

Exploring Santa Barbara-Summerland Wine Country

Urban wine tasting can be a form of discovery – blending new kids and established players – but each name on our list has already been discovered and acclaimed by earlier explorers. Undaunted, we set out like latter-day Lewises and Clarks, to find and test for ourselves the “local” wines, off-course wineries, and tasting rooms where they can be enjoyed. Here is our report:

Carr Vineyards & Winery

Black-and-gold cellar dog Roxy is official greeter at Carr Winery’s cavernous steel Quonset hut. Its site, on a low-key industrial street, is within sea-spray of the beach. The golden light that washes over gleaming stainless steel tanks is from fire-retardant foam insulation winemaker Ryan Carr installed to cool the space and transform its 1940s military aesthetic.

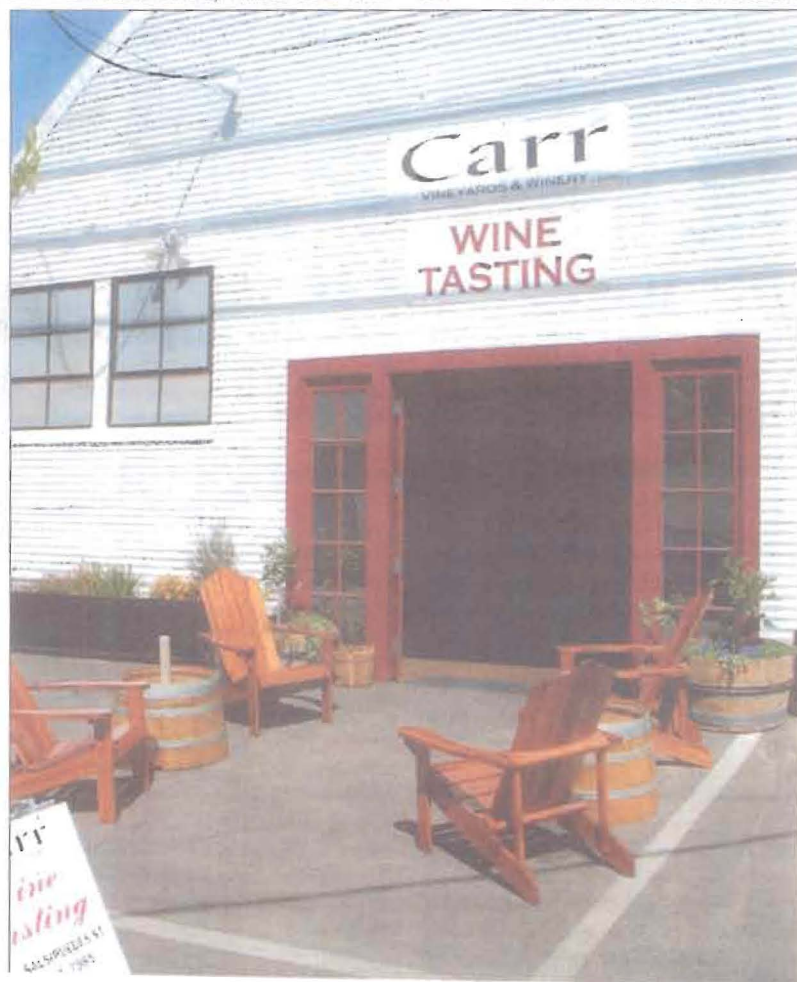
New releases from Carr include Grenache (an emerging trend?) from a vineyard site in Carpinteria, available Spring, 2008. Just released is a “monster” Cabernet Franc, which Carr calls

“amazing,” and a Sangiovese “experiment,” that Carr calls “a beautiful, really tasty wine.”

The 2006 Pinot Gris is the label’s only white wine, but Carr has attracted top scores from international wine mavens for his 2005 *Three Vineyards Pinot Noir*, and even higher ones for his *Turner Vineyard Pinot*, both from Santa Rita Hills fruit. “Cinnamon and clove on the nose,” Ryan observes of the Turner selection. “Very ‘holiday.’ It tastes like Christmas to me.”

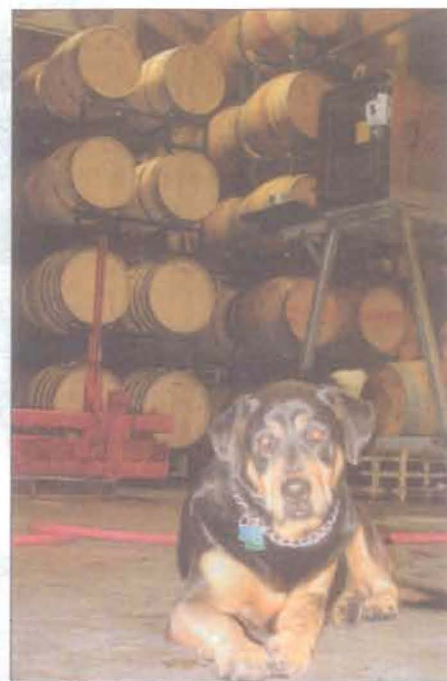
The winery has been known to feature Friday night flights – vertical tastings of its past and current releases – to the public for a charge. For those enamored of the science of wine, Carr keeps little jars of dirt on the polished cask counter, reflecting the various vineyard soils he works with.

Like Craig Jaffurs, Ryan is impressed by Santa Barbara’s welcoming of the new winery space. “I have a great landlord,” he boasts, adding that the City has been easy to work with. “We may not have the vineyard views,” Carr opines, “but we can step outside and see the mountains and harbor. For





Winemaker Ryan Carr says his outfit "may not have the vineyard views, but we can step outside and see the mountains and harbor"



Roxy greets guests outside Carr Winery's massive Quonset hut storehouse

those who want a wine touring experience without going to the Valley, I think we offer a special alternative."

Carr Winery and Tasting Room

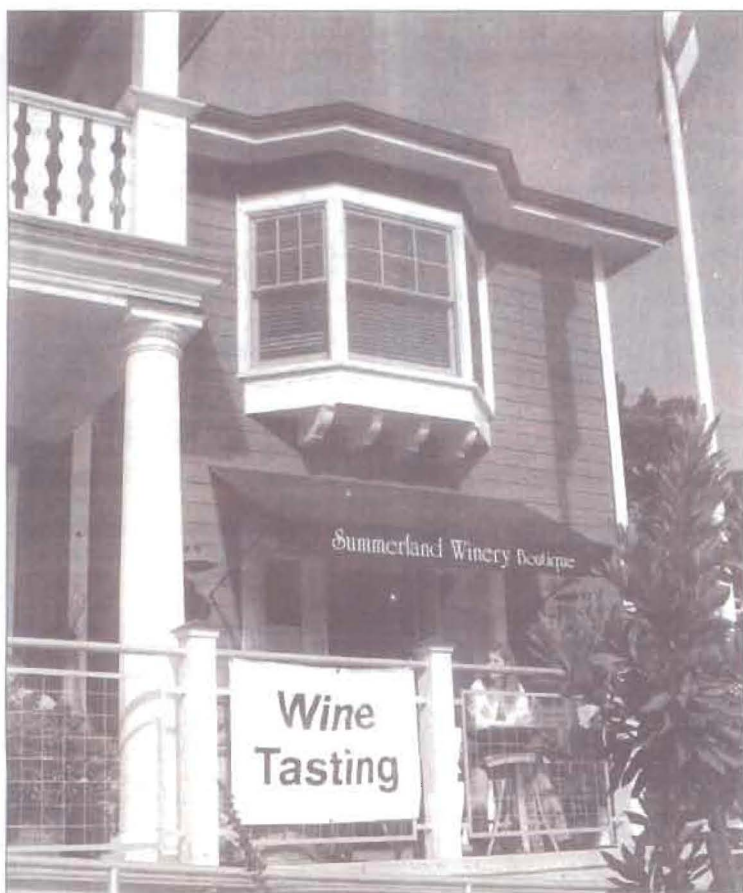
414 N. Salsipuedes St.

Santa Barbara, Ca. 93103

Tel: 805.965.7985

Hours: 11 AM to 5 PM Every Day

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Summerland Winery Boutique's wine-tasting porch looks out onto the ocean.

Summerland Winery Boutique

It is an easy bike ride from Montecito to Summerland Winery's Boutique and tasting room and its inviting sun deck overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Within the fresh gray and white beach cottage is a blend of sea air and award-winning wines.

"Current favorites are our Grenache and Pinot Noir," tasting room assistant manager Shirley Starks tells us. As for the French Camp Zinfandel, "When

we pour it," she says, "people buy it."

Among the winery's sellouts are the 2005 Pinot Noir and Central Coast Chardonnay. On offer (depending on the day) are: a Bien Nacido Chardonnay, a Wolf Vineyard Pinot Noir and a Petite Syrah.

Behind the laid-back beach-town atmosphere is an international trio of talented wine professionals. Winemaker Etienne Terlinden, a Euro-California hybrid, spent childhood summers in the Belgian countryside where he first learned about great



Shirley Starks pours her favorites for Kathy and Kia McInerney on the deck of Summerland Winery's tasting room.



Inside Summerland Winery tasting room with wine guide Meg Long (on right); from left, Kathy and Brian McInerney, and author

wines in his grandfather's cellar.

Similarly, owner **Bilo Zarif's** introduction to fine wine began at a young age in family vineyards in the hills of Iskenderun, Turkey. A local polo enthusiast, Mr. Zarif is known for his acumen in finding prime vineyard sites in Santa Barbara County, having transformed Barnwood vineyards from 300 acres to over 900 planted acres of Bordeaux varietals, before creating his Summerland label.

The trio is completed by world-class consultant, **Michele Pignarre Le Danois**, Etienne's "second palate" in the blending process. Together, the two taste more than 100 barrels of wine to achieve the refinement that Summerland strives for.

All this European teamwork pays off. Summerland's wines have attracted praise from such gurus as Robert Parker and Anthony Dias Blue, and been featured in *Bon Appetit*, *Wine and Spirits*, *Wine Advocate* and *Patterson's Beverage Journal* (now the *Tasting Panel*). As Etienne says: "What we try to do is make wines that are soft, luscious and rounded." On a sparkling California day on the deck with glass in hand, we cannot ask for more.

Summerland Winery Boutique

2330 Lillie Ave.,
Summerland, CA 93067
Tel: 805.565.9463; Fax: 805.695.0300
Hours: Monday-Thursday,
11 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Friday - Sunday, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.



Jaffurs tasting room manager Matt Brady and Joanie Hudson oversee the front of the room

Jaffurs Winery

In Jaffurs' pristine wine-making facility on the fringes of upper Milpas Street, wine-club members are as likely to be put to work as to lift a glass of his celebrated Syrah. "On days we release the wine club allocation, we have thirty or so people in the tasting room, all helping out and having a good time," tasting room manager **Matt Brady** told us.

Most of the time, however, the ambiance is playful, with vintage surfboards on the walls (Del Cannon, Phil Edwards of Hobie, as well as a Blake paddleboard). Others are relics from surfing days. "It gets them out of my garage," **Craig Jaffurs** says.

The winemaker is an established player in the story of Santa Barbara's wine indus-

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Craig Jaffurs waiting for the fruit to arrive at harvest

try. "We get people who have read the reviews," Matt notes. "When they get to Santa Barbara, they track us down."

"Syrah put us on the map, but the Bien Nacido Vineyard Viognier is pretty darn good," Craig admits. Described by Craig as "bright, minerally and delicious with food," the wine is a limited edition with striking surfboard labels by artist **Hank Pitcher**.

Each week features a different selection. In addition to the Viognier, Matt and colleagues may pour a single vineyard release such as Thompson Syrah, or the popular Santa Barbara County blend. "Remarkable, for the price (\$24)," Craig says. He reckons the aromatic Sangiovese made by assistant winemaker **Dave Yates** is "the best in the County." And a savory newcomer, Grenache Blanc, is slated for release next year.

Of his decision to build a working winery in city limits, Craig says: "The City made it easy. They felt it was the right project for the area. There are all these artisans around here. We fit right in." Surfing, art and wine, in a genteel working class area. It's a setting unique to Santa Barbara.

Jaffurs Wine Cellars

819 E. Montecito St.

Santa Barbara, Ca.

Tel: 805.962.7003

Hours: Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m., or by appointment

Santa Barbara Winery

Two blocks from West Beach is Santa Barbara Winery's user-friendly boutique and tasting room. All the win-



Tasting guide Joanie Hudson pours her favorite Sangiovese (that's not a typo; Joanie works Saturdays at Jaffurs!)

ery's white wines are made there, and a cask-lined cellar forms one side of the tasting bar. With the pungent scent of new wine in oak barrels, the setting evokes the caves of France's Burgundy region. Outside, a patio invites sharing a pour or two in the sunshine.

"Our flagship wine is Chardonnay," tasting room assistant **Joanie Hudson** says. "And we have a one-hundred-percent Grenache that has recently become very popular." Joanie's current favorites for autumn menus include a Grenache/Syrah, as well as a Sangiovese.

The winery was the first after prohibition to open in Santa Barbara, in 1962. Owner **Pierre Lafond** is familiar to Montecito residents and long-time visitors for his namesake local meeting spot in the upper village. But he is also a key figure in transforming the region's wine industry into one of international renown.

Harvest time is fun at the downtown location. "We get trucks of grapes arriving a little, at a time. There's a lot of activity as they are unloaded and pressed. Locals stop in to pick up wine or gifts." A traditional favorite among wine-savvy locals is ZCS, a blend of Zinfandel, Carignane and Sangiovese, selling for \$13. "A party sipper," Joanie confirms.

And Mr. Lafond himself drops by daily to check on things. "It's great. He's very active and interested, and his visits are a huge part of the day-to-day. It's fun to work here," she adds.

With so many quality wines, it's fun to visit too.

Santa Barbara Winery Tasting Room

202 Anacapa Street,

Santa Barbara, CA 93101

805.963.3633 or 800.225.3633 (toll free)

Hours: 10-5 Every Day

Whitcraft, the "Cult" Vintner

At **Chris Whitcraft's** stuccoed industrial space off a parking lot near the beach, collectors and serious wine aficionados can taste and acquire cult-favorite Q Block Pinot Noir, as well as his celebrated Chardonnay. Since the 1980s, the irrepressible vintner has been crafting wines for the cognoscenti. In an authentic winery atmosphere, the tasting room provides a chance to sample wines from a classic SBC winemaker and his talented son **Drake**, who is taking over the helm of a very hip ship. Not so welcome are wine zealots who let the words "Robert Parker" tumble over their lips. Not because Parker has been unkind to the label: "This sexy, sensual full-bodied effort possesses supple tannins..." But for reasons too complex for most of us to comprehend without a tumbler full of Pinot, these are fightin' words on lower Calle Caesar Chavez.

That's okay. The wines still shine. And will for some time.



Distinctive offerings from Chris Whitcraft and Son Drake include their sought-after Bien Nacido Vineyards Pinot Noir at \$75 per bottle

Whitcraft Winery & Tasting Room

36A S. Calle Cesar Chavez

Santa Barbara, Ca. 93103

Tel: 805.730.1680

Hours (Winter): Friday, Noon- 4 pm

Saturday - Sunday, Noon to 4:00 p.m.

And by advance appointment

• We could not visit all the urban wineries and tasting rooms within our allotted time, but with Kalyra, Oreana/Cellar 205, East Beach Wine Company, and Benjamin Silver (winery only), there's more to explore. 28

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