

A full 'wine experience'

Rivero González family's vision for E. End vineyard

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On the wall of her new Riverhead office, Maria Rivero González has been rejiggering plans for the 205 acres her family acquired recently from the Entenmann family in a \$15 million sale billed as Long Island wine country's largest to date.

In the weeks since the April sale, which included the Martha Clara Vineyards, Rivero González, CEO of the family's business on Long Island, has been planning an ambitious vision for the prime acreage: a vineyard-centered "wine experience" with luxury homes, a bed-and-breakfast, the vineyard's first winemaking operation located among the vines, and a new tasting room, even a restaurant.

"We've started a master plan for the whole 205 acres," she said. "It has an important housing component. We're looking to sell high-end second homes with a food-and-wine theme."

Pending Riverhead Town approvals, the new winery and tasting room will be built in the "middle of the vineyard." The eatery will be a "farm-to-table" restaurant with its own greenhouse, she said. She envisions bike paths through the vineyard.

"We almost want to do a town" for the visitors, residents, even the workers, she said.

Whether Rivero González will be able to receive Riverhead Town approvals for its plans is another matter.

John Marafino, chief of staff for Town Supervisor Laura Jens-Smith, said the town hasn't yet spoken with the vineyard's new owners. He declined to comment on any plan.

Rosemary Malone, who move in 1991 to an upscale development called Windy Acres abutting Martha Clara Vineyards, said she was "ambivalent" about the notion of new upscale homes on the farm.



Maria Rivero González, CEO of her family's Long Island business, has ambitious plans for the former Martha Clara Vineyards in Riverhead.



This vineyard has been sold to the Rivero González family.

"I didn't move out to the North Fork to have a restaurant and a wedding catering facility" next door, she said. "They bought the property; it's their right to do what they want with it, within the confines of the town building code," Malone said.

Properties in Mexico

Rivero González's vision takes elements from the family's big multiyear plan for Parras, Mexico, where it has nine properties in different parts of town.

The main resort in Mexico, de-

signed by the Henn architecture firm of Germany, plans a "path of the wine and the pathway for visitors" through the property, according to Henn's web page. "The latter follows a spatial structure which takes the visitor from dark to light, from the inside to the outside. Visitors experience the production of the wine alongside the periphery of the circular edifice without interfering with internal process flows."

Residents will be able to make and blend their own wine, choose barrels and blends. The

company is working with outside developers on the real-estate portion of the plan.

"We're winemakers in Mexico," said Rivero González, 34, from her office in the former Martha Clara vineyard. She operates a segment of the family business that grows grapes and makes wine in the Parras region of Mexico. She also operates the family's pecan-growing operations.

"We wanted to expand in the agribusiness in something outside of Mexico. This one just made sense," she said.

What attracted her most to the property was its potential, she said. "With the New York [City] market so close . . . , it's a destination," she said. "There's potential to work with the great people around here."

Her family runs two parent companies: Minera Autlan contains all the mining operations, Industrias Buena Fe manages the agribusiness and real estate.

A five-year plan

Rivero González said she expects to take up to five years to build out the family's vision for the Riverhead property. "If it were up to me, it would be three

to five years," she said. "But I do know it's complicated, and I want to do it the right way. We're not here to do it and leave."

The Martha Clara name won't survive the transition. Rivero González is working with a consultant on how to brand the Long Island operation. "I do want something new and fresh," she said.

Martha Clara had reduced the more than 100 acres it farmed for grapes down to 88. Rivero González expects that up to 100 acres will be farmed for grapes.

The farm has been growing 14 varieties of wine grapes. She expects to reduce that to around 10. And the 26 different wines marketed will also be reduced, she said, to 10. She said she plans to stress cabernet franc among reds and sauvignon blanc for whites.

The family philosophy: 80 percent of wine is "made in the field, how you work it and which grapes you choose."

More broadly, the plan is to create a full winery experience.

"People want to experience wine, winemaking tours and the range of wines you have. They are looking for experiences. Those are the things we are bringing to the table," she said.