

# FOOD&WINE

## Wine: Super Tasting Rooms

Boutique wineries are banding together to open cooperative tasting rooms that let you try wines—lots of wines—all at one time.

**BY RAY ISLE**

### LOCALS

Geyserville, California

Founder Carolyn Lewis tasted wines from more than 50 Sonoma producers before settling on the six labels featured at Locals. Her intention, she says, was to focus on small artisans whose names "people wouldn't necessarily know but should." The look of the room is local too: The bar's galvanized sheet-metal front comes from a ranch nearby.

**WINERIES** Crane Canyon Cellars, Eric Ross Winery, Forth Vineyards, Hawley Wines, Martin Family Vineyards and Peterson Winery.

**WHAT TO TASTE** A lot of varietals are grown in Sonoma, but its strengths are Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Zinfandel. Hawley Wines' Oehlman Vineyard Pinot Noir is wonderfully supple, while the Martin Family's Crazy Horse Zinfandel, made with grapes from 90-year-old Dry Creek vines, is loaded with black plum and spice flavors.

**DETAILS** Corner of Geyserville Ave. and Hwy. 128; 707-857-4900. Open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Wednesday through Monday. Tastes are complimentary.

### NAPA WINE COMPANY

Oakville, California

Winemakers know Napa Wine Company as one of the Valley's premier custom-crush facilities. Indeed, its list of clients includes some of the most prestigious small producers in California, whose wines are among those poured daily at the elegant Napa Wine Company tasting room.

**WINERIES** Twenty-two producers are showcased here, including such highly regarded names as Crocker & Starr, La Sirena, Lamborn Family Vineyards, Mason Cellars and Showket.

**WHAT TO TASTE** Although Napa's chief claim to fame is Cabernet, there are plenty of other great varietals to taste here, including the Napa Wine Company's own toasty, round Pinot Blanc, Mason Cellars' zippy Sauvignon Blanc and Joel Gott's juicy, crowd-pleasing Zinfandel.

**DETAILS** 7830-40 St. Helena Highway (at the intersection of Hwy. 29 and the Oakville Cross Rd., across the street from the Oakville Grocery); 800-848-9630. Open 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily (appointment necessary). A selection of 16 wines is available every day, and wines rotate weekly. A three-wine flight costs \$7; the company also offers tastings of its more expensive selections at a per-pour rate.

### LOS OLIVOS TASTING ROOM

Los Olivos, California

The Los Olivos Tasting Room, founded in 1987, was California's first independent tasting room. Although it's not a cooperative, it functions like one, serving as the key tasting destination for a number of small Santa Barbara-area producers. The Los Olivos Tasting Room was originally a general store built in the late 19th century, and its floor, ceiling and walls all date from that era.

**WINERIES** The list of nine wines changes twice a week from a selection of 90 wines, including such well-known names as Au Bon Climat, Bedford Thompson, Brophy Clark, Jaffurs, Lane Tanner, Ojai and Stephen Ross.

**WHAT TO TASTE** The Santa Barbara area is best known for its robust Syrahs and rich Pinot Noirs. If a bottle of Stephen Ross's luscious, spicy Pinot Noir is open, you should definitely taste it. (Ross is one of the best Pinot makers in California today.) The same holds true for Ojai's powerhouse Syrahs.

**DETAILS** 2905 Grand Ave.; 805-688-7406. Open 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. A taste of nine wines costs \$6.

### A TASTE OF MONTEREY

Monterey, California

Monterey County is a sprawling place, incorporating several different valleys and a lot of traditional agriculture between the vineyards (the Salinas Valley produces more lettuce than any other place in the United States). There are actually two Taste of Monterey locations: in the town of Monterey, where the tasting-room backdrop is the Pacific Ocean (the Monterey Bay Aquarium is a block away), and in Oldtown Salinas, next door to the National Steinbeck Center, which is devoted to the Nobel Prize-winning author who immortalized the town of Salinas in *East of Eden*.

**WINERIES** A Taste of Monterey pours only wines produced by members of the Monterey County Vintners and Growers' Association, which includes big names such as Chalone, Bernardus and Robert Talbot, as well as smaller producers, like Paraiso and Morgan.

**WHAT TO TASTE** A wide range of varietals is grown in Monterey, and its tasting-room offerings change daily. Two to look for: Paraiso's bold, peppery Syrah and the rich complex Chardonnays of Morgan.

**DETAILS** 700 Cannery Row, Ste. KK, Monterey; 831-646-5446. Open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. 127 Main St., Salinas; 831-751-1980. Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Tastes cost \$5 for a flight of six and \$10 for tastings of five reserved wines.

### CARLTON WINEMAKERS' STUDIO

Carlton, Oregon

The Carlton Winemakers' Studio came to life about two years ago, when a gang of smart Oregon winemakers, led by the visionary Eric Hamacher, joined together to open the state's first cooperative, solar-heated, gravity-flow, green-as-it-gets facility with a tasting room attached. It's a low-key, unpretentious place. Thursdays are special: That's when the Studio features homemade seasonal dishes by an acclaimed local chef.

**WINERIES** Andrew Rich Wines, Boedecker Cellars, Bryce Vineyard, Domaine Meriwether, Dominio IV, Hamacher, Lazy River Vineyard, Penner-Ash Wine Cellars, Ribbon Ridge and Scott Paul Wines.

**WHAT TO TASTE** Oregon's star grape is Pinot Noir (though there are also good Pinot Gris and credible Chardonnays). All of the Studio producers make Pinot Noirs worth trying; Penner-Ash's elegant Willamette Valley Pinot is a particular favorite.

**DETAILS** 801 North Scott St.; 503-852-6100. Open 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Tastes of the cooperative's own Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are complimentary, and eight wines are usually open, grouped into different flights, which cost between \$11 and \$14 each.

### THE TASTING ROOM, SEATTLE

Seattle, Washington

Although Seattle's Pike Place Market is a five-hour drive from Washington's wine country, it's only a few hundred feet from the elegant, old-world Tasting Room, a wine-country outpost that features the work of six boutique Washington producers.

**WINERIES** Apex Cellars, Camaraderie Cellars, Harlequin Cellars, JM Cellars, Wilridge Winery and Wineglass Cellars.

**WHAT TO TASTE** Syrah is the up-and-coming grape in Washington State (Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are the already-established stars). The Apex Yakima Syrah is a graceful, generous wine, while the Harlequin Minick Vineyard Syrah is its exact opposite: big, bold and brawny.

**DETAILS** 1924 Post Alley; 206-770-9463. Open 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. daily. Forty selections are offered daily; the price of a single tasting starts at \$2.

#### THE TASTING ROOM, LONG ISLAND

Peconic, New York

Housed in an old storefront, the Tasting Room captures the laid-back, bucolic aspect of Long Island's North Fork rather than the glitz and glamour of the nearby Hamptons.

**WINERIES** Broadfield Cellars, Comtesse Thérèse, Schneider Vineyards and Sherwood House Vineyards.

**WHAT TO TASTE** Long Island is making a name for itself with its spicy Cabernet Francs and cool-climate Merlots. Schneider's Cabernet Franc is particularly notable—smoky and ripe with red currant fruit and bracing tannins. Or try the Comtesse Thérèse Merlot, a wonderfully concentrated and ripe example of the grape.

**DETAILS** 2885 Peconic Lane; 631-765-6404. Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Monday. The staff will recommend flights of seven different wines at \$3 per flight, or they will customize a flight to reflect your varietal preferences (for the same price).

*Ray Isle is the managing editor of Wine & Spirits Magazine.*

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