

The world's best wine magazine

Decanter



California 2011

**Mapping the changing landscape and
emerging styles of the US' premier wine state**

Santa Barbara wine country

WHERE TO STAY, SHOP, EAT AND RELAX

The wines are hard to come by – so take a relaxed visit to the wineries, says Kia McNerny



SAVOURING A CRISP and floral Sauvignon Blanc or vibrant Pinot Noir on the deck of a tin-roof shack or in a scenic barn are some of the rural pleasures to be enjoyed in Santa Barbara's wine country. Others include spotting hawks, hares and the occasional cowboy connoisseur riding up to swap stories and sample the latest vintage.

Rusticity is honoured here. Dedicated to small-lot, handcrafted winemaking, the area offers the tranquility of old California in a landscape of twisted oaks and wildflowers. Yet to arrive are Napa's mega-sleek wineries and commercial output. Instead, the area is increasingly noted for handcrafted wines.

Now, serious chefs are coming to the region, pairing farm-fresh ingredients with cult wines in a rustic setting.

Lying a few miles south of the Danish-style village of Solvang, the Santa Rita Hills appellation of around 100 sq miles is marked by its east-west mountain range, producing cooling maritime currents for its

'Serious chefs are pairing farm-fresh ingredients with cult wines in a rustic setting'

Santa Barbara wineries lie in an authentically rural setting. Above: Foxen winery and tasting room. Right: Alma Rosa Winery

crisp Burgundian styles. Six miles inland is the urbane cowboy town of Los Olivos, departure point for Foxen Canyon's warmer-climate Rhônes and emerging Cabernets. And, for townies, Los Olivos' main street has clapboard tasting rooms run by such small-lot producers as Longoria, Byron, Stolpman and rising star Blair Fox.

SANTA RITA HILLS WINERIES

Alma Rosa Winery & Vineyard

It's hard to know who is more laid back at this ranch – the tasting-room manager Chris Burroughs or Princess, the resident cat. Fragrant, elegant Burgundian style in reds and whites. www.almarosawinery.com

Dierberg and Star Lane Vineyard

This prestige grower-turned-winery is attracting interest for its warmer styles from Happy Canyon, the newest and smallest AVA in the US. Star Lane Cabernets are not like those from Napa and don't try to be. www.dierbergvineyard.com

Foley Estates

Foley Estates' showcase setting is perfect for lunch outdoors. Enjoy its Santa Rita Hills Chardonnay with an English Stilton, Asian pear sandwich or goat's cheese and roasted pepper salad from Panino in Solvang.

Foley Estates (www.foleywines.com)

Panino (www.paninorestaurants.com)

Melville Vineyards and Winery

Known for disciplined whites and lush reds, the Tuscan-style tasting room is one of the loveliest in the area, with panoramic views. The Estate Pinot Noir is the flagship wine here. Also try its cold-fermented, tank-aged Inox Chardonnay, a rare find.

Melville (www.melvillewinery.com)

FOXEN CANYON WINERIES

Cambria Estate Winery

Cambria consistently produces high-quality Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from its Katherine's and Julia's vineyards. An idyllic afternoon can be spent sampling Pinot Noir from the winery's different sites.

Cambria (www.cambriawines.com)





Above: take your Panino lunch to enjoy outdoors at Foley Estates

Fess Parker Winery & Vineyard

Savour critically acclaimed wines in a comfortable, modern setting. Sought after are Ashley's Chardonnay, Ashley's Pinot Noir and Bien Nacido Chardonnay – all from gifted winemaker Blair Fox. www.fessparker.com

Foxen

A spectacular drive of rolling hills, twisted oaks and wildflowers brings you to Foxen and the Foxen 7200 tasting shack, a historic ranch bungalow for sampling Rhônes and Bordeaux styles. www.foxenvineyard.com

DINING AND STAYING

The Ballard Inn & Restaurant

Chef Budi Kazali is known for a light fusion touch with savoury accents and a stellar wine list in a refined and well-appointed country hotel. www.ballardinn.com

Cecco

In central Solvang, a sunny patio and wine bar draws the cognoscenti for light, rustic fare prepared by a wine-savvy chef. Specialities include brick-oven pizzas and wild-boar ragu. www.ceccoristorante.com

Fess Parker Wine Country Inn & Spa

Lovely ambience in an upscale hotel on Los Olivos main street, with a spa, wine-centric activities and lots of outdoor space. www.fessparkerinn.com

Los Olivos Wine Merchant Café

A popular lunch spot, check out these superstar wines: Brewer-Clifton, Tantara, Palmina, SeaSmoke and anything by Chris Curran. www.losolivoscafe.com

Root 246 and Hotel Corque

At Root 246 you find fine dining as well as simpler fare, such as roast chicken and mashed potatoes. Eat on the patio, in the smart dining room or even in the kitchen. Refined, comfortable hotel rooms are next door, with private terraces in a great Solvang location. **Root 246** (www.root-246.com), **Hotel Corque** (www.hotelcorque.com)

LOS OLIVOS TASTING ROOMS

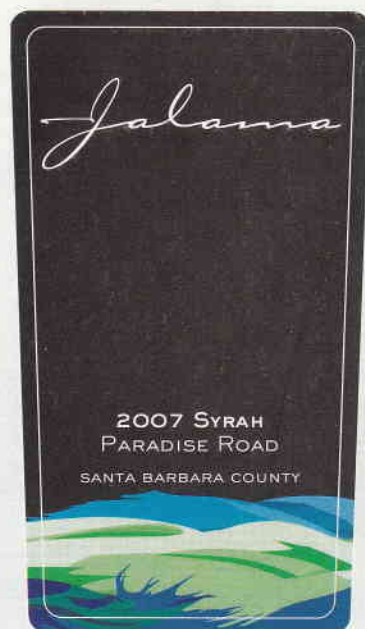
Blair Fox Cellars (www.blairfoxcellars.com)

Byron Winery (www.byronwines.com)

Longoria Wines (www.longoriawine.com)

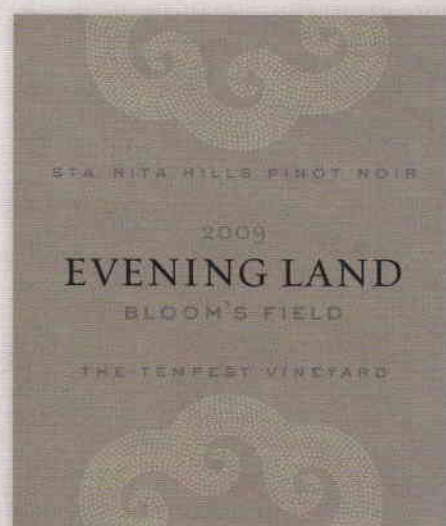
Stolpman Vineyards & Winery (www.stolpmanvineyards.com)

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