

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



## BEHIND THE SCENES: Creating music for the palate - Kathy Joseph makes Fiddlehead a world-class wine

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If there's anyone in the Santa Ynez Valley with well-aligned left and right brains, it's Kathy Joseph. The founder, proprietor and self-proclaimed "grape-herder" of Fiddlehead Cellars exhibits a rare balance of free-spirited creativity and analytical zest. After all, it took only one summer to transform the former pre-med student into a lifetime wine devotee. Dedication to her craft along with boundless enthusiasm has put this vintner at the forefront of the Santa Barbara County wine movement.

Following that pivotal learning experience at Simi Winery in the summer of 1981, Joseph continued to soak up grape-growing knowledge. Working at three wineries, including five years at Robert Pecota in Napa Valley, she learned everything necessary to get started. The Fiddlehead brand was launched in 1989 with fruit purchased from outside growers and processed at a rented space. When Fiddlehead's primary supplier, Sierra Madre, was purchased by Robert Mondavi in the mid-'90s, it was time for Joseph's team to plant some roots of their own.

After an extensive two-year search, Joseph's oenological instincts kicked in. "My palate turned to the cooler climate and darker fruit characteristics from coastal Santa Ynez Valley," she said.

She had no idea what kind of commitment she was about to make. "I was on a 20-acre search," she said, "not a 132-acre search."

The future site of Fiddlestix Vineyard was a flower farm across from the well-respected Sanford & Benedict Vineyard. In fact, it wasn't even on the market. The area known as Santa Rita Hills had yet to appear on the map.

The Fiddlehead team established the vineyard with patience and finesse. Things began to take off in 2003 with the leasing of the winery in the Lompoc wine ghetto.

"All the detail that we give to tending the plants has made a big difference," Joseph said. "It's all hand work. It's evaluating what the year is like. It's not recipe farming."

The vineyard has entered the top tier of recognizable names with the help of a number of producers making transcendent pinot noir with its fruit.



At Fiddlehead, Kathy Joseph, above, is an integral part of the winemaking process.  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF FIDDLEHEAD CELLARS



Since the beginning, the focus has been on pinot noir and sauvignon blanc. The latter is grown in the eastern Santa Ynez Valley at the Vogelzang, Westerly Stolpman and La Pressa vineyards. It became a celebrity unto itself in 2004 when it was featured prominently in "Sideways." A Japanese fan has visited the winery every year since. In a related note, Tony Soprano had the pleasure of sipping Fiddlehead during one of the show's final episodes.



These wines have been crafted to reflect the exuberance of their maker. Joseph's personality resonates in each wine she has a hand in creating. The operation is fueled by female firepower, warranting Joseph and her team an appropriate nickname, FiddleChix.

If it weren't enough to be a wine pioneer in Santa Barbara County, Joseph has also been tapped for more than 15 years into the West Coast's other hot region, Oregon's Willamette Valley. Timing her move on the heels of the Santa Ynez harvest, Joseph heads to Oregon to pluck more pinot.

**FIDDLEHEAD CELLARS  
WINERY AND TASTING ROOM**

Where: 1597 E. Chestnut Ave.,  
Lompoc  
Information: 742-0204,  
[www.fiddleheadcellars.com](http://www.fiddleheadcellars.com)  
Tasting Room Hours: 11 a.m. to 4

When not working on the latest vintages or planning events such as last weekend's FiddleFest, Joseph racks up frequent flier miles. Recently, she returned from a trip to France and Spain. Despite living the wine high life, Joseph remains unjaded. "I still can get as excited about a bottle of \$7.99 petite syrah with my husband by the fire as I can about the finest French wine," she said.

And she certainly has no regrets about forgoing a medical career: "It's better this way because I can help keep all the doctors happy."

**NAME THAT WINE**

The same care involved in making Fiddlehead wines also goes into selecting their names. Here, Kathy Joseph provides some insight into her library of creative titles. But first: Did you know a fiddlehead is a coiled fern-shoot considered a culinary delicacy?

Fiddlehead: "You know, it's interesting because I made the wine first and took two years to find a name I thought adequately described the feeling of the brand. (Fiddlehead) was in my head from studying botany in college."

Lollapalooza: "It's an old English word that means 'best of its kind.' It was our first wine ever released (from Fiddlestix Vineyard), in 2000. Cuvée Lollapalooza is a barrel selection of the best of the cellar in a particular vintage. I'm looking for the finest selections to display the glory of pinot noir and its elegance. You'll want to say, 'Lollapalooza!' after you drink it."

Doyle: "I name this rarest of beasts after my husband. It's made from a single-barrel in my cellar that consistently shouts out, 'I'm a rock star!' You know: a stand-alone barrel that I taste every time and think is absolutely superb. Each bottle is wax-dipped on the neck, numbered and the label design changes every year. "

Goosebury: "In making these sauvignon blancs, I discovered a couple of other opportunities for really, really exciting small bottlings. This one involves reserving a small portion fermented only in stainless steel. The names are sort of meant to reflect a style. Goosebury is the most fruit-forward wine (of the sauvignon blancs) in my portfolio."

Hunnysuckle: "The wine was just released with the new 'Winnie the Pooh' spelling. We were told the original spelling could imply that honeysuckle fragrance was added. It was pretty much the same thing with Goosebury."

Independence Day Sampler: The 1776 -- note the prices -- is one bottle 2006 Pink Fiddle (\$17) and two bottles 2003 Seven Twenty Eight (\$76); tax free. "As the seasons roll around we try to do something fun that reflects what's on our mind. This is a new idea. We also have the Red, White and Pink deal. . . . Take some home."