

GIN • VODKA • RUM TEQUILA • WHISKEY CLASSICS

Roseann Tully's

Sip

**OUR
BIGGEST
ISSUE
EVER!**

FOR THE LOVE OF DRINK.

CLASSIC COCKTAILS

INCLUDING OVER **80** RECIPES

RUMS FOR SIPPING!

18 CLASSIC
COCKTAILS
to Master Now

ORLANDO's
Cocktail Scene

Luscious Libations
in LISBON

DISPLAY UNTIL NOVEMBER 12, 2018

WWW.SIPTHEMAGAZINE.COM

\$6.99US \$7.99CAN

14>



Wines of
LOMPOC, CA

BAR STARS: Vegas, Chattanooga, Santa Fe



wine: LOMPOC, CA

Lompoc's

Glorious Wine Ghetto

A repurposed industrial area becomes one of the most welcoming and creative places to learn about California wines and its winemakers.





Decades before the craft cocktail scene took root in Tokyo, a cluster of pocket-sized bars known as *Golden Gai* in the Shinjuku neighborhood enabled small bar owners to express themselves. Though the exteriors of the bars were unassuming, owners successfully created their own little world through preferred libations and décor. There were also plenty of personal stories to go along with the drinks they offered.

Something similar has taken shape over the past couple of decades in Lompoc, an agricultural community in Santa Barbara County, California known for its award-winning wines and a handful of posh wineries on a par with those found in Napa and Sonoma. The reputation had to start somewhere. Some trace it to 1998, when Lompoc wine producer and pioneer Rick Longoria opened a tasting room in a 5,400 square-foot industrial space hidden behind a Home Depot store.

In the next few years, other independent winemakers followed Longoria's lead and set up shop in the complex, affectionately referring to it as a "wine ghetto." While the name stuck, young producers through the years reshaped their units within the humble space into an arty and appealing patchwork of 19 stylish tasting rooms echoing the diverse expressions of the wines and winemakers. Collectively, it also reflects that Lompoc winemakers have never seen themselves in the shadow of Napa or Sonoma producers.

"This place is unique because you can walk around and experience different wine styles and approaches to winemaking in a refreshingly unpretentious way," says Billy Vondrasek, who operates Artisan Uprising with his brother David. Their tasting room's interior has a classic rock theme and a D.J. area inspired by their experiences as rock musicians.

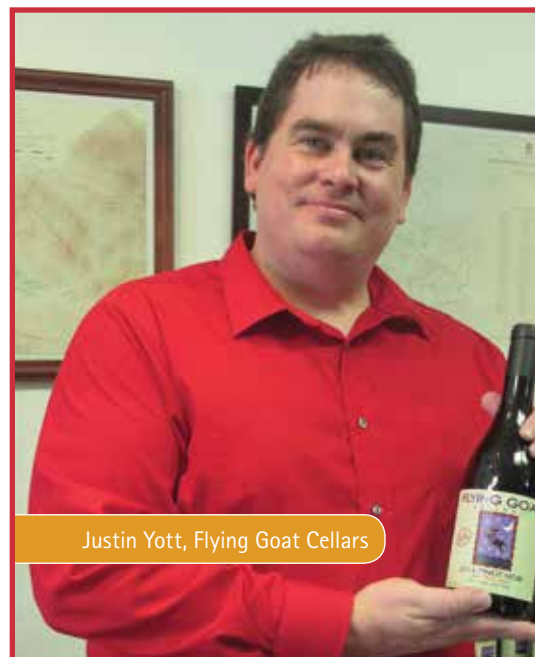
“People appreciate that it doesn’t have the formality of Napa and Sonoma, and there’s team spirit. As the president of the Lompoc Wine Alliance, I make sure all of us make the wine experience inclusive. We get the word out by starting with self-promotion, then expanding to praise our colleagues. If we can all do our part to promote the Ghetto as a whole, everybody wins.”

Vondrasek cites the strategy of asking what wine styles his customers enjoy, and based on that feedback, recommends other tasting rooms. He also playfully adds, one does not need Uber, as everything is in one place, enabling those learning about wine to try a variety of styles.

“You don’t have to visit a ton of wineries to really know and understand the process of what goes into winemaking,” he says. “Just ask us, or any of the winemakers. Everybody will have a different story; everybody has their own way of doing things.”

For Kimberly Smith, the creation of LaMontagne (a decidedly feminine tasting room with French flair) stemmed from a hobby that evolved into something that was as healing physically as it was satisfying personally.

“When I finally got my health back in 2010 (after a long illness stemming from diabetes), I decided to go back to school to learn about why people dump more wines than we’re drinking,” recalls



Justin Yott, Flying Goat Cellars



Smith. “I immersed myself in studies at Allen Hancock College and put myself into the school’s wine certification program. I also networked around the Wine Ghetto to meet other winemakers who offered to mentor me. One day in 2007, I decided to go to an after-hours party with a vineyard owner-winemaker speaker. The man’s talk spoke to my soul, so much so that I went up to him and asked if he would mentor me as a future winemaker. He responded by asking me to meet him at his vineyard at 8AM the next day.”

Smith was hooked, and made the commitment to meet with the winemaker every two weeks, to shadow him and learn about winemaking—literally—from the ground up, over the next four years. Her moment of truth came in 2010 when he challenged her to make her first barrel of wine. Today, when not enchanting imbibers in her tasting room, she travels on invitation to Europe to attend wine dinners. Even with some international acclaim and awards under her belt, she remains a steadfast Lompoc girl.

“I make my wines for longevity, not for huge commercial sales; therefore I produce a limited amount,” she continues. “I refer to my wines as ‘ladies,’ as each has their own character and



personality. I want you to understand why you appreciate (or not) certain wines and varietals. I enjoy educating you about exactly what is in your glass. Also as a professional chef and person with other businesses in Lompoc for 39 years, I want to run this business as close to home as I can.”

The *méthode Champenoise* sparkling wines and pinot noirs of Flying Goat Cellars, meanwhile, generate as much excitement as they did several years ago when they took their place in the Wine Ghetto. So much so, in fact, that one fan, Justin Yott, now mans the tasting counter.

“I enjoy working for someone who not only appreciates wine, but the entire process involved in attaining mastery of a certain craft,” says Yott. “Before I came to work here, I had been following Flying Goat for quite sometime. That said, there are so many excellent winemakers here that it can be easy for some to get lost in the shuffle. This, in turn, ensures all of the winemakers work hard to keep their production standards and customer service high. As we have four pinots, people can taste the differences in each one, based on where the fruit was sourced, and how it was crafted and aged.”

No matter where the day takes young wine drinkers, no trip to the Wine Ghetto is complete without a tasting session at Fiddlehead Cellars and a chat with winemaker Kathy Joseph. She has the distinction of being one of the original “settlers” in the complex (arriving in 2003), having a full winery (and not just a tasting room) located there, and working on her 30th vintages of pinot noir and sauvignon blanc. She was making wine years before the Santa Ynez Valley became a designated production region (AVA), and was one of a very small handful of women winemakers at the time.

“I make wines made to be enjoyed, and I have had many years to hone my craft to make them textural and immediately enjoyable,” says Joseph, a Wisconsin native with a biochemistry background. “I enjoy sharing the history of that learning process with my customers and people who are just beginning to learn what their palates are about. I came to the region knowing there was a cool climate close to the ocean and a warmer climate just 30 miles away where completely different varietals could grow.”

In her tasting sessions, Joseph offers up generous plates of charcuterie as well as an impressive geography lesson, describing wines made from grapes sourced from the Ballard Canyon appellation, the Los Olivos appellation, and Happy Canyon, where she grows the fruit for her sauvignon blanc.

“These boundaries did not exist when I first got here, so it was all about my

exploring and tasting wines from these other areas that made me a believer,” says Joseph. “One thing that makes Happy Canyon so interesting is that it is warm by day, eliminating herbaceous and brassy notes in sauvignon blanc, but cool at night, helping maintain vibrant acidity which results in a balanced wine. In Santa Rita Hills, pinot noir needs and demands a cool climate, and we are blessed with the Santa Rita Hills AVA, cooled by the ocean breezes and ocean fog.”

Weekends are considered the best time to visit the Lompoc Wine Ghetto, as most of the tasting rooms are open from 11am until 4 or 5pm.

For more information on the individual winemakers, tasting room hours and events, visit explorelomdoc.com/lompoc-wine-ghetto, lomdocwinealliance.com or lomdoctrail.com.

—ELYSE GLICKMAN



Norm Yost, Flying Goat Cellars



Rick Longoria, the “father” of the Lompoc Wine Ghetto



Kathy Joseph, Fiddlehead Cellars



Kimberly Smith, LaMontagne Winery