

Someone's in the Wine Cellar

Carina Cellars

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

"OUR PHILOSOPHY IS THAT WINE IS MADE IN THE VINEYARD." So says Ryan Saccomano, one of the winemaking team at Carina Cellars. At Carina, they try to treat all of the picked grapes in the same manner, with the aim of bringing the vineyard into the bottle. That is one of the things that makes this winery so interesting.

At Carina, controlling the conditions under which the grapes grow is the key. The tricky, rocky slopes, light watering, and a lot of pruning shape the product as it is readied for the harvest. Then, they try to use the same kinds of barrels, the same yeast, and the same techniques across the range of grapes



Carina Vineyards

that they grow. They want to let the vineyard express itself, not manipulate the wine into some preconceived product.

Ryan grew up in Utah, then moved to Calaveras County in High School, later moving to San Francisco to attend the California Culinary Academy. Wizardry in the kitchen was his passion until he discovered wine on one of the Academy's wine tasting trips. He realized that winemaking was a lot like cooking; it requires a lot of artistry to make subtle changes in the flavors. But, in wine, you get one shot per year to get it right. That requires a lot of planning, a lot of work in the fields, and a lot of patience. He was hooked.

For his first job in the industry, Ryan worked at Carina's tasting room. He needed to be sure that this was the right path for himself. Then he went up to Newton Vineyards and Dutched Crossing Vineyards in Napa. And when Carina needed a winemaker to work their new Paso Robles vineyard, to whom did they turn? To Ryan, of course.

At Carina, owner David Hardee, and

winemakers Joey Tensley, and Ryan are all passionate about Rhone varietals. This comes out in the way that the grapes are handled, and the way that the wines taste. Their "Clairvoyant" is a blend of syrah, grenache, and mourvedre, is a perfect example of the type. It is warm, round and full of sweet blueberries. The 2005 and 2006 vineyard designation syrahs are a mouthful of flavor; rich, earthy, again filled with berries, and hints of honey. Their "7%", which is another delight, is a syrah topped off with 7% viognier. It is easy to sip, with a sparkle in the finish, and is quite reminiscent of the Côte Rôtie wines.

You will likely find winemaker Ryan himself pouring if you visit the tasting room up Adelaida Road in Paso Robles, next to the Mount Olive Organic Farm. Tasting takes place in the winery building itself, a comfortable space carved out of one corner of the work area. They have made it very welcoming, with seating snuggled up against the barrels, what our son called "the butter zone of comfort". The tasting counter is made of gorgeous large slabs of a walnut tree from the property. Of course, the antics of several friendly kittens helped add to our enjoyment of the place. It is the kind of unprepossessing space that makes visiting Central Coast wineries feel much more focused on wine making, as opposed to the show biz tasting rooms in Napa, which feel focused on wine selling.

For his part, Ryan enjoys having the tasting room in the winery building because he gets to see how people react to his work. Drop by the tasting rooms in Los Olivos or Paso Robles to try their wines. But go to Paso Robles to



Ryan Saccomano

meet Ryan, and to learn about his approach to making wine. One can always meet a winemaker at a wine festival. One cannot always meet a winemaker in his element. It is definitely worth the drive.

Carina Cellars, 2900 Grand Ave # A, Los Olivos, CA 93441, (805) 688-2459. Open Daily 11 - 5pm.

Carina Cellars, 3525 Adelaida Road, Paso Robles, CA 93446, 415-309-2046. Open Fri-Sun 11 - 5pm.



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