

Someone's In The Wine Cellar

Carr Winery: When A Growler Is A Good Thing

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

YOU WILL RECOGNIZE THE PLACE

from the distinctive roofline of the double quonset hut and the lovely syrah and grenache grape vines climbing their way up the edges. When you walk in to the tasting room for Carr Vineyards, you know that you are in a place that is a little different from most of the wineries in Santa Barbara. Many of the local wineries on the Urban Wine Trail crush their grapes and store their barrels on site. But, Carr makes the equipment and the process of making the wine an integral part of the tasting room. All of the equipment is right there in front of you. The barrels line the walls.

Champagne bottles are stacked up neatly, awaiting the riddling process. But best of all, especially for us, is that the wonderful smell of yeast and sugar fills the air and stays with you throughout your visit.

The overall atmosphere is very clubby. A low ceiling at the door eventually gives way to the working area of the winery. As such, many of the tables feel like they are a part of a secret clubhouse. But then the tables spread out to where the ceiling zooms up to 25 feet, and you are in a comfortable

warehouse - if such a thing as a comfortable warehouse can be said to exist. It is a place that is great for hanging out. The tasting bar is beautiful, made by Ryan Carr, proprietor,

and his team out of 12 puncheon barrels. The space is filled with interesting objects like racks from the old San Ysidro Ranch, and a stone carving of a monkey left behind by the previous tenant. A backgammon table and a shuffleboard table are at the ready. Most afternoons, there will be a friendly dog, named Roxie wandering about. Sometimes there is live music. It is a place that you could easily picture taking a date for an evening of tasting wine.

Fortunately, Carr is open

until 8pm on Thursday through Saturday. And they are set up to sell their wine by the glass.

Adding to the clubby atmosphere is a rack of boxes that sits beside the door. Carr sells something called Growlers. These are reusable one-liter bottles for wine. These ready to drink bottles can be purchased at the winery for \$25, wine included. Once enjoyed, bring them back in and they can be refilled with Carr's Growler selection of wines for a mere \$15 per refill. Currently

on tap is Pinot Grigio and Quonset Hut Red. By spring, perhaps, a Pinot Noir will be added. This harkens back to the way that one buys wine in the villages of France, Portugal, Spain, and Italy. The wines are ready to drink, and at a liter of wine, instead of 750 milliliters, this is a bargain, especially considering how tasty the wine is!

Ryan Carr got into the wine business in an interestingly backwards way. He wanted to become a graphic designer and perhaps grow citrus trees so he could be close enough to the ocean to surf. While he was off at college in Arizona, his father moved to Santa Barbara and fell in love with the wine. He started sending Ryan bottles of local wine and at some point purchased some land in Ballard Canyon to start his own vineyard. Ryan couldn't resist when his father asked him to come out and help. It wasn't citrus, but it was near the ocean. The property didn't pan out as hoped, but after two seasons of growing Petit Syrah, Ryan was hooked.

He went to work in other vineyards, helping out the vineyard managers. In 1999, he had the opportunity to pick a fence line of grapes for himself. He picked them by hand and made what he refers to as a trash can garage Cabernet Sauvignon. The next year, another vineyard offered him a ton and a half of three varieties of grapes, and the use of proper equipment to make wine, in exchange for working as a vineyard manager. And so the Carr label was born. The next thing Ryan knew, he was risking his own money to buy grapes and make his own wine at Central Coast Wine Services. There he watched a lot of other small winemakers at work. He watched them succeed. He watched them make mistakes. Mostly, he learned what he liked. And he

learned that the most important thing to do with a well-grown grape is not to screw it up. Good wine, after all, begins in the vineyard.

Now he manages something like 14 vineyards, getting his pick of the best grapes for his own label. He also makes wine for a number of clients. His winery operation has grown to 5,000 cases per year since then. He also employs a staff of distributors for the Carr wines and his client labels. From vineyard operations to distribution, this guy does it all.

The wine Ryan creates is velvety, warm, and round, with a taste that is clear and long lasting. He is best known for his Pinot Noirs, but his Cabernet Franc and his Syrah remain his best sellers. The surprise of the tasting was the Quonset Hut Red wine, which is sold in the Growlers. It was very well structured, with a terrifically spicy nose and up front taste. Filled with berries, pomegranate, and honey near the end, it was quite a surprise for a wine that was only \$15 per liter. Think of it as the ultimate picnic wine, or the perfect table wine. You can drop by the winery for a full glass of this for a mere five dollars. But take a friend, and order two glasses. And keep your eyes open for the monkey.

Carr Winery is located at 414 North Salspuedes St and is open 11 to 5pm Sun - Wed and 11 to 8pm Thurs to Sat. Reach them at 965-7985.



Ryan Carr



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