

JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Mica Raas, owner of Mica Cellars, has strong opinions about what types of grapes should be cultivated locally.

Winemaker Mica Raas has bold ideas, subtle wines

Wines + wine making 59.12
Mica Raas is a confident winemaker. He knows what kind of wines he wants to make, and as a geologist and native of Soquel, he has strong opinions of what kind of grapes should be planted in the mercurial microclimates of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

"Santa Cruz should have the best fruit in the world," says the 29-year-old Sonoma State graduate. Although he doesn't have a enology degree, Raas worked his way up at Harvest Moon, Sonoma Valley Portworks and at a custom crush



STACEY VREEKEN

Wine Press

facility in Sacramento.

After seeing how 67 winemakers made their wines, he came out saying, "This is how I'll do it."

Raas prefers all modern equipment but an old winemaking approach. He has a de-stemmer and an ozone sterilizer but hand punches down the grapes after they arrive. He "tests everything"

but makes changes based on taste and smell.

The winemaker prefers working with small lots, and the grapes in each wine come from a single vineyard. If

it's a blend, the different varieties are fermented together.

Raas makes three Santa Cruz Mountains appellation wines, buying grapes from the Zayante and Corralitos areas. He also buys grapes from the Monterey Bay region and works as a vineyard management and winemaking consultant. His tasting room is in Watsonville.

"I know more about microclimates than almost anybody I meet," Raas says with a smile.

He believes that "too many people have planted pinot noir" in all the

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wrong places in a mistaken conviction that the climate is much colder than it actually is. He calls the pinot noir technical group, which supports grape growers, "horribly misguided."

When questioned on it, he crisply replies, "They should be doing better," saying in a follow-up e-mail that he believes the technical group "implies that pinot noir is suitable for the entire appellation."

Raas clearly relishes his role as provocateur, saying, "I've pissed everyone off. ... I'm outspoken because someone needs to be."

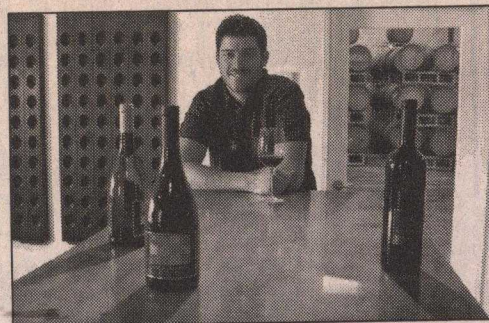
He describes his efforts as being part of a group whose members are trying to get varieties planted in the right places to create world-class wines. He has created a map using National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association data, UC Davis Degree Days interpretation and other data to indicate ideal areas to grow particular varieties.

He argues that most of the region should be growing merlot, cabernet franc or other Bordeaux or even Italian varieties.

"Not everyone in the Santa Cruz Mountains should be growing pinot noir," he says. "We should focus on a site specific approach rather than a regional approach."

"Santa Cruz Mountains is very complex area, and no one grape should be grown everywhere. Our strength is that we have a diverse enough climate so that we can grow premium grapes of every variety, yet in different parts of the appellation," Raas says.

Depending on his wines, Raas may become one of the region's new leaders, but he'll never apologize to his fellow winemakers for his opinions or confidence.



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Mica Raas stands in his Mica Cellars tasting room.

AT A GLANCE

MICA CELLARS

WHAT: Produces single vineyard-designate wines in classic varieties from Monterey Bay region

TASTING ROOM: 18 Hangar Way, Suite C, Watsonville. Shares tasting room with Roudon-Smith, Armitage and Bump wineries

HOURS: Noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays

I MAKE WINES THAT: 'showcase the place they come from. I don't tell it what to do. I work with what the wine wants to do.'

WINES: Sauvignon blanc, pinot noir, zinfandel, charbono, cabernet franc and CMF blend.

FAMILY: Wife Rebecca Raas

OUTSIDE THE WINERY: Rides his mountain bike. Enjoys dining at Cafe Sparrow, Au Midi, Caruso's

INSPIRED BY: 'a challenge.' Just tell him no.

PRODUCES: 405 cases

WINEMAKER SELECTION: CMF 2009. Cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and merlot from Jolon Vineyards [Monterey]. Tasting notes: 'Chocolate and ripe berries explode in the nose. Cinnamon, cloves and mocha radiate through the mid-palate and rich plums with subtle soft yet muscular tannins' for the finish. \$30.

RECOMMENDS: Bump Cellars

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