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Winery of the Month



Balancing the Urban-Agricultural Mix

Fenestra Winery



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October 2011

Livermore is located in Alameda County on the eastern edge of the San Francisco Bay Area and is an interesting mix of high tech, agriculture, and residential development. The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory is a federally funded research and development center devoted to national security with an approximate \$1.5 billion budget and 700 employees. The laboratory itself is located on a one square mile parcel and operates an additional 7000 acre test site nearby. But in 1883, long before anyone could have imagined such an enterprise, the German immigrant Carl Wente purchased 50 acres and planted wine grapes, creating an enduring agricultural legacy for the Livermore Valley. Wente Vineyards is the oldest, continuously operated family-owned winery in the U.S. and today farms 3,000 acres of vineyards. Concannon Winery is another large land owner in the Livermore Valley.

Apart from steering its own development, the Wente family was instrumental in preserving agricultural use in the area. A massive Bay Area population could have easily expanded into the Valley when large tracts like the 770 acres owned by the Catholic Church came up for sale in the early 1990s. Instead, this and other properties were sold to a joint venture, Signature Properties and Jack Nicklaus, for the

development of a large golf course and a subdivision of 20-acre vineyard parcels, known as Ruby Hill Estates. Each parcel was zoned for a two-acre home site and 18 acres of vineyards, which would be planted and maintained either by the owner or by Wente. Some owners started their own wineries. In 1993, there were just 2,100 acres devoted to viticulture and 11 wineries. Today, there are more than 5000 acres of vineyards and over 50 wineries. Apart from Wente and Concannon, the rest are small, boutique operations.

Lanny Replogle at Fenestra owns one of the oldest smaller wineries in the area and is devoted to Livermore Valley's long history of viticulture that began even before Wente and Concannon planted their first vines in 1883. His winery was built in 1889 by George True, for whom Lanny has named his largest production wine, True Red, a non-vintage blend. When he took possession in 1980, the main structure consisted of unreinforced brick that burrowed into the hillside to access cooler temperatures for wine storage. A tunnel to the outside gave workers access to the crush-pad. Before refrigeration, the configuration was common for wineries. A wooden second-story succumbed to fire in 1966. Built in the 1940s, a rusted wall of winemaking equipment with cranks, pulleys, and pipes bears witness to

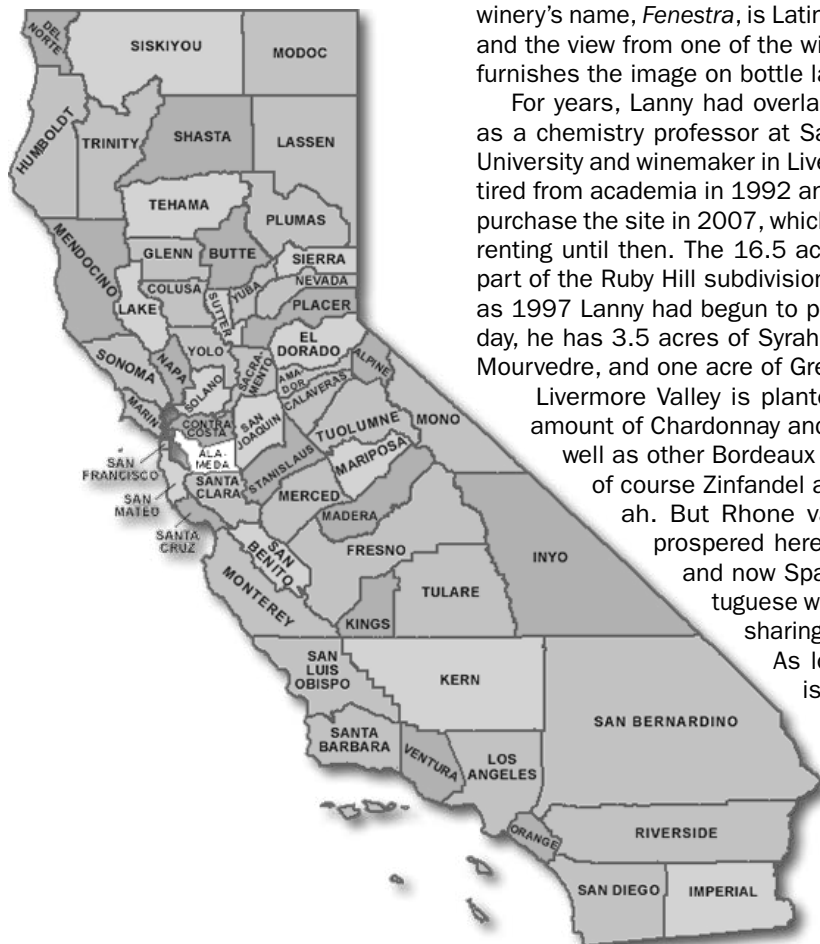
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WINERY OF THE MONTH



WINERY from cover

ALAMEDA COUNTY



another century's technology. "We put a lot of money and effort into cleaning up this historic building and strengthening it," he says. The winery's name, *Fenestra*, is Latin for "window," and the view from one of the winery windows furnishes the image on bottle labels.

For years, Lanny had overlapping careers as a chemistry professor at San Jose State University and winemaker in Livermore. He retired from academia in 1992 and was able to purchase the site in 2007, which he had been renting until then. The 16.5 acre parcel was part of the Ruby Hill subdivision, but as early as 1997 Lanny had begun to plant vines. Today, he has 3.5 acres of Syrah, 1.5 acres of Mourvedre, and one acre of Grenache.

Livermore Valley is planted with a fair amount of Chardonnay and Cabernet as well as other Bordeaux varieties, and of course Zinfandel and Petite Syrah. But Rhone varieties have prospered here for decades, and now Spanish and Portuguese wine grapes are sharing the spotlight.

As loyal as Lanny is to Livermore grapes, which will always provide his staple wines, he's not opposed to going further afield when he sees interesting opportunities.

His young winemaker, Brent Amos, points out that his peers are open to a variety of wines. "They have a short attention span, and every time they come to

the winery, they want to see something new and different. But we're always going to make the mainstays, Cabernet, Chardonnay, and Merlot."

Lanny is happy to provide new experiences for his visitors. Currently, he offers about 20 different wines, made in small quantities, which comprise from 7,500 to 8,000 cases annually. He offers local whites and rose` and the reds Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Mourvedre. During cool years, he says that careful growers can produce very good Pinot Noir. But since he made his first Port from grapes that were harvested from Silvaspoons Vineyards in Lodi, he's been making other Portuguese and Spanish wines from the same vineyard and from Livermore as well. Lanny is part of a growing band of enthusiasts, who are making these delicious new wines, in large part because their presence is increasing in California vineyards. Locally, Wente grows smaller lots of Iberian vines, which Lanny has been able to purchase.

Silva Spoons Vineyard is one of the main sources of Portuguese grapes in California. Ron Silva cultivates 300 acres in Lodi in the Alta Mesa appellation, most of which is devoted to Zinfandel and Petite Sirah. But since planting Portuguese winegrapes, he has come to be known as Lodi's "Portuguese Grape King." After visiting the birthplace of his grandfather in Pico and tasting the white Verdelho, he planted 12-acres of the variety, followed by Touriga Nacional, Touriga Francesa, Tinto Cao, and Torrontes, red grapes rarely seen here. "I've been tasting wines in the category," Brent Amos comments, "and winemakers are doing a good job with these grapes. Hopefully they'll continue to make good wines without increasing prices too much."

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