



- Home
- News
- Opinion
- Classifieds
- Arts & Events
- Film
- Community
- Food & Wine
- Outside
- Special Issues
- Archives
- About us
- Advertising Info

Cuisine

This Week Review | Kathy's Pic

Ahoy, matey!

Sextant sails into San Luis Obispo

BY KATHY MARCKS HARDESTY

Date: 10/10/2007

The people behind the newest wine tasting room in SLO are hoping to lure wine lovers away from downtown, but it's smooth sailing along South Higuera to dock at Sextant. Not familiar with a sextant? It's an Old World astronomical instrument that determines latitude and longitude at sea by measuring angular distances of the sun, moon, and stars. You can see a handsome brass version on display at Sextant's tasting room, but come first for the interesting array of wines they offer.

Sextant is owned by Craig and Nancy Stoller of Bakersfield-- aficionados of the sea (hence the name) and great wines. They named the tasting room for their flagship brand, which features Bordeaux blends and Zinfandels. But they offer much more for tasting and sales with two other brands they own: 10knots and Windemere, focused on Rhone and Burgundian varieties, respectively. Their large selection offers six red and white wines on the "main deck" menu and five red wines on the "upper deck" menu, which befits their tag line: navigate, explore, discover.



CHART A COURSE

Customers Karen Knowles (background) and Margaret Strand Schwarzott visited Sextant to buy wine on Oct. 8. The new tasting room in San Luis Obispo is named after the flagship brand of Crain and Nancy Stoller.

PHOTO BY STEVE E. MILLER

Epicureans who also love to cook, the Stollers traveled to Europe to better understand winegrowing and winemaking. They say the experience provided them a greater appreciation for Rhone varieties.

"I traveled all over Europe to understand winemaking, varietals, and the regions they're grown in. Wine is a living, breathing thing," Craig explained enthusiastically. "It's a celebration of life. When you're with friends or family, you celebrate with wine. If it's a special occasion, you get the nice wine out."

Anyone watching Craig and his sales manager, Ron Wannagat, serve a long line of eager tasters recently at the Morro Bay Harvest Festival could tell that the wines were crowd pleasers.

"This is the best of show. My partner and I pick one at every wine tasting," one oenophile gushed about the Sextant 2006 Zinfandel with the proprietary name Nightwatch. The tasting room list boasts Nightwatch as a favorite of wine critic Robert Parker. You can still get it while it lasts at Sextant tasting room, which isn't far from downtown on the road to Trader Joe's and Food 4 Less. There's plenty of parking, making it a convenient stop.

The nautically themed tasting room in a strip mall looks nondescript from the road, save the curious ship's helm at the entry. But step inside and a surprise awaits you. Unlike the polished appointments on an aging cruise ship, this new tasting room is akin to the captain's stateroom on the revamped Queen Mary. Just inside the door you'll find a cozy living room setting with couch and chairs around a table holding the latest issues of glossy wine magazines. The shelves are filled with buyables like Riedel crystal wineglasses special-made to enhance the flavors of Zinfandel, and logo-wear. Of course, the focus is on their large line-up of wines running along the back bar, which includes Chardonnay and white and red Rhone blends labeled 10knots. Although proud of their new wines, the Stollers are particularly pleased to offer their new, cool-climate Chardonnay and

Advertisements

Quaglino
PROPERTIES
LLC

LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT RESIDENTIAL APARTMENT

PCPA
THEATERFEST

Discover

Season 2007-08

Your Email

Signup



Pinot Noirs labeled Windemere, a brand they recently acquired.

The husband and wife partners who own these three brands were both born and raised in Bakersfield, but their roots run deep in San Luis Obispo soils. Craig said that his second home was Port San Luis while growing up, where he developed a passion for fishing and sailing on open waters. He usually accompanied his father, Glen, to Avila Beach on weekends when they fished for salmon. At home in Kern County, his father owned and operated Sunridge Nurseries, which Craig joined in 1992 after graduating from Cal Poly. Following in Glen's footsteps, the Stollers generously support their alma mater.

Sunridge Nurseries, which acquired Caldwell Nurseries Inc. of Napa, is the exclusive American nursery to plant and maintain vineyards for the ENTAVE-INRA clones brought directly from France. This ensures quality-focused wineries the opportunity to obtain unique clones that can be traced back to the mother plant. It's the source for many vines planted in most American vineyards.

But don't count the Stollers among the many Central Valley residents who make SLO County their weekend home. Although they still live in Kern County, they also own a home in Avila Beach where they're spending a lot more time lately--especially with winegrape harvest season in full swing and the recent opening of their new tasting room. Nancy, formerly a teacher, assists in the development of their brands and coordinates special events. The Stollers have three young daughters whom they hope will take interest in the family tradition of growing and making wine.

The purchase of Windemere brought a wealth of Edna Valley history to this new wine company. Stoller chuckled over the admission: "My grandmother's name was Edna." Local wine aficionados will remember that Windemere was founded by Cathy MacGregor, the first woman winemaker in SLO's South County wine regions. When the Stollers purchased Windemere, the sale included the 25-acre MacGregor Vineyard at the corner of Hwy. 227 and Price Canyon roads. Cathy, the daughter of Edna Valley pioneer Andy MacGregor (who passed away last year), inherited the vineyard that was the third commercial vineyard planted in Edna Valley in 1974. A year later, Andy purchased a larger estate on Orcutt Road where he planted 75 acres of Chardonnay, which is now owned by Jean-Pierre and Elke Wolff of Wolff Vineyards. Last February, Cathy decided to retire from the winemaking and sold her brand and vineyard to the Stollers.

"Cathy worked for three years at getting applications for a conditional use permit," Craig explained of MacGregor's endeavors to obtain permits for an on-site winery and tasting room.

He expects to begin construction of a winery/tasting room by summer of next year, which he estimates will take two years to complete. They originally leased the South Higuera building for offices and storage, but the storefront provided a prime location with plenty of parking for the interim tasting room.

The winemaker for all three brands now is Kevin Riley, also a Cal Poly alumnus, who worked at Opolo in Paso Robles. He's now making the Stollers' wines at a custom crush facility in Templeton. I was impressed with the wines he's created for them so far. The three Sextant Zinfandels are as individual as their three brands and fairly priced at \$20, \$28, and \$49. Although the critic's favorite (and the most expensive Zinfandel) isn't available for tasting, there's plenty you can try here in your own search.

INFOBOX: Get direction

Sextant is located at 3536 S. Higuera St., Ste. 250, in San Luis Obispo. For more information, call 542-0133.

Contact New Times' Cuisine columnist at khardesty@newtimeslo.com.

[E-mail this Article to a Friend!](#) | [Submit your Story Idea](#) | [View Archives](#)