

## PICK & CHOOSE

JUST RED? JUST WHITE?  
JUST CALIFORNIAN?  
JUST ITALIAN?  
HOW ABOUT A  
COMBINATION?

### CALIFORNIA WINES

Artisan Series –  
\$29.50/month, a red and a white  
Winemaker Series –  
\$59.50/month, 2 reserve reds  
Artisan red–Winemaker red –  
\$46/month

### ITALIAN WINES

Artisan Series –  
\$32/month, a red and a white  
Winemaker Series –  
\$62/month, 2 reserve reds  
Collector Series –  
\$112/month, 2 collectable reds  
Artisan red–Winemaker red –  
\$48/month  
Winemaker red–Collector red –  
\$87/month

### CALIFORNIA–ITALIAN COMBINATIONS

CA Artisan red–IT Artisan red –  
\$33/month  
CA Artisan white–IT Artisan white–  
\$29.50/month  
CA Winemaker–IT Winemaker –  
\$62/month  
Alternate CA & IT Artisan Series –  
\$29.50/\$32/month  
Alternate CA & IT Winemaker Series–  
\$59.50/\$62/month

### DOUBLE UP

You can also receive more than two bottles per month. California sales tax is included. Shipping is extra.

experience and have faith and trust in what I'm dictating. In our contracts with them, we specify that we will determine when the fruit is picked. I can't wait for them to get a picking crew together. Typically, there's a two to three day window when it's best to pick. If you wait a little bit too long, the sugars go up too much. The fruit will start to raisin, and you'll get higher alcohol wines that are out of balance. If you have to pick too soon because the grower didn't drop enough crop and the fruit is not going to get properly ripe, or there's a pending storm, and you have to pick early because the grapes are going to fill up with water and the flavors will be diluted. Who's fault is all of that? Basically it's the grower who tried to get a bigger crop than could properly ripen in time. In a couple of vineyards, we actually do the picking ourselves because they're so remote. To get a crew to some of these spots is practically impossible. We get a couple of vans, and I get the clippers and go out there and pick. Besides the time, I control the whole picking in terms of what's picked and what isn't as far as quality. That's really the key. When the grower knows that we have this narrow set of criteria, they know that they're going to have to grow sustainably so that the vineyard is in balance. The chance of bugs and microorganisms and mildew, all these factors are going to be minimized because growers are not trying to get more out of the vineyard than they should. It's like working a horse too hard or anything else. If you've got your vineyard in balance, it's going to produce good quality fruit.

**With all these new vineyards and wineries, the appellation must be growing fast.**

There are ebbs and flows. When we came here 17 years ago, we were the new kids on the block. The old guard was Bargetto, Algren, Fogarty, Ridge, some of those people. Some have survived; others haven't. And then more and more people came in, who had made their money some place else. So that's been difficult. It's a little bit difficult to compete with marketing because they've got a lot more marketing dollars than I have and can afford to be more sophisticated with marketing. But at the same time, I think they bring a certain level of professionalism to the business that the dirt-farmer winemaker doesn't have. I think with all of these people coming in and opening up, everyone who sticks a finger in the pot, who gives it a shot, is certainly going to expand the availability of Santa Cruz Mountains wines and will be trying a lot of newer things. Generally, the more experimentation that's going on creates the chance of newer discoveries. We worked for the first time this year with the same grower who planted our Gold Medal Pinot Noir fruit. He's planted a Sauvignon Blanc vineyard, so we're going to be making the first Sauvignon Blanc from the Santa Cruz Mountains. Actually, it's a clone called Sauvignon Blanc Muscay. There are only three or four vineyards planted with that clone in California. The other thing about the Santa Cruz Mountains is that it spans three counties, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, and San Mateo, and we've got two different sides of the mountain. It's a huge appellation and has a lot of potential for different microclimates and soils yet to be explored. So we'll probably get a pretty good range of varieties and see some pretty great wines coming out of here over the next 20 to 30 years. ■



## California Winery of the Month



## Eclectic Tastes Hallcrest Vineyards



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January 2006

One hour south of San Francisco on Highway 280 and a half hour west on winding Highway 17, the Santa Cruz Mountains were ablaze with spring, much like the rest of Northern California. Along the roads, yellow acacia and pink and white flowering plum were interspersed among dense evergreens, the colors dazzling in the sunshine after months of torrential rains. Federally recognized in 1981, the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation is defined in part by elevation, beginning at 800 feet in the east and 400 feet in the west to the top of the Santa Cruz Mountain range, with most vineyards around 2,000 feet. Patches of vineyard first appeared in the late 1800s, but few survived Prohibition. Then again in the 1940s, new wineries developed, Hallcrest Vineyards among them, on the sunny crest of a hill in the town of Felton. ➤

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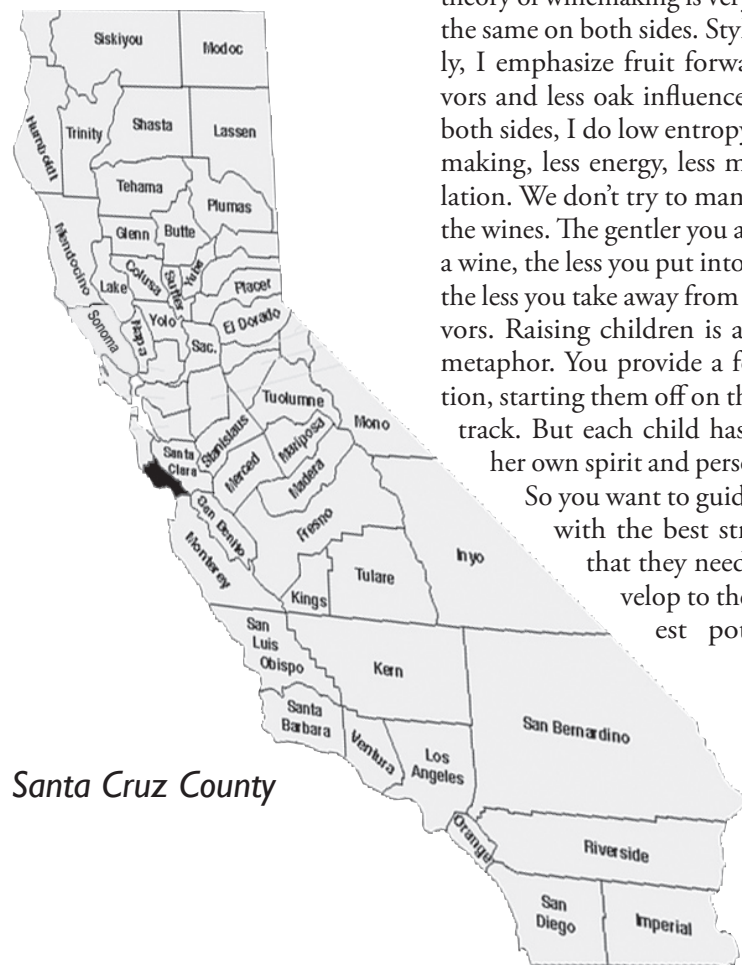
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Lorraine and John Schumacher purchased the property in 1987, after John had graduated from the University of California at Davis with an enology degree. Composed but energetic, John Schumacher is a man who knows what he's doing and does what he knows, most of which is crafting organic wines under the Organic Wine Works label, the first certified organic wine in the U.S. These wines are made without the use of added sulfites, according to laws established by California Certified Organic Farmers (C.C.O.F.), and the fruit is harvested from organic vineyards throughout Northern California. Yearly production for Organic Wine Works ranges from 10,000 to 20,000 cases. But John also makes an additional 2,500 cases of wine under the Hallcrest Vineyards label, seeking out small, vineyards high in the Santa Cruz Mountains. His efforts have been described as schizophrenic, he says.



Santa Cruz County

Even a prestigious marketing company that he hired to reconcile the two brands couldn't come up with a unifying theme. "I'm still trying to figure it out. We're making ultra premium wines for the Hallcrest brand, and then there's this public concept that organic wines without sulfur dioxide are schlock. So I just consider myself eclectic. I can do two different styles," he explains. I print our conversation with minor editing for clarity.

**Your organic wines are delicious and have a large and growing following. Why do you bother with your small Hallcrest Vineyards production?**

A lot of people get very confused because I'm making two very different types of wine. Organic Wine Works is definitely my brainchild. But the whole idea of Hallcrest was to be traditional, to reestablish the traditional brand that Chafee Hall created here in the 1940s. But my theory of winemaking is very much the same on both sides. Stylistically, I emphasize fruit forward flavors and less oak influence. With both sides, I do low entropy winemaking, less energy, less manipulation. We don't try to manipulate the wines. The gentler you are with a wine, the less you put into it, and the less you take away from the flavors. Raising children is a useful metaphor. You provide a foundation, starting them off on the right track. But each child has his or her own spirit and personality.

So you want to guide them with the best structure that they need to develop to their fullest potential.



"I just consider myself eclectic."  
—John Schumacher

On my card it doesn't say Wine-maker. It says Wine Shepherd. The wine really makes itself. I just do all the work. We try not to over-extract flavors during fermentation. We do a very gentle, hand punch-down process (mixing the cap of solids that rises to the surface of the tank as the wine ferments.) It's more labor and work, especially on the Hallcrest, smaller-lot items. Hand punching down goes back almost to home winemaking days. The best wines are made that way. We don't use machinery. All the barrels are filled by hand. It's not an assembly line. And you see the results. Everything is made in very small lots. All the wines still see limited production. Every bottle is numbered.

**Are any of the Hallcrest vineyards organic?**

Some are. But what we do is educate our growers to move toward areas of greater sustainable agriculture. Everything I learn on the organic end, I've been able to use to become a better winemaker on the Hallcrest end. Even though they're a little bit different in style, and we have to go in different directions with the two labels, we take the knowledge base that we learn from one and apply it to the other. If you limit yourself to one

type of product, sometimes you have the tendency to get too narrowly focused.

**Do you intend to increase production for Hallcrest or Organic Wine Works?**

No. About three years ago, we came to a crossroads with the organic wines. We could increase production and really go down that road, or I could improve the quality and continue with the smaller vineyards that I had been working with. So we decided to really wrap our arms around the quality, because there seems to be this general bias about organic wines that they're not as good as conventional ones, especially with the gatekeepers, the wine writers and even buyers. We already knew that we had tremendous customer loyalty. We knew from the reorders that we got. Once we're on a shelf, our product gets pulled off. I have our 800 number on the back label, so we get feedback. We welcome people to contact us. Our first release for the organic wines was back in 1989, and the ratio of complaints to compliments completely switched as the vintages progressed. We can't keep up with demand.



**Are you able to find organic grapes here, or do you have to go outside of Santa Cruz Mountains to find fruit?**

Not many farmers in the Santa Cruz Mountains can grow organically because the appellation offers harsher conditions as far as mildew is concerned, and they're dealing with certain weed and pest problems on hillsides. Some areas around here are more conducive to being sustainable and some less. Many growers are not really experienced. A lot of these people are gentlemen farmers, so they're not typically ready to jump on the organic or sustainable agriculture wagon. We try to educate them, so they're at least taking one step at a time. If they completely converted over to organic, they might lose a crop, and that's very costly. We look for growers in the Santa Cruz Mountains, who have the right clone and varietal in the right part of the appellation. They understand that even though Pinot Noir happens to be the hot grape in the appellation, they can't necessarily grow it because it doesn't grow well in parts of this appellation. At some of the higher elevations, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon

might work. I look for growers who are conscientious, who in the end game are not just looking for a particular price per ton but want the quality of the fruit to come out in the bottle. In our contracts, we maintain a certain level of control as far as fruit yield in the vineyard. The quality of the fruit is supposed to be free of rot and mildew and that type of thing. So growers sometimes have to go through the crop and drop fruit two or three times prior to harvest so that they're thinning out or culling out bad fruit or fruit that isn't ripe. We don't have any secondary or tertiary crop mixed in with our harvest. As a result, I do have to pay top dollar to all of these growers because their yield is going to be less. Instead of getting four tons per acre, they're going to get two or one and a half. They've gone through and dropped a lot of their crop, so they're not going to get a second crop in the harvest. Because it's a cold climate appellation here in Santa Cruz Mountains, even a small percentage of second crop won't turn to what could be a nice, richly balanced wine. The second crop has a certain amount of bitterness and astringency because it is at least three or four weeks behind in ripeness. If you throw even one percent of it into the batch, it will make the wine a lot tarter.

**Do your growers ever complain about your high standards for the fruit?**

Basically, I work with growers who understand my winemaking

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