

Wineries abound in our own backyard

By JEFF HUDSON

Wine has taken hold of this area. New vineyards are being planted, new wineries are popping up, and home wine making is now a popular part of the County Fair.

All sorts of wine is being made here — from highly exclusive, prize-winning varietals to experimental garage efforts. There are wines of great variety — red and white, dry and sweet, sophisticated and humble. In addition to grapes, local berries, apples and plums have been turned into wine by area vintners.

The Santa Cruz Mountains is now recognized by the federal government as a distinct appellation. And several local wineries are topping their more famous Napa Valley counterparts in tastings around the state. As Bill Frick of Frick Winery says "The Santa Cruz Mountains are getting a really good reputation as a wine maker's area because of the quality. The people making wine here are exceptional." Though still small in terms of production, Santa Cruz County has earned an enviable reputation around the state.

And wine is finding its way into an increasing number of homes, as an increasing number of people try their hand at wine making.

Wine is an art as well as a trade, with many different outlooks and attitudes.

We began our wine series back in September, with a visit to the **Devlin Winery** in Soquel. Chuck Devlin's '79 Zinfandel took the gold medal in its category at the Los Angeles County Fair, the second time a Devlin "zin" has been cited at a major competition. An unpretentious man, Devlin says that he isn't "obsessed with some French something-or-other. I think we make very good wine. That's what it comes down to."

Will Hangen's **River Run Vintners** is in Aromas, and has gained praise in several wine journals for both his Pinot Noir and Zinfandel. Hangen, who is also an author, home builder and apple grower, plans to stay mostly with red wines because "that's what I like." River Run is open by appointment for informal tastings.

Bargetto Winery in Soquel is among the oldest and best known in the area, and several of the Bargetto whites have won awards at the Orange County Fair and San Jose Mercury tastings. Bargetto Winery is open daily for tasting. As Jim Bargetto observed, "Santa Cruz County

is now wine country — the central California coast is wine country. California is recognized as a wine state."

Ken Burnap of **Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyards** has reached an enviable position. He makes around 3,000 cases of wine annually, and receives orders for around 15,000. Burnap concentrates on Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, grown at his vineyard above Soquel. Burnap dry-farms his vines; he believes that "stressed vines" yield the best grapes for wine making. The winery is terraced on a hillside, with gravity pulling the wine from level to level. The red wines never enter a pump, an important point to Burnap.

Roudon-Smith Winery in Scotts Valley is another established name in Santa Cruz County. Bob Roudon and Jim Smith were both engineers before entering the wine trade, and their skills are evident at their neatly arranged winery. Roudon-Smith has won a number of awards in different wine competitions, and the winery is open for tasting on weekends.

Gewurztraminer is the word at **Smothers Winery**, in the hills above Santa Cruz. That wine has won several awards for entertainer Dick Smothers' business venture, and his car's license plate reads "GEWURZ 1." Wine maker William Arnold's Chardonnay and Zinfandel have also been award winners.

Sometime this year **Grover Gulch Winery** of Soquel will be releasing their first wine — a

Carignan. Dennis Bassano and Reinhold Banek will be making only reds, "more in the Italian than French style." Future releases will include Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel.

Another new venture is **Crescini Winery**, where Richard and Paule Crescini are preparing Chenin Blanc for their first release. Richard is particularly proud of his forthcoming Petite Sirah, a wine he made for some years at home before opening the winery.

Judith and Bill Frick have their **Frick Winery** at the Old

will be released at a future date.

Dan Wheeler's **Nicasio Winery** is high above Soquel on a storm-damaged road. But Nicasio's caves (dug by Wheeler for aging his wines) survived intact. Wheeler — whose wines are sold only through the winery — is branching into a new vineyard high in Lake County.

Rebecca Cook and Jim Ellis started the **Cook-Ellis Winery** just last year, and plan to bottle Chardonnay and a strawberry wine for their first releases later this year. The

making. Sarah's '80 Caberne Sauvignon won high marks at a major tasting in Monterey; the winery also makes Chardonnay.

The **Hecker Pass Winery** is run by Mario Fortino, who comes from an Italian wine-making family. The winery has gained note for its prize-winning Carignane — seldom made as a varietal outside the Hecker Pass area. The winery is strong on reds (Grenache, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and others), but also makes a number of whites and two sherries.

Thomas Kruse (of the **Thomas Kruse Winery**) distains much of the snobishness associated with some wine lovers — Kruse's labels lampoon one such conversation. Others share some of his favorite recipes. Kruse rails against the high "show biz" prices charged by some wineries. This year the Kruse list has included French Colombard, Zinfandel, Zinfandel Rose and two Cabernet Sauvignons.

When we met Gary Hada, he was just starting out as the

With this wrap-up story, the Register-Pajaronian concludes its *Time for Wine* series, a most enjoyable introduction to new and exciting fermentations around Watsonville.

Sash Mill in Santa Cruz. Among the wines are Chardonnay, Petite Sirah and Pinot Noir. Frick has a small tasting room and is open for sales or tasting most days.

Felton-Empire Vineyards has made an extensive reputation for its White Reisling — earlier this year, six different Reislings were available, coming from different vineyards and done in different styles. Felton-Empire emphasizes whites, with Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer and Chenin Blanc rounding out the list. But the reds are not forgotten — six different Pinot Noirs

wines are made in a geodesic dome high in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Cook-Ellis' fruit wines will bear the locally inspired "Buzzard Lagoon Vineyard" label.

Another group of wineries is centered in the Hecker Pass area above Gilroy. All of these wineries are open for tasting on weekends, many are open weekdays as well.

Marilyn Otteman of **Sarah's Vineyard** is one of a growing number of women entering the formerly all-male field of wine

Commercial wineries are tucked in the mountains and foothills within driving distance of Watsonville. Vintages are increasingly of prize-winning quality.

Wine and winemaking

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wine maker at the **Summerhill Winery**. Hada was busy upgrading the cooperage (left from the winery's former owners, the Bertero family). Hada says he plans to make "pleasant, affordable wines" to include Fume Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Grenache Rose and Grignolino (among others).

Nicholai Kirigin of **Kirigin Cellars** brought his vintner skills from Yugoslavia and gives tastes of wine along with ample conversation at the old Bonesio winery. His sweet "formula" wine, *Vino DeMocca*, is made with a dash of coffee; he offers a number of white wines, a rose and three varietal reds.

Sycamore Creek Winery is run by Terry and Mary Kaye Parks, who were teachers before they entered wine making. Their winery has won a raft of prizes in the last two years, for their Reisling, Gewurztraminer, Carignane, and Cabernet Sauvignon.

The **Fortino Winery** (run by Ernie Fortino) has also collected a row of award ribbons. With one of the busier tasting rooms in the area, Fortino pours a number of reds (Barbera, Carignane, Petite Sirah, and the seldom-made Charbono) as well as several whites and roses.

No less important are the home wine makers, whose ranks have produced many of those who now make wine for a living. We visited pediatrician Wells Shoemaker, Judge John Marlo, merchants Jim Mychajlonka and Mike Kaplan, teachers George Lerek, Rudy Pedulla, Mike Erickson, and Bill Peck, apple grower Gene Silva and insurance salesman Fred Pierce. Home wines are now a popular feature of the county fair, and home wine makers produce a tremendous variety of wines in many different styles.

There are other wineries bordering on this area as well. Around Gilroy these include **Live Oaks Winery**, **A. Contratto**, **San Martin**, **E. Guglielmo**, **Pedrezetti**, **Richert** and **Rappazzini**.

In the Hollister area are **Calera**, **Cygnat**, **Enz** and the mammoth **Almaden** vineyards.

Above Boulder Creek are **Sunrise**, **Algren**, **P & M Staiger** and **David Bruce** wineries. On the San Jose side of the hill are **Martin Ray**, **Ridge** and others.

Monterey County has also emerged as a major wine producer, with such giants as **Monterey Vineyards** or small wineries such as **Monterey Peninsula Winery**, as well as small, isolated wineries like Soledad's **Chalone**.

