

Someone's in the Wine Cellar

Old School Oreana

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

URBAN WINE TRAIL? WHAT IS THAT? Let us not forget that Santa Barbara is blessed with a collection of ten wineries that are pouring great wine in our own downtown. The Urban Wine Trail began for us at the Funk Zone end of Anacapa Street, with Oreana Winery as one of the wineries that established the shape of what was to come. Winemaker Christian Garvin is the man at the helm (or barrel) at Oreana.

The tasting room, aptly named Tasting Room 205, is located at 205 Anacapa Street. Formerly a tire shop, it has been converted into an open, airy tasting room that frequently serves more than just Oreana's wines. It has lost none of its Funk Zone charm.

But what about the winemaker himself? Christian likes to do things a little differently. In many ways he is the perfect picture of Old School Napa winemaking. This is a thought that might not rest too well with him. That Old School was, to be honest, about doing things a little differently. It was about being a maverick, and that is what Christian is.

He is a tall, elegant, laid-back kind of guy. His office is a collection of old bellhop bells, Springsteen and Sinatra memorabilia, and metal racks filled with empty bottles of

great wine. He does a lot of the heavy lifting around the winery and has his hands on every aspect of what goes on in the winery. Though Oreana doesn't have its own fields, Christian knows well what he wants and so chooses grapes with care. While they are developing on the vine, he goes to the fields to inspect the fruit as often as he can, paying attention to how it is forming up, and what qualities it is going to have when it matures. Many fine winemakers follow this practice. But, what happens after that is where he does things differently.

Christian doesn't like the word: 'I'. As he puts it, "So often with winemakers it is about the 'I'. About what 'I' want. Not about what the customer wants." Christian's approach is about making a wine that the will be enjoyed by the people who will be drinking it, not to tell people what they ought to be drinking, and why. He is a craftsman, not an auteur. And, to make something stand apart, as he puts it: "Don't screw up what Nature gave us." He is careful with the oak barrels. He might use one new barrel out of eight for a particular varietal. This will give some of the great characteristics of new oak without over-oaking the wine. It also lets the grape shine through.

Which locally grown grapes does he like to let shine through? Temperanillo, dolcetto, pinot grigio, verdhelo, and malbec

are his favorites this year. These are lesser-known grapes, to be sure, but full of character and flavor. They are also the bedrock of many of the great Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish wines. Yes, Christian does make wonderful wines with local syrah and pinot noir grapes, too. But we think that his finest work comes with the unusual grapes. He seems to have the touch to bring out fruit flavors that pack a punch. Here again, he says, "It is not about what 'I' want, it is about 'The Grape.'" He doesn't tinker with the grape too much, once the basic work has been done. The results are delightful.

There is one other thing that Christian does that is different and very, very fun: The parties. Lots of wineries have big events. Oreana's events are celebrations that are fun and funky. Christian gives a lot of local bands a place to play, which is getting rare in Santa Barbara these days. Oreana also has movie nights in the summer. Did you ever want to watch *Godzilla vs. Mothra* in a winery? Or perhaps *Jaws*? Christian does. Terribly different. This is the kind of Old School we like! Check out their website for the schedule. Coming on the 3rd of October will be Oreana's 'Beaver Moon Party.' Anybody can have a harvest party. This will bring about a thousand people to Anacapa Street to listen to local favorites like Spencer The Gardner and One Two Tree. All of this, combined with some new wine releases and some barrel sampling promise a most festive



Christian Garvin

evening. Buttonhole Christian at the party if you can. Ask him about his favorite French wines. It will be a fascinating conversation.

Oreana Winery is located at 205 Anacapa St and is open daily from 11am-5pm. For more information call (805) 962-5857.



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.