

SCHAEFER ON WINE

Santa Cruzing

BY DENNIS SCHAEFER

Ne like to think that Santa Barbara County has the corner on winemaking mavericks; what other area has come so far so fast? But there are other sets of wine culture where iconoclastic winemaking thrives.

Wheeling Santa Cruz is one of those appellations that deserves more recognition. Ridge and Bonny Doon are the most known wineries in the area, but winemaking is practiced at 7 of the smaller wineries picturely situated in the hills.

Thomas Fogarty Winery, founded by the sake surgeon and faculty member at Stanford University, falls into that category. Dr. Fogarty began home winemaking in the late 1970s and went commercial in 1981, at the same site where the winery complex now stands. Just west of Stanford, the 320-acre property has vines planted to the vine, primarily chardonnay and pinot noir, in well-drained, sandy loam soils.

Geographically, the region is similar to Santa Barbara, situated only 12 miles

from the ocean. The difference is the vineyards are located at an elevation of 2,000 feet and mountain-grown fruit produces a distinctive type of wine. Winemaker Michael Martella embraces the same kind of hand-crafted winemaking we do locally.

• **Thomas Fogarty Chardonnay '97, Santa Cruz Mountains:** Citrus, apple and pineapple aromas are integrated with a dose of caramel, a result of barrel fermentation in one-third new oak, the majority of it American. Well-tempered flavors follow from the aromas with nothing excessive about the (pineapple) fruit; it's firmly balanced with clean acidity and the silky texture adds to a nicely rounded mouth feel. A bit of pink grapefruit, sneaking in on the mid-palate, hits it off with the toasty vanilla on the finish. A chardonnay that's concentrated and muscular with no flab.

• **Thomas Fogarty Pinot Noir '97, Santa Cruz Mountains:** Good extracted color from being hand punched down three times a day during primary fermentation and then undergoing an extended maceration for two weeks, before being pressed and transferred to French oak. The nose is hesitant but predominantly cherry, laced with bacon fat. In the mouth,

cherry and cranberry flavors with a touch of brown spices are out front but after the initial burst they quickly diminish, replaced with a tannic finish. The grapes and the winemaking have the pedigree and a hard core of fruit is obviously there, but both the mouth feel and the finish seem harsh and muted. Perhaps more time in the bottle is needed? Or perhaps it's a characteristic of mountain-grown pinot?

• **Thomas Fogarty Gewurztraminer '97, Monterey:** Now gewurz is not everyone's cup of tea and this one's more extreme than most, which is why I like it. Most California gewurz are fairly simple, sweetish concoctions, but the Fogarty version is in the dry Alsatian vein. Gewurz means "spice" and you can smell the spicy aromas as soon as you pop the cork.

Light floral components mix with lichee nut and the traditional Alsatian "petrol" aromas. In the mouth, plenty of in-your-face spices along with an underlying layer of lichee nut, nectarine and pineapple fruit. It's a big impact wine—for matching with bold flavored foods—with a long lasting finish.


Not far from Fogarty, down the road in Santa Cruz, Cinnabar Vineyards and Winery turns out artisanal wines from its dry

farmed estate, facing the southern end of the San Francisco Bay at 1600 feet above sea level. Tom Mudd, a former fellow at the Stanford Research Institute, began clearing the hilly landscape for vines in 1983 and crafted his first vintage in 1986.

Chardonnay, from the Corton-Charlemagne clone, is planted to 12 acres and yields an average 2 tons per acre. Cinnabar also makes a Central Coast chard, that includes fruit from the local Bien Nacido Vineyards.

• **Cinnabar Chardonnay '97, Santa Cruz Mountains, Saratoga Estate:** Again the winemaking regime is very much like our own region. Barrel fermented in 30 percent new French oak, utilizing native yeasts and aged 11 months on the lees, the nose has that charming mineral quality with apple and pear aromas integrated with spicy oak. In the mouth, it's rich and full-bodied without the slightest hint of heaviness. Apple, citrus and pear flavors lends complexity on the mid-palate as well as the brown spices from the toasty oak. The long finish quickly invites another taste. Well worth seeking out.

Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears in Scene every other week.



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