



PHOTOS BY JOE JOHNSTON jjohnston@thetribunenews.com

 ${\it Maria Stolo Bennetti of Stolo Family Vineyards along the Pacific Coast Wine Trail.}$

The trail offers coastal vineyards, history galore and characters you'll find nowhere else

Visitors can spend a day touring 11 wineries from Morro Bay to San Simeon

Most of the wines are from small lots, often poured by the winemakers themselves BY SALLY BUFFALO Special to The Tribune

isitors to San Luis Obispo County's North Coast are starting to discover something among the wildlife and waves: wine.

V Eleven wineries now dot Highway 1 from Morro Bay to San Simeon, featuring hand-crafted, mostly small-lot wines — often poured by the winemakers themselves.

The wineries have banded together to form the Pacific Coast Wine Trail. There's even a map and events to spread the word about the diverse range of varietals that tasters can find on the 24-mile route.



Black Hand Cellars in Cambria along the Pacific Coast Wine Trail.

Hearst Ranch Winery has a tasting room inside Sebastian's in San Simeon at the northernmost point along the Pacific Coast Wine Trail.

"Lots of people come stay on the coast then drive over to Paso to go wine tasting," said Maria Stolo Bennetti, general manager of Stolo Family Vineyards & Winery, which is tucked in the hills behind Cambria. "When we hand them that map, they are so excited to realize they can stay and have a full day of winetasting here."

Meet the wineries of the North Coast, starting from the top and heading south.

HEARST RANCH WINERY

Despite the name, most of the grapes for Hearst Ranch Winery's popular range come not from the coastal ranch but from the 90-acre east Paso Robles vineyard of Jim and Debi Saunders, who operate the winery in cooperation with Steven Hearst.

The only large producer on the trail, the winery has gone gangbusters after starting in 2009 — opening a second tasting room in Cholame; shipping internationally to China, Japan and Vietnam; offering wine club membership to employees of Hearst Corp.'s many cable networks, publications and TV stations; and drawing many of Hearst Castle's 75,000 annual visitors.

But stepping into the tasting room, inside Sebastian's Store in Old San Simeon Village, is like stepping back in time.

Open since 1852, Sebastian's is the longest continually operating store in the county, according to Jim Saunders.

Historical photos and artifacts hang from the walls, giving visitors a glimpse of the village's storied history.

Originally built out on the point in San Simeon to supply whalers, the store was moved by oxen to its current location, where visitors can peek out at the bay or take in the view of the Castle high on the hills behind the historic chapel out back.

CUTRUZZOLA VINEYARDS

About 4 miles south of Hearst Ranch Winery, at the turnoff to Cambria's West Village, sits the tasting room for Cutruzzola Vineyards. However, the vineyards



TASTING

sit back in a coastal valley — 7 acres of riesling and pinot noir planted on a steep hillside.

Recently, such coastal vineyards have been gaining renewed attention for producing the truest expression of coolerclimate grapes including pinot, riesling and chardonnay, as well as complex and nuanced syrahs.

Photographs of the vineyard decorate the walls of the airy, light-filled tasting room so you can behold the vines while tasting their fruit.

BLACK HAND CELLARS

Tom Banish owns a vineyard outside San Miguel. He has worked for Paso Robles stalwarts such as Hope Family Wines and Justin Vineyards & Winery, but chose Cambria to open a tasting room six years

All his syrahs come from the plot, on

SEE COAST, 28VI

26



Some of the wines from Moonstone Cellars in Cambria along the Pacific Coast Wine Trail.

FROM PAGE 26VI COAST

the west side of San Miguel near Camp Roberts, where the hot summer sun ripens the fruit to produce the big, full wines Black Hand is renowned for.

Stop in the speakeasy-style tasting room and hear Banish's tales of Chicago's Black Hand mafia, which searched out his great-grandfather's wine. Thankfully, the black hand on the label is the decidedly more family-friendly handprint of the Banishes' daughter, who was born the year of his vineyard's first harvest.

MOONSTONE CELLARS

Across the street from Black Hand, Moonstone Cellars' Todd Clift doles out entertainment and wine in equal measure, holding court among regulars and tourists alike.

His label traces its roots back almost 20 years to a garage overlooking Moonstone Beach, where Clift began making wine as a hobby with his dad.

Moonstone became the first winery tasting room in Cambria when it opened on April Fools' Day in 2007 — appropriate for another fool in the wine business, Clift said.

With its friendly vibe and full range of wines from light whites to bold reds, Moonstone offers something for everyone. But don't miss the gewürztraminer — one of the few examples of the varietal in the area — or Clift's fun tasting notes.

TWIN COYOTES WINERY

Cross into the East Village and you'll find the cute yellow bungalow that houses Twin Coyotes.

Twin brothers Steve and Stu Thompson grow grapes at their sustainably farmed Paso Robles vineyard, and sometimes

howl at the moon. But they leave actual winemaking to Signe Zoller, who has made wine around the state and in Australia.

Sip some vermentino or another of their diverse offerings, and take comfort knowing the vines are farmed with natural processes to protect the land and its workers for generations.

STOLO FAMILY VINEYARDS & WINERY

The Stolo vineyard, first planted in 1998 and since expanded, is one of the closest to the water's edge in the entire state — just 3 miles up a scenic, windy road.

The marine-influenced climate — with cool foggy mornings and sunny afternoons — produces the winery's expressive pinot noir, syrah, sauvignon blanc,

SEE COAST, 30VI



PHOTOS BY JOE JOHNSTON jjohnston@thetribunenews.com

Harmony Cellars is on the Pacific Coast Wine Trail.

FROM PAGE 28VI COAST

chardonnay and dry gewürztraminer — helped along by winemaker Nicole Bertotti Pope, a Talley Vineyards alumnus who met Stolo playing beach volleyball.

The pastoral Stolo property, with a farmhouse and dairy dating to the 1880s, also boasts a history as colorful as the spring wildflowers in bloom.

Local lore holds that the owner during Prohibition, a Swiss-Italian immigrant, secretly made wine from grapes bought from the York and Presenti families in Templeton. He also pressed the skins to make a fiery grappa that he sold in local saloons including Camozzi's, which still operates on Cambria's Main Street and is now known as Mozzi's Saloon.

HARMONY CELLARS

About 5 miles south, Kim and Chuck Mulligan have been making wine at Harmony Cellars since 1989, when they became the 17th winery established in Paso Robles's nascent AVA. But winemaking in the tiny hamlet goes back much farther, to the 1800s.

Kim's great-grandfather helped found the town's creamery, where he made wine in the basement. The winery, on land that's been in Kim's family through four generations, stands just up the hill from the creamery that its new owners are working to revive.

Check out the live music Friday nights



Chuck and Kim Mulligan of Harmony Cellars.

during the summer, or bring a glass of wine to the grassy area out back and take in the sweeping views of rolling hills, the town and grazing cows — who get in on

SEE COAST, 32VI



PHOTOS BY JOE JOHNSTON jjohnston@thetribunenews.com

Cauycos Cellars is located on Ocean Boulevard in "downtown" Cayucos.

FROM PAGE 30VI COAST

the grapes as well. The Mulligans feed them pomace — the skin, seeds and pulp that remain after the juice is pressed out. They particularly enjoy the reds, Chuck Mulligan said, and so will you.

CAYUCOS CELLARS

Down the road in Cayucos, town native and winemaker Stuart Selkirk employs natural winemaking methods, with only wild yeast and minimal intervention, then ages his wines for three to six years in the barrel. It's a technique his daughter Paige described as "part patience, part procrastination."

Winemaking is a family affair for the Selkirks, one of whom pours current releases in the bright blue, modern tasting room a block from the beach in the classic surf town.

The actual winery — located in an old dairy barn in the hills above town — smells much better now, one of the family members may tell you. But it's still a working ranch, so they sited the tasting room in town to "prevent anyone from being flattened by a tractor."

CUATRO DIAS WINES

Greg Allen works three straight 24-hour shifts as a firefighter and paramedic in southern California. On his four days off, he makes wine. Hence the name, meaning "Four Days" in Spanish.

Allen said he even saves up vacation days to use around harvest time, when he sources grapes from Paso Robles down to Santa Barbara County to make red blends, Rhone varietals or whatever quality fruit he can get his hands on that year.

Visitors have to be as dogged about

finding Allen's wines as he is about making them. The tasting room is tucked inside the Highway 41 Antique Emporium about a block off Route 1, with little signage to point the way.

CHATEAU MARGENE

On the Embarcadero in Morro Bay, Michael and Margene Mooney offer three luxury labels, as well as artisan flavored olive oils and vinegars.

The namesake, Chateau Margene, features high-end cabernet sauvignon and cab-based blends from Paso Robles. Mooney Family Wines focuses on pinot noirs and chardonnays from the Santa Lucia Highlands in Monterey County. The El Pistolero line — chardonnay, pinot noir, cabernet sauvignon and meritage — pays homage to a family history that goes back five generations to a Mexican land grant in 1842.

If the stop leaves you wanting more,





Chateau Margene is on the Embarcadero in Morro Bay.

head out to Creston where you'll find the family's 5.5-acre estate vineyard, barrel room and second tasting room.

MCV WINES

Just behind Chateau Margene, Matt Villard set up shop for his label, MCV Wines, which was recently moved from Paso Robles.

Starting with a batch of petite sirah six years ago, Villard has expanded to produce viognier, rose, syrah, grenache and a couple of blends, including the inky but smooth Black, which adds some tannat and petit verdot to a base of petite sirah.

Sitting on the brick patio overlooking

the bay with a glass of Villard's flagship 1105 is a treat whether you're starting or finishing a day along the North Coast wine trail.

As Hearst's Saunders said, "Where else can you sit on a bench while wine tasting and watch whales breach and dolphins swim?"

