

DANIELLE NICHOLS '95

A CALCULATED RISK

With just a one-way ticket to San Francisco, CA in 2001, Danielle Nichols '95 was taking a risk. After nearly two years at a mutual funds company in Boston, Nichols was heading west to seek change and opportunity. Although she may not have found the button-down financial job she was seeking, she took a less certain path; one that has, ten-years down the road, paid off.

Nichols is confident, thoughtful, and lively. She has taken life's experiences to heart, and this consideration goes hand-and-hand with Cork, the wine bar and market that she has carefully crafted in downtown Waterbury, Vermont.

Nichols grew up ski racing at Stowe Mountain Resort prior to attending GMVS. She returned to coach at the Mount Mansfield Ski Club while studying at the University of Vermont, where she received a B.A. in economics with a minor in sociology. After graduating from UVM in 1999, Nichols returned to MMSC for a year before heading to Boston.

When she hit San Francisco in 2001, and the job market proved fickle, her experience with young racers paid off. "My brother suggested I head up to Tahoe to coach for the winter," Nichols said. "I drove up and interviewed and decided I would spend one year coaching, just for the winter."

She stayed at the Sugar Bowl Ski Team Foundation for the next ten years, working

with FIS girls (ages 15 and up) down to J4 racers (11-13 years old). "Every age that I coached was so different," Nichols said. "Working with older kids was incredible because of their commitment and maturity. Their understanding of more advanced technical analysis was so rewarding because it was so specific."

While traveling the globe with her racing squad, she hit countries like New Zealand, Australia, Chile, and back in the States, Oregon- all regions known for their cultivation of grapes and fine wines. What began as a passing interest soon grew into a passion.

"I was always fascinated by how global wine was, and how everyone had different styles of producing it," she said. The idea of opening a wine store, modeled on the wine shops of California, where one can buy wine and open it at the bar, took seed. Realizing that she missed the close knit community of her hometown in Vermont, she packed up and headed east.

The concept of Cork grew. "I decided I would spend some time planning the business I had been talking about for so long," she said. The real motivating factor was the space she found in Waterbury.

The historic building Nichols refers to stands on the corner of Stowe Street and Route 2 in Waterbury, Vt. Twenty years ago, she drove

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- Danielle Nichols, class of 1995



Photo by GORDON MILLER

by that building every day. "It was run down, very scary," she said.

Nichols has transformed the space into a tasteful blend of the traditional with a hint of the industrial, or "farmhouse industrial," as her sister calls it. Exposed beams, wood floors, and original brick work with antique pieces culled from local dealers, such as an enormous mirror from a hotel in Ontario, and a stained glass window from her great grandmother, blend in with streamlined efficiency, replete with over-sized butcher paper listing the daily specials of Panini, cheeses, charcuterie, and other light fare.

"Brandon Dyksterhouse '95 always encouraged me to embrace life and take chances, no matter what the outcome," she said. "I would tell any young person today that taking the risk is the scariest part, but that it's important to do, and also the most rewarding. Taking as calculated a risk as possible increases the chance of success," she said.

Cork's mission closely aligns with some of GMVS's core values: total commitment and effort along with collaboration and excellence. "Cork thrives on collaborating with small community-minded businesses within food, entertainment, and the arts to create an all-encompassing experience in the Waterbury area," the mission statement reads. "Driven by passion, all of us at Cork are here to offer an experience unlike anything else offered in Vermont," the statement continues. And they are serious. While cultivating a love of good wine and fine cheeses, among other provisions, they are equally determined about building a community-minded business.

"My goal for Cork is to have it continue to be a place where people like to meet and enjoy a glass of wine. In addition, working within the community to add to Waterbury so that Cork becomes more than just a place to get wine," Nichols said.

Partner to her in this business venture is Colin Moffatt, whom she met while attending a GMVS coaching clinic in Solden, Austria in 2008. Moffatt has worked as a coach at Elitem with Doug Lewis '82 for the past three years, and is Head Coach and Program Director for Cochran's Ski Club in Richmond, Vt. Ever the romantic, Moffatt proposed to Nichols in suit and tie at the Sugar Slalom in Stowe this past spring.

"My sister and I were watching the race," Nichols said. "She coaxed me to move toward the opening of the finish area." She watched Jimmy Cochran and Tim Kelly run their dual heat. Then Moffatt and Roger Brown descended. After his run, Moffatt reached into his pocket, pulled out a ring, dropped to one knee, and asked Nichols to marry him.

The answer was yes.

With a baby on the way and Cork ahead of its targeted projections, Nichols might have little time to savor what she has created, but the gratification has been well fought. "I did a lot of research and spent a lot of time crunching the numbers to prove to myself that I had a viable idea," she said. The risk has paid off.

~ By Kim Reynolds

Kim Reynolds is a writer and editor who lives in Warren, Vt. Two of her children are currently students at GMVS.