



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Steve Principe is the new owner of Vinocruz next to the Museum of Art and History in downtown Santa Cruz.

# Vinocruz still going strong

Under new owners, wine shop hopes to connect more with museum

Bus-V

By J.M. BROWN

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**SANTA CRUZ** — Six months after its founders moved to New York City, Vinocruz is thriving under new owners, who are determined to carry on the store's original mission: to educate customers about the diversity of local wine.

By selling only wines made in the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation, Vinocruz became a one-of-a-kind destination when it opened downtown next to the Museum of Art and History in 2006. It closed briefly after founders J-P Correa, a former Downtown Association president, and his husband Jeffrey Kongsle Correa put the shop up for sale after Jeffrey took a job with a national same-sex marriage advocacy group.

In August, new owners Jennifer Walker, 41, and Steve Principe, 57, also partners in business and in life, reopened the Front Street store with a new tasting bar and the intention to seek out even more Santa Cruz vintners. The two also work together down the street at RPM Mortgage, of which Walker is the branch owner.

"What is exciting about this place is it's local — the fact that it is Santa Cruz Mountains wine expressly and always will be so," said Principe, adding that business has been good. "Basically, we picked up where (the Correas) left off."

Walker and Principe, longtime Santa Cruzans who now live in Boulder Creek, want to more closely connect with the museum by being a place where visitors can relax before or after activities. The owners are willing to stay late on event nights and are eager to help the museum's director, Nina Simon, explore new uses for the Abbott Square area surrounding the store.

Chip, director of the Downtown Association representing merchants, is glad the shop and its mission have stayed intact.

"They really know the community and it was such a nice fit for them," Chip said of the new owners. "It's really great to see that there was an opportunity for somebody local to step in and keep the momentum created."

J-P Correa said he believes he left his



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Vinocruz is next to the MAH in downtown Santa Cruz.

## IF YOU GO

VINOCRUZ

**WHAT:** Wine shop featuring only wines made in the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation

**WHO:** Owners Jennifer Walker and Steve Principe of Boulder Creek. Both also work at RPM Mortgage.

**WHERE:** 725 Front St., Santa Cruz

**HOURS:** 1-7 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 1-8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 1-6 p.m. Sunday.

**DETAILS:** www.facebook.com/vinocruz, 426-8466

baby in good hands.

"What we were looking for was someone to be passionate about the brand that we had built and fostered for five years, someone who was going to be sensitive to the fact that we have a special appellation in California," he said. "The day I handed (Walker) the key, I walked out the door crying, but I knew they were the right people."

Correa, who previously worked for

Banana Republic and Prada, now works as director of merchandising for Giorgio Armani, merchandising the company's store on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

Kongsle Correa, a former Arabic linguist with the Navy who lobbied for the repeal of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gay and lesbian troops, is now development director for New York-based Freedom to Marry.