



# Wine Into Water

**With a mission to provide water to communities in need—and to make a few bodacious bottles—a cool couple uncorks Tithé Wines.**

| *By Amber Bell* | *Photography by Julie Soefer* |

## GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

"This is a lot about our personalities," says Stephen Lewis of his new Tithé Wines, to be available at restaurants like Tony's, where he and journalist wife Allison Triarsi are pictured. "For instance, Allison's got this reporter mentality where you wake up every day, you discover this story, you get all the facts, you create it, and you tell it. You don't have time to think about all the obstacles, you just have to go."

It began with a glass of pinot noir. Oenophile Stephen Lewis, 42, had been traveling to Napa Valley regularly for years—sampling wines and basking in the vino culture. He read books about wine, studying it. It was his hobby; it was his golf. And then one day, sipping a pinot, a light bulb: He could *make* wine!

A native of Spring, a wealth advisor by profession, and a well-known auctioneer for annual charity events like the Astros Wives gala, the neatly tailored Lewis couldn't rest until he'd given it a try. So two years later, after as much unexpected red tape as red grapes, he and wife Allison Triarsi, a KHOU-11 TV news reporter, are ready to debut Tithé Wines ([tithewines.com](http://tithewines.com)).

Under the label Decimus, Tithé is rolling out 2010 vintage pinot noir and chardonnay in limited batches—only 150 cases of each. The pinot retails for \$50 and includes notes of jam, cola, fruit and spice, while the chard, \$35 a bottle, touts tropical notes, hints of citrus and a nutty finish. Both will be available online and at restos like Tony's, Brennan's, Reef and Post Oak Grill.

"It's one of those things where, if you knew everything at the beginning, you wouldn't do it," Lewis laughs of the Napa-produced wine, the making of which he oversees from Houston.

"You just assume, 'Oh, I'll just have a guy fill a bottle up with wine and sell it to people.' It's one of the highest regulated industries out there. It's hard. I have a cork guy, a glass guy, a label guy, a shipping guy, a storage guy. But I'm doing what I'm supposed to do."

The name, Tithé, was inspired by a church sermon on the admonition that the faithful should give 10 percent of their income to God. The couple has since committed to supporting Houston-founded nonprofit Living Water International—which supplies water solutions, like wells, to developing countries in desperate need—by donating 10 percent of their gross proceeds each year. Plus, they've promised to provide enough money to drill a new well wherever it's most needed in 2012, at a cost of about \$20,000.

"We knew [Living Water] was the organization we needed to go to," explains Triarsi. "We liked giving back with a global perspective. Water is the thing that everyone needs."

Lewis felt that a chardonnay and pinot noir would be the best wines for food pairing, and easy to drink. He recruited Reynolds Family Winery's Steve Reynolds of Napa as his lead winemaker. "His wines have a nice mix of New World and Old World character," says Reynolds, who uses grapes from California's Carneros region, a foggy, breezy area encompassing parts of Sonoma and Napa. "That's what's so intriguing about them."

Juice for the next vintage is already in the works, according to Lewis and Triarsi, both eager to do more to support Living Water. "Eventually Steve and I would love to travel to the country where they build the water well," Triarsi says. "That's our dream, to make this thing big enough that we make a *real* impact."

Or at least make a splash. **■**