

Jim Smith of Roudon-Smith

VINE AND DANDY: Santa Cruz Vintners

CHRISTINA WATERS

The making of fine wines is as much a part of Santa Cruz' 20th century history as the Boardwalk, surfing and camping among ancient redwoods.

The Bargetto family has been turning sun-ripened fruit into liquid gold on the banks of the Soquel Creek for over 50 years and the sturdy vines planted by Chaffee Hall in 1941 still bear award-winning grapes under today's Felton-Empire label. As inventive as their vintage ancestors, our growing community of winemakers continues to adapt their products and techniques to meet the booming needs of wine drinkers, collectors and connoisseurs.

One of our smallest (3000 cases per annum) and youngest (1978 first crush) wineries is Devlin, located in the hills above Soquel. Winemaker Charles Devlin worked at Bargetto's during his high school years and

went on to earn a degree in Fermentation Science from UC Davis. "After working for a lot of wineries," he started his own label releasing his first wines in 1979.

In a bold marketing move Devlin opened its Porter Street tasting room (this past Memorial Day) with the idea of eliminating the costs of distribution and thereby lowering wine 'costs. When they're not on the road at tastings, conferences or wine shows, Chuck and Cheryl Devlin (with baby Thomas in tow) are at the tasting room showing off award-winning wines that are long on chardonnays, zinfandels and merlots.

Currently nine wines are available for tasting at Devlin's handsome new mahogany bar and winemaker Devlin

(whose vocabulary can easily wander into technical jargon) proudly points out that he sells no wine over \$10 a bottle. Admitting that he'll probably make some sweeter wines in the near future — a muscat for example — due to consumer pressure, Devlin believes that a tasting room allows him "to do a bit of educating. We're basically trying to make dry wines for people to drink with their salmon."

As good as his word (and fresh from the mammoth Orange County Fair), winemaker Devlin poured some samples of what can only be called spectacular bargains. Finding a drinkable chardonnay for under \$10 is like stumbling on a good 5¢ cigar. But imagine finding a mature, well-constructed chardonnay for under \$5! Devlin's Sonoma Chardonnay 1981 is graceful, faintly gingery and a steal at \$4.99. Even more charismatic, and bearing its characteristic jalapeno pepper perfume, is Devlin's Monterey Sauvignon Blanc 1980, a Silver Medal winner at the LA County Fair. At \$7.50 this one will develop complexity for years to come.

We like red wines, so does Chuck Devlin. "The red market never really died, the market just grew from the other end." The winemaker is partial to his prize-winning cabernet, merlot and zinfandels. Devlin's Sonoma Cabernet Sauvignon 1980 won a coveted 19 out of 20 possible points, plus a Silver Medal, at the Riverside Fair, and its velvet intensity won over our palates (especially for \$5.99). My personal favorite was the 1981 Merlot, a sweepstakes winner at Riverside, a complex gem at the top of the line of \$10. If you like zinfandels, Devlin offers an LA County Fair Gold Medal winner, his 1979 Paso Robles Zinfandel, for \$10, and a light, berry-laden 1980 Zinfandel for \$7.

If you don't regularly haunt wine tasting rooms, Devlin's might be the perfect place to start. Aside from a few outlets in Florida, Washington DC, the Pan Ocean Cruise line, selected Santa Cruz restaurants, and via mail order, the Soquel tasting room is the main place to sample, learn about and purchase Devlin Wine Cellars products.

By the time you read this, about 350 cases of 1982 Devlin Merlot will be safely tucked into their bottles (bearing what Chuck Devlin tongue-in-cheekily describes as their "first artist label" — the work of the winemaker himself. He promises to make the new Devlin Merlot available, "When I decide it's ready."

• Devlin Wine Cellars Tasting Room • 2815 Porter Street (next door to La Batoville) • Soquel • 476-9300 • Open daily from noon until 5 pm •

While it may be an exaggeration to claim that chardonnay flows through Bargetto family veins, it is true that the alchemy of winemaking has been a Bargetto tradition for three centuries. Half of one of those centuries has been spent at Bargetto's Soquel and John, then John's son, Lawrence, and now Lawrence's son, Martin, and now Lawrence's son, Martin, have made wines from countless varieties of grapes and fresh fruit. As consumer palates have changed over the years, so Bargetto's has addressed new wine trends, such as the drier, lighter European style. And the previous plethora of Bargetto's fruit wines has been pared down to four.

On my way to the bustling Bargetto tasting room (after this long in the business, they've got wine tasting down), I stopped by to say hello to one of the winery's secret weapons — Senior Wine Counselor Patti Ballard. Winding my way back through enormous steel vats and rows of aromatic barrels, I found Ballard whipping up homemade pasta and medallions of chicken for a distributors' lunch in the winery kitchen overlooking Soquel Creek.

non-vintage burgundy, barely six weeks in the bottle. "This is going to win us a medal," she noted with a grin. And she's probably right. Bargetto's 1978 Late Harvest Zinfandel is a huge, berry-musky wine — a bargain at \$7.

I finished my tasting with a medium dry 1982 Gewurztraminer and grinned my way back to the sales room. Past the newly released non-vintage zinfandel, past a 1983 White Zinfandel, I didn't swerve from my



Clockwise (from left) Jim, Tom, Martin, Beverly and Loretta Bargetto

Ballard's domain at Bargetto's has been sales and tastings "since almost before God," yet she found time out from developing local and national corporate tastings to pen *Wine in Everyday Cooking*, now in its fifth printing in just two years. A professional food and wine writer, Ballard believes "we're still in the dark ages when it comes to cooking with wine." Her book, embroidered with tips learned from her grandmother, stresses the use of "good, varietal wines, not just 'white wine' or 'red wine.'" Ballard literally shudders at the thought of a generic something called "cooking wine" lurking on grocery shelves the world over.

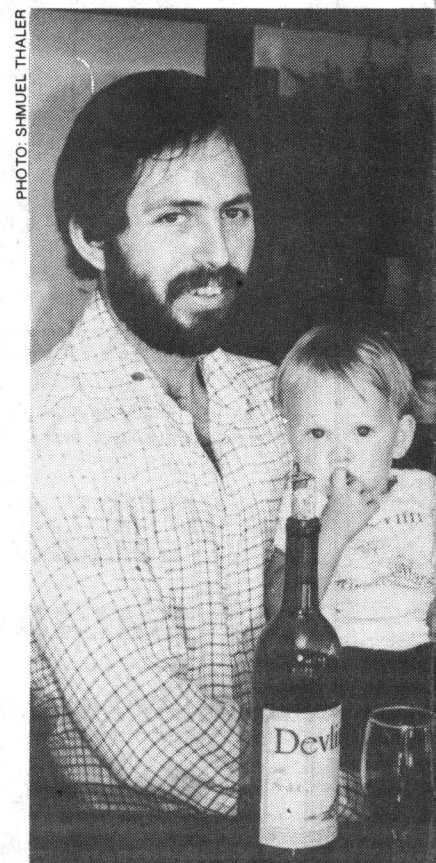
Though Bargetto's makes 45,000 cases of wine a year, it retains the unpretentious warmth of the small, family-run business it is. Past a front sales room that burst with bottles, glassware and every wine appliance and gadget known to woman and man, I descended a few brick steps to the cool, bottle-lined tasting room. Bargetto ancestors gazed down upon the long bar from oval portraits as gregarious Kathleen Bowers (one of Ballard's prize pupils) presented me with a tasting list of over 30 wines. Prize ribbons from prestigious competitions like the LA County Fair line one wall in tribute to Bargetto's recently released vintages.

Bargetto makes medium dry gewurztraminers and semi-sweet rieslings, but lately also offers a very dry chablis, a riesling with "dry" right on the label, an extremely dry riesling, and a spicy, light gewurztraminer bearing tones of grapefruit. From the first crush of a special 1982 chardonnay harvest, Bargetto's makes the lightly floral Cypress Chardonnay. From the second crush of the same grapes comes a softly apricot-fragrant Petite Sainte-Marie chardonnay-perfumed pate.

With impeccable timing (a miracle considering that eight fellow tasters had joined me, at the bar), Bowers poured a sample of the new

mission. I grabbed a bottle of my favorite pomegranate wine (valhalla for \$5.25 a bottle). Endlessly satisfying as a late night aperitif, this fruit wine is seductive, light and also works well with my favorite lamb recipes. The latest batch of raspberry wine will be ready for bottling any day now.

I also succumbed to the unbelievable \$2 bottle of 1978 Vintage Chianti — a Silver Medal winner at the Riverside County Fair. After tasting it (I find it impossible to "age" wines for longer than seven days), I'm going back for every last bottle. The spacious tasting room at Bargetto's is a good place to begin an



Chuck, Thomas &

fternoon of local history, to find out about new releases, and to meet lots of nice folks from all over the country.

• Bargetto's Winery • 3535 North Main Street • Soquel • 75-2258 • Tasting Room open daily from 10 am until 5:30 pm

Looking down over the hillside of chardonnay grapes that skirts Branciforte Creek and fuels the Roudon-Smith Estate vineyard, it's hard to believe that deer ate up the entire first planting less than 10 years ago. Following a dream that took them from Silicon valley careers to the bustling present-day winery on Bean Creek Road, the Roudons and Smiths now turn out 10,000 cases a year of hand-made wines.

After years working with large distributors, Roudon-Smith now markets its wines through a broker and lots of footwork by June Smith. Upon its release last year, Jim Smith prophesied of the 1981 Roudon-Smith Pinot Noir, "This one's going to win medals for us." And so it was. Results from some of this summer's big wine competitions are already in, yielding the small winery a Silver Medal from the San Francisco Fair and an unprecedented four medals from the Orange County Fair, where wines are judged exclusively by winemakers. Last year Roudon-Smith won a Gold Medal at Orange County for its 1981 Sonoma Chardonnay, and this year the 1982 Mendocino Chardonnay took gold, with the 1981 Petit Sirah and 1980 Sonoma Zinfandel both winning Silver Medals. A bronze was also tagged for Roudon-Smith's illustrious 1981 Pinot Noir.

June Smith admits that seeing those gold and silver stickers on bottles "makes a big difference in sales." And much of the selling goes on during tastings at the winery. The reds sell well in the tasting room, where quite a few wine connoisseurs come to us to buy for their cellars. We offer a 20% discount on



Cheryl Devlin

unbroken cases purchased at the winery."

Inviting staffs of local restaurants is becoming a new tradition at Roudon-Smith's winery. "Deer Park Tavern starting the ball rolling by inviting themselves," June Smith recalls, "but then we decided to take the initiative and, in the past several years, we've had the Courtyard, the Shadowbrook, Casablanca, Cardinale's, the Carriage House here. It's always fun and educational. They come up and take a tour, taste the wines and a personal rapport develops that's good for everyone."

Intent on staying small, Roudon-Smith employs two other permanent workers in addition to the familiar foursome: Bob Roudon serves as winemaker, Jim Smith is the operations manager, Annamaria Roudon oversees art design and finances, and June Smith handles PR and local sales.

Santa Cruz grapes are used by Roudon-Smith "whenever possible," June Smith says. Lately the winery has begun releasing "medium priced wines." Naturally, we're aware of economic realities. People simply can't afford to pay \$10 a bottle for all the wines they'd like to try. So we thought we'd try to produce a good quality, medium-priced line."

With grapes from three different California counties, primarily Mendocino, Roudon-Smith now sells a 1982 California Chardonnay under a Sequoia Coast label for \$6. Primarily zinfandel grapes go into the new red 1981 Claret that sells for a remarkable \$3. A dry White Zinfandel currently sells for \$5.50 a bottle. And an early-maturing 1982 Cabernet Sauvignon from Mendocino grapes is available from Roudon-Smith for \$7.50.

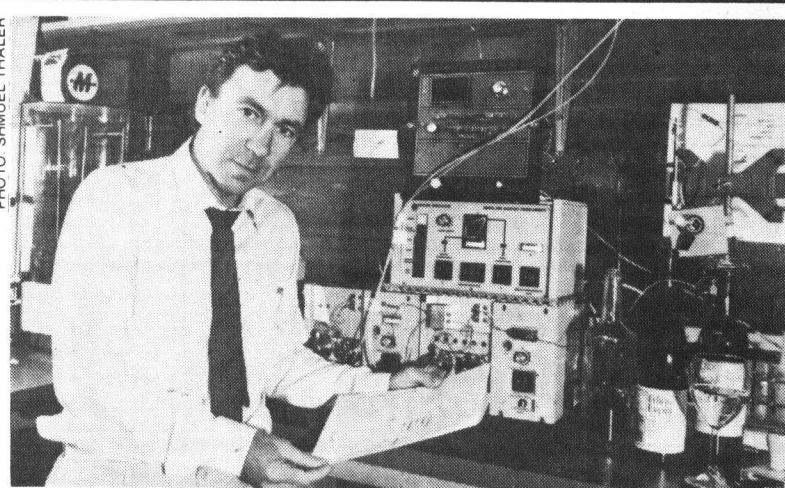
Look forward to the soon-to-be-released 1982 Petite Sirah and a 1982 Sonoma Chardonnay scheduled for bottling next week ("We'll keep it a minimum of three months, to get over 'bottle shock' before releasing it," June Smith said.) Busy packing to a Pre-Olympics tasting at Redondo Beach this week, June Smith has confidence in the new Roudon-Smith medium priced wines. "It's our big experiment, and so far it's doing very well."

You can meet the people who make Roudon-Smith wines by making an appointment to visit, tour, taste and purchase any Saturday. One sip will tell you more than all the medals in the state.

Roudon-Smith • 438-1244 • By appointment, Saturdays •

Not content to simply turn out 22,000 to 25,000 cases of cabernets, zinfandels and the finest Germanic style gewurztraminers and rieslings this side of the Rhine, winemaker Leo McCloskey of Felton-Empire Winery has decided to experiment with the mercurial magic of custom-oak aging on a new line of wines.

Working with existing cabernet and riesling grapes on Chaffee Hall's legendary Hallcrest Estate, plus harvests from selected areas around the state, McCloskey began using his Ridge Winery and UC Santa Cruz experience to create prize-winning rieslings in European styles ranging from the dry Kabinett to the luxurious late harvest Auslese. After years of taking medals at the big competitions for its innovative white wines, Felton-Empire recently released its



Leo McCloskey of Felton-Empire

"Tonneaux" series under a bold, multi-striped label. After sampling the new wines under the guidance of Felton-Empire associate Bill Gibbs last month, I wanted to know more about the striking chardonnay and pinot noirs.

Glenn Luque, Felton-Empire's general manager was glad to explain. The new labels — harmonizing gold and orange with the golden chardonnay, and rust and purple labels with the garnet pinots — were a year in the designing. "Leo did a lot of work on the colors. He even changed hues and designs at least 30 times," Luque admitted. The idea was to show off the best crushes in barrel aged wines. After consultation with his two assistant winemakers, McCloskey located the "stand out" barrels. "Tonneaux" is french for "barrels," and from the best of the best were selected the wines to be labelled the 1982 Chardonnay Tonneaux Francais, 1981 Pinot Noir "Tonneaux Francais and 1981 Pinot Noir Tonneaux Americains.

Three different oaks from various regions of France and three different coopers worked on the barrels used in these new releases. The resulting chardonnay is strikingly full, yet light. But the pinot noirs contain genuine surprises. "After fermentation," Luque explains, "half the pinot grapes were put into the Missouri oak, coopered in Kentucky, the other half, from the same vintage, was placed in the French oak. The difference in flavor is striking. The American oak Pinot Noir has harder edges, but promises to age well. The French oak-aged wine already has more finesse and more structure. Taste them both together, and you'll see what I mean."

You'll soon be able to taste a recently-bottled 1983 Sonoma Chardonnay and Tepusquet Chardonnay, both bearing the colorful new Tonneaux series labels. If you're lucky you'll be able to find one of the smaller release of Hallcrest Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, also bearing the Tonneaux label, made from the grapes Chaffee Hall planted over 40 years ago.

If you love Felton-Empire's Maritime Series white wine, be reassured that these wines that made Felton-Empire famous are holding their own nicely in this summer's big competitions. At the recent San Francisco Fair, Felton-Empire's 1981 Late Harvest Gewurztraminer took a gold medal. Entered for the Best of Show Award, this lovely wine ended up fourth in a field of 1300 wines. Felton-Empire won three Silver Medals at the Riverside Fair last

month for its Maritime White Riesling, 1982 Gewurztraminer and 1982 Santa Cruz Mountain White Riesling.

Situated on a sunny hillside above Felton, the new Felton-Empire deck is the perfect place for sampling new and recent releases. You're invited to bring a picnic and visit the tasting facilities every Saturday and Sunday from 11 am until 4 pm. Somewhere between the redwoods and the venerable vines, the spirit of Chaffee Hall is alive and well.

• Felton-Empire Vineyards • 379 Felton-Empire Road • Felton • 335-3939 • Tasting Room open weekends from 11 am until 4 pm •

Bill and Judith Frick combed California for five years to find the perfect spot for their winery, and finally settled on Santa Cruz in 1976. "It was a great grape-growing area and it was good for people too," explains winemaker Bill Frick. Specializing in red wines ("we wanted to make something challenging"), the Fricks now make 4000



Bill & Judy Frick

cases of carefully hand-made wines each year.

"There were a lot of reds when we started out, then there was a waterfall of white wines. Lately we've heard rumblings of renewed interest in red wines," Bill Frick says. The Frick Winery, and its diminutive tasting room, are both housed in the Sash Mill complex on Potrero Street. "Our biggest market is within a 100 miles radius of the winery," says the self-taught winemaker. "But our wines do get around the country," (notably to the other big Frick market, Texas). Working on developing their sales network through the brokers of Monterey Bay Wine

Company, the Fricks' wines are popping up on local restaurant wine lists with increasing frequency.

Both Bill and Judy work on developing their vintages of Frick Petite Sirah, Pinot Noir, Zinfandel and Chardonnay. "We both work on the wines, go out and look at the grapes, compare notes," observed Bill. At the tasting room, wine lovers can sample something new, something old and sometimes something right out of the barrel, just for the fun of tasting a developing wine. Tasters will also find the unique calligraphic Frick label on especially priced wines at the tasting room ("What we call the esoteric winemaker's special").

"The reds really interest us, we're always looking for more and different growing areas, developing different styles of wine. Someday, when we grow up," Frick jokes, "we may even make a cabernet. We were looking from the first for a light style of wine. We harvest early, use special yeasts, press very early, so the produce is light and fruity, with not so much tannin."

The emphasis at Frick Winery is upon personal involvement with wines made from grapes grown "as close to the winery as possible. Our zinfandel grape comes from Santa Clara," Bill Frick says. "We've been getting our pinot noir grapes from Soledad for the past eight years." Choosing to remain small and manageable in size, Frick is adamant about "not losing touch with the wine." And that closely watched wine currently ages in French oak coopered by Sequin Moreau. "Hopefully someday we'll be using American oak," says the uncompromising winemaker.

Revealing that Frick's Pinot Noirs tend to "be rated pretty high in the tastings," Bill Frick doesn't enter his wines in the big California competi-

tions. "I don't feel it's important to win awards. We're not out to build a large trophy chest. We're making wines to meet our own tastes. It's nice going to tastings with people who know wines. That feedback is more important than fairs."

If you haven't yet discovered Frick's wines, you can educate your tastebuds and provide your own feedback at the tasting room every Saturday. It might be the perfect opportunity to enlighten yourself about the joys of red wines.

• Frick Winery • 303 Potrero Street • SC • 426-8623 • Tasting Room opens Saturdays from noon until 4 pm •