

Santa Barbara Historical Museum

The History of Winemaking in Santa Barbara County

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

THE SANTA BARBARA HISTORICAL MUSEUM has begun an exciting new lecture series: *The History of Winemaking*. The first lecture, on Thursday, April 14th, was on the subject of the history of winemaking in Santa Barbara County. At the podium was Wes Hagen of Clos Pepe Vineyards in the Santa Rita hills. In one evening, he covered 12 million years of natural history, 10,000 years of wine, and 212 years of local winemaking. He did this not only brilliantly, but also with a solid dose of wit and humor.

Wes began with the origins of grapes and grape growing in the Middle East, and

then went on to the geological foundations of the California coastline some 12 million years ago. He roamed over the biology of the grapevine, and then jumped to the historical record of winemaking. Locally, the Chumash didn't make wine. This is probably because the varietals grown in the region prior to the Mission era were small and bitter. But, in 1799, the Santa Barbara Mission began growing grapes from European varieties. From there, the Santa Barbara coast, and California generally, grew into one of the largest producers

of wine in the world, particularly during the French phylloxera blight of the mid-19th century. Wine output grew and grew

until the era of Prohibition. Wine grapes continued to be grown, but they had to be sold as fruit; though much of it was turned into wine anyway, in basements all over the country. After Prohibition, UC Davis and Fresno State started wine growing courses, and the industry modernized in California. By the 1950s, Napa wine was taking off. By the 1970s, Santa Barbara wine was taking off with Pierre Lafond out in front. In 1972, Marshall Ream bought the Zaca Mesa property and started turning out not just great wine, but also some of the best winemakers in California. Over the years, Ream's staff has included such greats as Byron Ken Brown, Jim Clendenen, Bob Lindquist, Dan Gehrs, Lane Tanner, Benjamin Silver, and, of course, Wes Hagen. The rest, as they say, is history.

After the lecture, the audience adjourned to the museum's courtyard. There, we were greeted with a gorgeous display of C'est Cheese cheeses, tasty appetizers, a full bar, and five tasting stations for absolutely lovely

local wines. Hagen delighted the crowd with his Clos Pepe Pinot Noirs. Other wineries offering tastings were Jaffurs, Ampelos, Imagine Winery, and Carina Cellars. The wine tasting turned into a party, as so often happens at the Santa Barbara Historical Museum. After all, when you have a place as lovely as the museum's courtyard, wouldn't you want to stall all night long?

The next event in this series of wine lectures is scheduled for October, 2011. Call the museum for details.

The Museum is located at 136 East De La Guerra. Reach them at (805) 966-1601



Eleanor Van Cott, President, Board of Trustees and **Wes Hagen**, Clos Pepe Vineyards in the Santa Rita Hills



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