

## Someone's in the Wine Cellar

# Sharing the Family Dream

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

**WE ALL HAVE DREAMS OF WHAT WE MIGHT DO IF WE ONLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE RESOURCES.**

For some, it is going surfing for the rest of their life. For others, a penthouse in Manhattan littered with theater ticket stubs. For the Conway family, their dream was to move to a quiet ranch somewhere, and make wine.

Christopher Conway founded Mentor Corporation, a business well known in these parts. Fortunately, he did pretty well with that little venture. But, what do you do next? When it is time to retire, you want to do something with your kids; in his case, with all five kids. But, we all know that kids want to go do their own thing. So how do you find something that will keep everyone together? The Conways seem to have figured it out beautifully. Wine was the ultimate retirement project. It also brought his family's diverse skills together into a family business that they could share.

Dad, the skilled commander of business, took a back seat at the outset of the 2007 project. It was, after all, supposed to be his post-career years. Gareth, the eldest, gave up his own coffee company in San Diego to take up the reins as president. Gareth is a major foodie, who reveled in doing his own coffee blending. When he is not running the business side of things, he is in the cellar, helping out with the blending. Tom studied music and anthropology, and has put his talents to work

as Vice President of Development. Gillian, the baby, and an Emerson grad, has a degree in writing and publicity. Her card says VP of Communications, but her heart seems to be in the everyday marketing of the wine. This job sees her on the road most of the time and she demonstrates a certain joy in getting around and meeting people. The last two siblings, John and Sally, are in rock and roll, and acting respectively. Sally also helps with the artistic designs on the labels while John tours as keyboardist for The Bravery. But, when it comes time for crush and blending, everyone heads for ground zero. At blending time, the whole family moves to the cellar to test out the myriad of potential blends that vintners Andrew Adams and Jonathan Médard have prepared with Gareth's oversight.

The wines that the family produces are delightful. The "Deep Sea" label focuses on maritime appellations and the lovely cooler grapes these coastal vineyards produce. The 2008 chardonnay is a treat. It is neither the heavy oaky Napa style chardonnay, nor the Central Coast pineapple fruit bomb chardonnay. It is a delicate pleasant chardonnay that begins with a lavender-like scent, brought on by 5% of the viognier grape. Thereafter, one is greeted with pear and vanilla notes, with a touch of oak on the mid-palate, and then a hint of heather on the finish. It stays with you consistently across the palate.

Another entry into the Deep Sea label is the 2008 viognier. This has the scent of pears and straw on the nose. Next comes a butter taste with warm pear and a hint of tangerine

over the tongue. A tart finish rolls back over the palate as you swallow that last drop. This is a wine to serve cool, but not cold, as the flavors blossom as the wine comes closer to room temperature.

A second label, "Rancho Arroyo Grande" showcases their estate wines. The ranch is 3,400 acres of hillsides, woodlands, pastures, and vineyards bordering the Los Padres National Forest. These reds are Rhone style, rich and deep in flavor. Because it is a young winery, the reds were designed to be enjoyed now. We tasted the 2008 Deep Sea red wine. It has a classic Rhone nose of dusky fruits and hints of cured meats. On the palate, it is a nice cool climate syrah flavor, full of rich minerals, plums, and dried oranges. This was a very tightly built wine, and should be fully aerated before drinking.

As this is a new winery, rather off the beaten track, they do not have a tasting room. We are hoping that they might open one here in town. For now, if you want a taste, you might find them in some restaurants in Santa Barbara. The Montecito Café, Jane, and Blue Agave are currently pouring wines from Conway. Gillian is working on finding the right local distributor for retail sales of the wine. If you would like to buy a few bottles, the wine is easily available on



The Conway Family

the web at [Conwayfamilywines.com](http://Conwayfamilywines.com). There, the early members of the Friends of the Family Club can sign up to receive any quantity or selection of wines at a 30% wine club style discount. And they even deliver the wines via next day shipping.

As for retirement, Christopher seems to be failing at his original objective of just sitting back and enjoying the passing seasons. With each month, he is becoming increasingly involved in the day to day running of the winery, and enjoying it commensurately. But for us, it is a pleasure to see somebody achieve their dreams. It is also nice that they will share their dreams in a bottle with the rest of us.

**Conway Family Wines** is located at 591 Hi Mountain Rd, Arroyo Grande, CA. Contact them at (805)489-2855.



**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.