

## Someone's In The Cellar

## Acres of Delicious Syrahs

By **RICHARD** and **AMANDA PAYATT**  
Special to CASA

**A**NOTHER ONE OF OUR FAVORITE PLACES ON THE SANTA BARBARA URBAN WINE TRAIL IS JAFFURS WINE CELLARS. This is not without good reason. Jaffurs turns out Syrah, Petit Syrah, and Grenache wines that are tough to beat. We are not alone in this opinion. *The Wine Spectator* has given Jaffurs' 2006 and 2007 Syrahs scores from 92 to 94. 94 Points from *Wine Spectator*? You bet! And the wines are worth it.

Craig Jaffurs is an eloquent, tall, distinguished looking man. His clothes are casual, but you get the feeling that he would pretty comfortable in a suit. Craig's background is in aerospace management and he used to wear suits pretty regularly. His background is one that we think has given him his unusually meticulous approach to winemaking. Craig himself will admit that it also made him more serious about the business side of owning a winery, but that is only one aspect of the qualities that make his background important. There is something



to be said for a winemaker with a serious analytical background. It can certainly help out when you need to be able to determine where the chemistry went right so that you can duplicate the results. That is where Craig had a real advantage when going from a wine hobbyist to a professional winemaker and owner after a mere five years of study.

He helped harvest the grapes at Santa Barbara Winery in 1988. He wasn't really hooked, but he had an enjoyable time. As the years passed, he was spending more and more time making wines in his garage. He made his first professional vintage of about 3,000 cases, in 1994. He still had a day job, and no employees to help him do the work. He used to move the barrel racks on his own, because there wasn't anybody around to help him.

He bought a building just off Milpas, and opened the winery in 2000. By then, he was being reviewed by the likes of Robert Parker. He was garnering expressions like, "opulent," and, "multilayered," earning marks in the low 90s. Amazingly, he had moved from the new kid on the block to a noted winemaker in a mere

six years. Jaffurs credits the market itself for much of his success. He estimates that he came in at the right time with the right wine. Central Coast Syrah was just starting to catch on. With Andrew Murray Vineyards and Stolpman Vineyards turning out great Central Coast Syrahs, alongside of his own, suddenly the world had reason to notice these local grapes.

Since 2000, Jaffurs has been in a mild state of grateful denial over his good fortune. The reviews are great, but where does that connect with what he is making in the cellar? For him, the reviews don't connect. Like a good artist, he doesn't really read his reviews. (That will probably include this one.) He will look at the numbers that the reviewers give him, but that is about as far as it goes. He will rejoice for 24 hours if the numbers are good, and mourn for the same amount of time if they are bad. And then he moves on. "You gotta make what you gotta make," he says in an unexpected turn of colloquial speech. He makes wines that he himself wants to drink. Happily, the public likes them, too.

Jaffurs makes lighter, minerally white wines, when he makes white wines. The reds are deep, fruit forward, jammy reds. The Syrahs are filled with berries, spices, and occasional hints of pepper. The Grenaches are at once spicy and floral. (We recommend the Whole Cluster Grenache, if it is available.) Jaffurs focuses on bringing in grapes from different vineyards, and then handling them separately. As such, each Syrah is different from the next, and it would be difficult to discuss them all without getting hopelessly beyond the scope of this article. So, just trust us. Just when you find yourself doubting that this part of town could really be home to a



Craig Jaffurs

first class winery... there, just off of Milpas, is a roll-up steel door with a treasure trove for the taste buds inside. You have to search the winery out, but then, that is the way that Craig likes it. He wants to make wines for people that are willing to go that extra mile into uncharted suburban territory. This trip is definitely worth it.

Jaffurs Winery is located at 819 E. Montecito St (off Milpas Street) and can be reached at 962-7003. They are open for tasting from 11 to 5pm Fridays through Sunday for most of the year, and 11 to 5pm daily during summer months.



**Amanda and Richard Payatt** combine their considerable writing skills with their incredible knowledge and experience of fine dining to bring you this column.