

VINTAGES



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Wine Buzz
CHRIS MACIAS



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Two get national exposure

Finally, here's restaurant survey news that deserves a toast. OpenTable, the online reservation site, recently polled its users and shared the findings of its "Top 50 Wine Lists in the U.S."

Two Sacramento-area restaurants made the cut: Carpe Vino of Auburn and Sacramento's Enotria.

Enotria is the long-running wine bar and restaurant at 1431 Del Paso Blvd., which debuted a \$1.5 million remodel in February. Its cellar offers about 400 wines, from California classics, to Burgundy and adventurous picks from around the wine world. Learn more at www.enotria.com or at (916) 922-6792.

"I'd say that getting such an overly positive response surprises us, but we see that on a daily basis," said Michael Coyne Jr., Enotria's general manager. "We are very happy to be considered nationally one of highest ranked wine lists."

What's also surprising is how poorly Northern California - especially San Francisco and Napa wine country - fared overall. Completely absent in this survey are such veritable temples of wine as San Francisco's Fifth Floor, Cyrus in Sonoma and the storied French Laundry in Napa.

Then again, Cyrus and French Laundry aren't the kind of places where you just pop in after work for a flight of sauvignon blanc.

Gary Moffat, co-owner of Carpe Vino, credited the affordability of his wines for helping to make the list.

"Our wine list is accessible from a financial point of view," Moffat said. "We don't do restaurant mark-ups. All our prices are retail plus \$5 to open the bottle in our restaurant. If you're in our wine club, we waive the charge. If you ran the numbers on the amount of wine we sell, it would blow you away."

Carpe Vino, at 1568 Lincoln Way in Auburn, is online at www.carpevinoauburn.com. Or, call (530) 823-0320 for information.

Back at Enotria, you'll find a new wine director in Matthew Lewis. He replaces Jeremiah Morehouse, who left Enotria in September for San Francisco's SPQR, known for its extensive Italian wine program (though it also didn't make OpenTable's top wine list survey).

Lewis is a certified Level II sommelier with previous stints at the Firehouse and Slocum House. Enotria continues its Thursday night tastings, which cost \$10 and can feature up to six wines. Special wine dinners are also held monthly.

Call The Bee's Chris Macias, (916) 321-1253.



Daniel D'Agostini

Andis winery in Amador County named its mourvèdre blend "Painted Fields," a name that was once suggested for the winery itself.

A toast to Painted Fields

Blended wine honors the palette of its winery and the palate of its maker

By MIKE DUNNE
Special to The Bee

The American wine consumer has been brought up on wines labeled by varietal, such as cabernet sauvignon, zinfandel and merlot.

That's their comfort zone, and they're reluctant to be weaned from it, even though many of the more exciting wines to enter the market these days are blends labeled without a varietal designation. Generally, they can't be labeled as a

varietal because federal regulations overseeing the trade stipulate that a wine must contain at least 75 percent of a given variety to carry its name, and most blends don't have that much of a single grape.

Thus, vintners get creative to come up with meaningful, colorful and catchy proprietary names in hopes of attracting an audience that largely remains stubbornly committed to varietals.

Therefore, out of the nearby Sierra foothills alone, you'll find blends with such evocative names as Where the Buffalo Roam, Slug Gulch Red, The Spaniard, Apparition and Train Wreck.

Add to that list the proprietary name that just might be the prettiest of them all, Painted Fields. If Vincent van Gogh didn't call one of his paintings that, he should have, given the term's power to evoke images of fields or vineyards ever shifting with color and drama.

The wine that bears the name - the Andis Wines 2008 Amador County Painted Fields - is pretty powerful and colorful in its own right. It's a veritable artist's palette. Andis winemaker Mark McKenna began by dipping his brush into a big gob of earthy

mourvèdre, then started to add dabs of alicante bouschet, petite sirah, grenache and five Portuguese grape varieties.

The composition he created is a bright and deep splash of garnet, which on the palate blooms with authoritative and evolving flavors, one moment red fruit such as raspberries, the next dark fruit such as blackberries, with a brushstroke of anise here, a splash of white pepper over there.

It's a beefy wine, but its tannins are more relaxed than rigid. It's a fall wine, insisting to be on the table alongside a hearty stew. It's a very graceful piece, intended to be savored over and over. If it were hung in a gallery or museum, patrons would find themselves drifting back for one more look.

The grapes that went into the wine were grown at two Shenandoah Valley vineyards, BellaGrace and Bray. Their juice was fermented separately. Initially, McKenna expected to release the mourvèdre that accounts for 44 percent of the blend as a varietal, independent of other grape varieties.

But the more he tasted it, the more he realized that "it didn't have the legs to stand on its own." Then he

began to add some of this and a little of that until he got a wine so forthright and balanced it could carry such a poetic name.

"Painted Fields" originally was one of about 50 names proposed for the Shenandoah Valley winery now known as Andis. The naming of the winery, which opened last fall, was a matter of prolonged debate until the owners, Andrew Friedlander and Janis Akuna, decided they'd go with Andis, an abbreviated combination of their first names.

"Painted Fields" resurfaced when they started to search for a name for their first proprietary wine. By that time, no one directly affiliated with the winery could remember who had proposed the name.

After the wine was labeled, Friedlander and Akuna took a bottle with them when they met their architects, Paul Almond and Pam Whitehead of Sage Architecture Inc. in Sacramento, for dinner at the Plymouth restaurant Taste. When the bottle was put on the table, a startled Whitehead reminded them that she had recommended the name "Painted Fields" for the winery.

"I was really surprised to see the name on the bottle," she recalls. She says she

came up with the name as she mused "about the vineyard and how it is ever-changing in its colors, both the leaves and the grapes."

"I also was thinking about the creative process of making wine. It's really an artistic endeavor, like designing a building. And I liked the way the name rolled off the tongue, what it conjures up in your mind and on your palate."

She sidesteps talking about the merits of the wine itself. "I'm not really a wine drinker, and when I

do, I tend to favor whites more than reds," she says. She's missing a treat.

Longtime wine critic and competition judge Mike Dunne continues his relationship with The Bee as a contributing columnist to the Food & Wine section. His wine selections are based solely on tastings, judging at competitions, and visits to wine regions. Check out his blog at www.ayearinwine.com, and reach him at mike-dunne@winegigs.com.



Grapes are sorted during harvest.

Andis Wines

2008 Amador County Painted Fields

By the numbers: 13.9 percent alcohol, 311 cases, \$22
Context: Winemaker Mark McKenna recommends Painted Fields with grilled meats and hearty pastas and also notes that it should hold its own against the onslaught of varied flavors, textures and weights of the traditional year-end holiday banquet.

Availability: Painted Fields is stocked by Corti Brothers and the West Sacramento, El Dorado Hills and Roseville branches of Nugget Markets. Sacramento-area restaurants that carry Andis wines include The Firehouse, Ten22 and Hawks. Painted Fields also can be ordered through the winery's website, www.andiswines.com.

Information: The tasting room at Andis Wines, 11000 Shenandoah Road, Plymouth, is open 11 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Thursday through Monday.

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