.

- Robert Begin, Co-owner of The Grist



Background

What is the precise recipe that brews success? It is one that calls for survival mode, strength and sacrifice to be vigorously mixed together with a passionate hand.

The story of The Grist is one where a family-owned business has perfectly replicated the recipe. Robert (Rob) and Danielle Begin are a husband and wife team who are the owners of the restaurant and brewery nestled in Ontario wine country. Together, they built a life in Niagara-On-The-Lake with their two daughters. Their story of entrepreneurship begins over 25 years ago when they opened their first pizza business in Niagara-On-The-Lake and developed pizza recipes that became local favourites. From there, Rob continued to venture out into the hospitality industry, where he worked in sales for breweries and wineries, did set-up for them and travelled across the globe throughout his career. His opportunities allowed him to discover his passion for not only the restaurant business, but breweries as well. Rob was grateful for the life he was able to give his family and for a career where he was always learning. What has not changed in Rob's life is that he thrives under complex and ambiguous situations.





A few years ago, Rob had passed by a barn in St. Davids (a small village in Niagara-On-The-Lake) many times and the infrastructure was striking to him. The barn was owned by fruit farmers and was used as a packing shed. He could not stop imagining the possibilities for the property every time he saw it. There was potential. It could become a home for locals and tourists. A place for people to gather and celebrate life with delicious food and drink, all while being in an authentic location. He talked to his wife Danielle about his idea that had been simmering in his head for several years. Although she was reluctant at first to agree to it, she knew she could not stop her husband from making his dream come true. "It's been in him for so long and when someone has a dream that big, you have to get on board and support them because I don't think you will ever be the same person if you didn't get to pursue your dream," says Danielle.

Rob could not resist contacting the owners of the barn and explained his vision to them. Three days later, the barn was under his ownership. Before building, Rob walked to each of the houses backing onto the restaurant and asked the owners of the homes if they would be okay with the construction of a brewery and restaurant. To his surprise, they welcomed it. Today, each of the owners are among his greatest supporters.

The purchase of the barn was the beginning of a journey changing their family life forever. The family had to sacrifice practically everything they had and put it into the construction of the restaurant. As much as one would like to think the restaurant came to life by snapping their fingers, it simply didn't happen that way. After the barn was purchased, the family had to wait a lengthy time to get a permit so construction could begin. The challenges did not stop there. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, construction was put on hold multiple times because of municipal restrictions. "At the end of the day, it all worked out because the delays gave us the time to think through our processes, making cohesive plans and focusing on each detail within the restaurant," says Rob.

When one takes their first steps into The Grist, the attention to detail on every square foot of the restaurant is clear. Many aspects of the barn were re-purposed. Rob and Danielle, walked through the barn and were fascinated with the hidden potential within pieces collecting dust in the barn from barrels to sleighs. They put their creative minds together to have one vision for the layout of the restaurant. After 17-hour days, working on their hands and knees and constant support from their daughters, their vision became a reality. They worked on putting the restaurant together themselves from placing the tiles and floors by hand to managing the construction done in the restaurant. "We brought remains back to life," says Rob. The décor is situated among the cream walls and a bright red pizza oven that Rob had picked even before opening the restaurant. The rusted metal used for décor on the walls was previously the roof on the smaller barn behind the restaurant. Remains from a barrel are weaved into the wall beside the staircase leading to the lounge. The light fixtures were created by a local maker. An old sleigh laying in the barn was used for additional décor. The tables in the restaurant were found by Danielle and Rob at an auction and were painted by Danielle. Together they lifted the beam that was in the old barn and placed it perfectly in the lounge to use it as the bar counter. Every time one turns their head, they see something a little different in the restaurant.

The brewing system is located right inside the restaurant, which is why the restaurant is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays – for brewing. "We are not a full-time restaurant or a full-time brewery, we are a mix of both," Rob says.

Rob planned to bring back the pizza recipe he used years ago at his old restaurant, and his experience in sales with breweries and wineries allowed him the opportunity to combine his love for food and profound interest in beer. In addition to pizzas, up-scale pub food is on the menu.





The restaurant follows basic recipes for beer under the direction of the head brewer; they also strive to get creative with their beer. The Grist currently offers four flagship beers. Bottles are also sold for take-out on location.

Since the restaurant opened in July 2021, they have had steady line-ups every day. "It is important to me to let our customers know I really care that they have an enjoyable and memorable experience. So, I make pizzas and let our guests waiting in line try samples. I like to bring treats out for the children waiting too," says Rob.

Rob describes what managing a restaurant means to him. "It's important to me to work twice as hard as my employees. In any small business, particularly in hospitality, if you are not hands on as an owner, you won't survive. You have to talk to the guests that come and understand their experiences. You have to show your workers you are equally willing to do the work you ask them to do," says Rob.

Many family members are working at The Grist. Rob and Danielle's daughter Devon, is assisting with supervising, serving and most importantly just being there for her parents during their incredible adventure.

Why Moneris?

Rob thought that Moneris® would be the best fit for his business operations for many reasons. “The previous providers I used just didn’t have the expertise or longevity to sustain what we needed to do,” says Rob.

Rob had noticed Moneris was the payment processor at many different places he visited. So, he looked further into it. “It was natural for me to use Moneris because there are so many Canadian companies using their solutions, which shows that they are very comfortable with services offered.”

The business is using countertop and wireless terminals. “Transactions are very complicated and difficult to manage. You need someone that you can trust is going to manage them in an efficient way. Moneris devices just work, remove complexity and make the payment experience easy,” adds Rob.



Looking forward

“It is so amazing seeing the locals being so supportive after watching our business come-to-life over the three-and-a-half years before opening.”

Rob is looking forward to offering gelato and coffee in the smaller barn behind the main restaurant and brewery. He is excited to see how the business continues to unfold and does not fail to express his gratitude for the constant support from his family.

“The unexpected success of the business is because of my family and the staff who are committed to ensuring excellence each day when they come into The Grist. We support each other and we trust each other.”

The family is enjoying the moment of working together and is looking forward to seeing what the future holds.





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