

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS



Pierre Lafond and Santa Barbara Winery celebrate a half century of success.

PIERRE LAFOND says it was just a pragmatic decision and nothing romantic when he opened the first commercial winery in Santa Barbara County since Prohibition. It was 1962 when Lafond's Santa Barbara Winery opened, despite the fact that the dream of retiring to wine country, planting a vineyard, and living out the years making wine simply didn't exist—nor did wine country, for that matter, at least in Santa Barbara County.

BY ANTHONY HEAD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS

PROP STYLING BY KRISTEN CRAMER



OPPOSITE PAGE: Cheers: Patriarch of the Lafond family Pierre Lafond (right) and winemaker Bruce McGuire have been making Santa Barbara County wine together for more than 30 years.

THIS PAGE: To celebrate the 50th birthday of Santa Barbara Winery, the extended Lafond family sits down to a feast on the back patio of Pierre Lafond Wine Bistro in Montecito. Along with a terrific meal prepared by chef Jake Reimer, the tabletop décor was hand-selected from Upstairs at Pierre Lafond, yet another Lafond family business.



Elements of success (clockwise from top left): Chef Jake Reimer and Don Hull, Pierre Lafond Wine Bistro's manager and sommelier, have the enviable task of selecting wines to pair with the evening's dishes; after the first 50 years of practice, Santa Barbara Winery produces some of the best pinot noir in Santa Barbara County; Michelle Lafond, marketing director for the wine business, helps light up the night for the party.

“I remember when we started, there were home growers with two or three acres who could make great wine. I was amazed that great wine could be made, but no one was making it [commercially],” says Lafond. “I was thinking mostly like an entrepreneur. I mean, I liked wine. My family drank wine. There was a wine culture there. There was passion behind it as well. It was a combination of both, really. I was excited to have an opportunity to create something.”

Fifty years is a business milestone that most wineries in America, and a majority throughout California, aren't even close to; but Lafond and Santa Barbara Winery succeeded and thrived amid a transformative half century of the region's wine industry. Today Santa Barbara County is home to more than 100 wineries, more than 17,000 acres under vine, and four American Viticultural Areas (AVAs)—with more of everything coming in the future. Lafond moved the winery to its current location in what's now Santa Barbara's Funk Zone in 1964.

Lafond and his wife, Wendy Foster, have grown as entrepreneurs in Santa Barbara's wine country and the city itself, having opened the Montecito Market in 1964 and the Lafond Winery & Vineyard in 2000 while running two Wine Bistro restaurants in Santa Barbara and Montecito. Their empire also includes the Wendy Foster and Angel clothing stores and Upstairs at Pierre Lafond, a multifaceted boutique carrying everything from tableware and bedding to children's clothing and stationery.

But today it's time to take a day off and celebrate Santa Barbara Winery's silver anniversary. The family gathers on the pretty back patio of Pierre Lafond Wine Bistro in Montecito to toast past successes, dream of future endeavors, and enjoy a delicious meal prepared by Wine Bistro chef Jake Reimer.

When he thinks back about the winery's evolution, Lafond, who also owns and leases about 150 acres of vineyards in the Santa Ynez Valley, says the first three years of his wine business were slow. “When we opened the [first] winery, the other closest winery was in Paso Robles, and there may have been only three or four commercial wineries there at the time,” he says. >



Dinner is served:
See the full menu on page 75.



They trucked in grapes, mostly zinfandel, from San Luis Obispo. Toward the end of the decade, however, a wine boom began in the country; there was so much demand they couldn't get fruit, so they started growing grapes in 1972. "Actually, it's been very fortunate to pick a vineyard location that's become a very well-known location," says Lafond. "And we started producing really good wine when Bruce came."

Bruce McGuire became Santa Barbara Winery's winemaker in 1981, having previously worked in Clarksburg. "The first thing that I had planted here was pinot noir in 1982," says McGuire. "I was aware of the early launch from Sanford & Benedict; and they definitely created a lot of interest in Northern California, where I had been."

Pinot noir continues to be the winery's primary focus today, with close to 90 acres under vine (along with smaller lots of chardonnay and syrah). As far as growing protocols, McGuire says many of the current practices of vineyard management were virtually nonexistent when he began at the winery. "How we farm has changed quite a bit over the last 30 years. But we're always striving for the best fruit quality," he says.

"We grew with Bruce," says Lafond. "We kept up-to-date and got the latest equipment to keep him happy."

Because different equipment is needed for producing red and white wines, Lafond Winery makes all the reds at the vineyard location, while Santa Barbara Winery makes the white wines downtown; and all wines are bottled and distributed from the Funk Zone location.

"That's another thing that has changed—the area. At one time this location was very poor," says Lafond. "The landlords helped change the atmosphere, and along with natural growth, it's now very exciting to be here. We have seven or eight tasting rooms around us now, and I'm sure more to come."

While he was proactive at nearly every stage—especially the beginning—of Santa Barbara County's modern food and wine revolution, Lafond still insists that he was only making business decisions and hoping for the best. "It was serendipity," he says. "I couldn't have known that this would have happened." ♦

For recipes and tabletop resource information, visit 805living.com.

Food, wine, and fun (clockwise from top left): Pierre Lafond celebrates with granddaughter Sara Deinhard; the stylish accoutrements for the evening, like this metal lantern, were provided by Upstairs at Pierre Lafond; vineyard manager David Lafond and wife, Kim, are clearly happy with the quality of the wines; chef Jake Reimer prepared *escabèche* with local halibut—and that was just the appetizer.

Dessert is roasted orchard stone fruit with late-harvest riesling sabayon. It capped off a full menu of local, regional, and, above all, *spectacular* food and wine for the celebration.



MENU

ESCABÈCHE OF CHANNEL ISLAND HALIBUT WITH
GINGER AND CAVIAR LIME

*SANTA BARBARA WINERY 2009 RESERVE CHARDONNAY,
STA. RITA HILLS*

ROASTED CARPINTERIA RANCH DUCK BREAST
WITH ROYAL TRUMPET MUSHROOMS AND FRESH BERRIES

LATE-HARVEST CORN AND FOUR-BEAN SALAD WITH RADICCHIO

SAUTÉED RAINBOW CHARD WITH ROASTED BEETS

QUINTET OF HEIRLOOM TOMATOES WITH OJAI RADISH SPROUTS,
BURRATA CHEESE, AND BANYULS VINEGAR

*SANTA BARBARA WINERY 2010 PINOT NOIR,
STA. RITA HILLS*

ROASTED ORCHARD STONE FRUIT WITH
LATE HARVEST RIESLING SABAYON

*SANTA BARBARA WINERY 2008 LATE HARVEST RIESLING,
STA. RITA HILLS*

Meet the Or

THE LAFOND FAMILY CONTINUES TO OWN AND OPERATE SANTA BARBARA'S FIRST COMMERCIAL WINERY

by Meredith May / photos by Jeremy Ball

Just off of lower State Street in Santa Barbara, barely a few blocks from where the Pacific Ocean lures tourists and beach volleyball players, lies a burgeoning inner-core neighborhood known as the Funk Zone. Java stops, art galleries, surfboard shops and a proliferation of wine tasting rooms continue to reformulate the one-way streets, replacing the auto body shops, industrial offices and warehouses that once peppered these blocks.

But still standing is the area's original location and first commercial winery post-Prohibition: **Santa Barbara Winery**, founded by Pierre Lafond in 1962. "I think we've reached a saturation point with wineries around here," states Bruce McGuire, President and Winemaker and 30-year veteran of Santa Barbara Winery. While McGuire has seen it all, including changes in technology and the improvement of his facility, as well as the expansion of the company's **Lafond** label, with winery operations in the Sta. Rita Hills AVA, he is concerned about a case of over-exposure for many of the smaller tasting rooms that are setting up shop locally.

Family Ties

The Santa Barbara Winery tasting room is the hospitable side of the operation, backing up to stainless steel tanks for white wine production, a bottling line (for both labels) and barrel storage rooms. With a combined production of 40 to 50 thousand cases for Santa Barbara Winery and its Santa Rita Hills-based sibling, Lafond, business is humming; distribution is nationwide and growing internationally as well.

Patriarch Pierre Lafond is a legend in Santa Barbara. An architect by trade, he is a wine, food and retail visionary who, in addition to his two wine labels, owns two restaurants, and with his wife Wendy Foster, four clothing stores, a home furnishing store and a gourmet food market. His son David (General Manager) and daughter Michelle (Marketing Director) are an integral part of the wine side of the business.

While the Lafond label was introduced in 1996, five years later, in 2001, the family opened the dedicated Lafond Winery on Santa Rosa Road, with benchland and hillside vineyards along the Santa Rita Hills (regulations require the AVA to be spelled Sta. Rita Hills on wine labels). The property farms 137 acres, which includes the original 70 acres planted in the early 1970s.

Creating international buzz is still a work in progress for this exciting but relative small cool-climate, maritime corridor, located about an hour's drive north of Santa Barbara. The 100-mile long stretch of east-west oriented valleys represent a bevy of unique soils and climactic influences that inspire world-class Chardonnay and Pinot Noirs.



iginals



Lee Schlesinger, Director of Marketing for importer/marketer Winesellers Ltd. (far left), flew out from Chicago to gather with winemaker Bruce McGuire, Pierre Lafond, David Lafond and Michelle Lafond. Photographed at Lafond Winery in Santa Barbara's Sta. Rita Hills AVA.

Wines of Character



Lafond 2009 Sta. Rita Hills "SRH" Chardonnay speaks to the marine soil in which it's grown.

Winemaker Bruce McGuire nurtures a common thread in his wines. His signature of ripeness with balanced acidity shows itself in the Santa Barbara Winery portfolio as much as it does in the plush nature of his Sta. Rita Hills Chardonnay, Pinot Noirs and Syrah.

Lafond 2009 Sta. Rita Hills Pinot Noir (SRP \$27) A plush, tannic structure with a ripe core and an immediate velvety tactile sensation defines this Pinot Noir. The fruit is pretty: blueberry and boysenberry denseness with charming, cleansing acidity. There's no doubt this wine possesses verve: Its edginess walks the line on the winery's common thread of ripeness and acidity.



Santa Barbara Winery 2010 Syrah, Santa Ynez Valley (SRP \$20) The alluring blue flowers and rich black plums, sweet tobacco and cigar tip are some of the complex flavors that arrive, but an underscore of pheromones and feral notes place this wine into the structure department.

Santa Barbara Winery and Lafond Winery are distributed and marketed by Winesellers, Ltd. For more details, go to winesellersltd.com. ■

ANNIVERSARY

Pierre Lafond

PAUL WELLMAN FILE PHOTO

A Half Century of Santa Barbara Winery

The Region's First Modern Winery Turns 50 This Summer

It all started with a liquor store on the Mesa. The year was 1957, and Montreal-born Pierre Lafond inherited the shop from his father, who had lured his son to sunny Santa Barbara but died soon after his arrival. Though trained as an architect, the younger Lafond jumped into the retail business and started to focus on selling wine, eventually opening a new shop in downtown's El Paseo complex in 1962. Though there wasn't much popular interest in wine back then, Lafond realized that there was a growing thirst for locally grown wines, so he founded Santa Barbara Winery that same year.

"It was not a good time to start a winery," explained Lafond, as many Napa Valley operations were closing or being sold off. But he started buying zinfandel fruit from the Templeton Gap area near Paso Robles — "It was the only thing that was available," recalled Lafond, though he'd soon start producing fruit-based wines like olallieberry, as well — and enlisted an optometrist friend to start making the wine. "It was very primitive," said Lafond one recent

by **Matt KETTMANN**

morning outside of the winery's tasting room in the Funk Zone, where everything has been headquartered since 1964. "We weren't doing anything that I was really proud of."

In 1972, Lafond bought 105 acres in what would become the Sta. Rita Hills and planted most of the land with cabernet sauvignon, chenin blanc, riesling, and zinfandel, becoming one of the Santa Ynez Valley's vineyard visionaries. Business grew slowly, as did Santa Barbara County's wine industry, but then came an upstart winemaker named Bruce McGuire, who'd been making wine since his parents gave him a kit to make rosé at home as a 10th grader. ("It turned out pretty bad," admits McGuire today.) With an ag degree from the University of New Hampshire and work experience in both Boston wine shops and Sonoma County wineries, McGuire became Santa Barbara Winery's full-time winemaker in 1982, giving up a job in a Clarksburg vineyard near Lodi to do so.

"It was really tough deciding whether to move to downtown Santa Barbara by the beach or work in the delta 25 miles south of Sacramento," deadpanned McGuire, who was especially intrigued by the region due to the 1976 release of

Sanford & Benedict's first pinot noir. "That had a lot of people talking," recalled McGuire, who advised Lafond to plant some of that Burgundian grape. Recalled Lafond of the idea, "When he suggested pinot noir, it was not a household item."

Today, pinot noir is one of the most preferred grapes on the planet, and Santa Barbara County — specifically the Sta. Rita Hills, where Lafond now has nearly 90 acres of pinot planted — is considered one of the world's best regions for that finicky fruit. McGuire also encouraged a chardonnay program, which is now Santa Barbara Winery's workhorse grape, although he makes about 15 different wines per year,



Bruce McGuire

including slightly obscure varietals, such as primitivo and lagrein, and blends from outside the region, like the ZCS, a zin-carignane-sangiovese concoction from Lodi. "It keeps me entertained," he said of making so many wines. "And it gives the winery something to offer that's different from what you can buy out in the supermarket."

Today, the business is split between two brands and facilities. The majority is sold under the Santa Barbara Winery label, and that facility still thrives on lower Anacapa Street, where Lafond credits the Castagnola family for being "very helpful landlords" over the past half century. Then there is the Lafond Winery, which was built by the Sta. Rita Hills vineyard in the late 1990s, opened a tasting room in 2001, and makes mostly estate-grown pinot noir, chardonnay, and syrah.

Altogether, the two facilities produce about 35,000 cases of wine per year — the downtown winery handles most of the whites, with the Sta. Rita Hills facility making the reds — but have the ability to do 50,000 at full capacity and now sell wine throughout the United States as well as in Europe, Canada, and China. In the imitation-as-flattery department, the company has had to legally swipe away a number of copycats in recent years that tried to cash in on both the well-known name and popular label designs.

Along the way, it's become a family affair, with Pierre's daughter Michelle signing on in 2011 as the marketing director and his son David leading the construction of the Lafond Winery and becoming a general manager of that property. "He's become quite the farm boy," Michelle said of her brother, who now lives up near the vineyard, which overlooks the Santa Ynez River and features a private little campground the family calls "Camp Dirt" and a nice swimming hole. She explained, "It's very Norman Rockwell."

Altogether, a half-century later, Santa Barbara of 2012 wouldn't be the Santa Barbara we know if it weren't for Pierre Lafond and his wife, Wendy Foster, as they also own a number of bistros around town as well as clothing stores. And Santa Barbara's wine country might look a lot different if it weren't for Bruce McGuire, who's mentored some of the region's biggest players, both established and emerging, in his 30 years of work, from Craig Jaffurs, Brett Escalera, and Greg Brewer to Graham Tatomer, Joey Gum-mere, and Chris King.

As to why he's stuck around so long in an industry where people often jump from project to project, McGuire had a pretty easy answer. "Working two blocks from the beach in downtown Santa Barbara is not too bad," he said with a smile. Plus, there's still much more to learn. Explained McGuire, "My protocols are evolving constantly."

4.1.1 Santa Barbara Winery will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a wine-club members party on Saturday, July 21, 6-9 p.m. at the tasting room at 202 Anacapa Street. See sbwinery.com. Additionally, the Urban Wine Trail Passport Weekend is July 27-29, and Santa Barbara Winery is participating; see urbanwinetrailsb.com.

Eye Openers continued

indoor table at **Succulent Café & Trading Company** (1555 Mission Dr., Solvang, 805/691-9444). Locally sourced, inventive breakfasts, served on weekends, include baked-fresh-daily buttermilk biscuits with cinnamon and cumin-braised pork belly, bacon gravy and pineapple chutney. **Sides Hardware and Shoes—A Brothers Restaurant** (2375 Alamo Pintado Ave., Los Olivos, 805/688-4820) is the latest project of chef-owners Jeff and Matt Nichols, formerly of Brothers Restaurant at Mattei's Tavern. Located in a restored 1901 building, the brothers turn out feather-light cinnamon and golden raisin beignets, eggs benedict with applewood-smoked maple bacon and buttermilk cornmeal pancakes made from their mom's recipe. Both Sides and Succulent Café make their own tasty bacon in-house. ✱



Scarlett Begonia

Toast to a Happy 50th Birthday

Santa Barbara Winery

AFTER STUDYING ARCHITECTURE at McGill University, 32-year-old Pierre Lafond found himself living in Calgary, Canada. "I told my father, who lived in Santa Barbara, that I couldn't stand the weather, and that I was going back to Montreal. He said, 'Why don't you come here?'" Lafond didn't hesitate, and he hasn't looked back since. In fact, he proceeded full-speed ahead for the last 50 years, with no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

In 1962, Lafond established Santa Barbara Winery (202 Anacapa St., 805/963-3633, www.sbwinery.com), the first commercial winery in Santa Barbara County since Prohibition. Two years later, he located a winery facility in an area now known to locals as the Funk Zone. Sitting on the leafy patio of the winery, the upbeat and charming Lafond smiles and notes that back then, the neighborhood was less than desirable, but "it's a great location." Santa Barbara Winery now occupies

five buildings in the hip Urban Wine Trail, and its award-winning wines are distributed all over the U.S. and Canada. "It turned out to be a really good spot."

Lafond initially bought grapes from outside the county because there were none available locally. (Uriel Nielsen and Bill DeMattei planted Nielsen vineyard, the first commercial vineyard, in 1964.) Lafond decided to plant his own vineyard, purchasing 105 acres in Santa Ynez Valley. In 1972, with the assistance of viticulturist Bill Collins, he planted 65 of those acres to Cabernet Sauvignon, Chenin Blanc, Riesling and Chardonnay. Today, Lafond grows about half the grapes for his own production.

The hiring of winemaker Bruce McGuire in 1981 helped put Lafond on the world-class wines map. One of McGuire's suggestions was to plant Pinot Noir, then Syrah. Lafond Winery & Vineyards in Buellton was established in 2000. Lafond is involved with both operations, zipping back and forth between the two. His daughter Michelle is marketing director and son David manages Lafond Winery & Vineyards.

Today, Pierre Lafond owns and operates (with his wife Wendy Foster) the two wineries, wine bistros on State Street and in Montecito, event catering, a gourmet market, four clothing boutiques and a home accessories store. The visionary Pierre Lafond made the right move back in 1962. Cheers to a happy 50th! ✱



Food

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2014



RECORD SET

Season finale of 'How I Met Your Mother' sees 12.9 million viewers

ENTERTAINMENT | **D3**

Codeword **D2** Dear Abby **D2** Comics **D4**
Crossword **D2** Movies **D3** Television **D5**

Picks of the WEEK



Organic zucchini

It may seem early, but John Givens Farm of Goleta has freshly harvested zucchini for sale. Excellent as a side, in a pasta or green salad, or shredded and incorporated into fresh breads or muffins, zucchini is the perfect low-calorie food to have on hand this season. I recently grilled it, which makes for a tasty side alongside your favorite protein. See how to do it in the Fix of the Week on page D7. Now at the Tuesday Santa Barbara, Thursday Carpinteria, Thursday Camino Real, Saturday Santa Barbara and Sunday Camino Real farmers markets. Certified organic available. About \$2.50 to \$3.50 per pound.



Goin' Coconuts Almonds

This protein-packed sweet treat is popular with locals. Another winner from Fat Uncle Farms of Wasco, Calif., these fresh almonds are coated with a thin layer of coconut, honey and evaporated cane sugar. The perfect snack for an afternoon hike or served over a little ice cream for a simple dessert. Available at the Tuesday Santa Barbara, Thursday Carpinteria, Friday Montecito, Saturday Santa Barbara and Sunday Camino Real markets. \$6 per 5-ounce bag or two bags for \$10.



Sprouted soybeans

Grown by Ojai Valley Greens, these freshly sprouted soybeans are a great way to naturally ensure that extra boost of protein in your diet. Eat them raw in a mixed green salad or lightly steam and add to your favorite rice dish. They can also be used to make a delicious soybean hummus or homemade soup. Available at the Tuesday Santa Barbara, Thursday Carpinteria, Friday Montecito, Saturday Santa Barbara and Sunday Camino Real markets. \$3.50 per pound.

Sam Edelman is general manager of the Santa Barbara Certified Farmers Market Association; photos by Robby Barthelme/News-Press



Dennis Schaefer's column is on page D7.

SCHAEFER ON WINE

Dennis Schaefer

Funk Zone's newest from one of SB's oldest wineries

By **BRETT LEIGH DICKS**
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

A new face is coming to the Funk Zone's extensive collection of wineries and tasting rooms. But it is a name Santa Barbara is familiar with.

Lafond Winery is putting the finishing touches on its new tasting facility, next door to the Lafond family's long-serving Santa Barbara Winery tasting room. Located at 111 E. Yanonali St., the Lafond Winery tasting room is located at the front of Lafond Winery & Vineyards' bottling facility at

Yanonali Street and Gray Avenue.

The building was originally leased by Lafond Winery & Vineyards in 2000; the business, however, leased out the front space, most recently to CompuWest Inc., which moved to the Turnpike Center on Hollister Avenue in Goleta about eight months ago.

With the recent transformation of the Funk Zone into a prominent wine destination, the Lafond family decided to use the space to provide a presence to its Buellton-based Lafond Winery. Establishing a tasting room for the label in Santa Barbara in addition to the one at the Buellton winery made perfect sense to owner and founder Pierre

Lafond.

"Have you been down here on Saturdays?" Mr. Lafond, 84, explained to the News-Press inside the new space, which is still under construction and has a tentative opening date of April 18. "It was slow in coming, but the Funk Zone has really boomed in the last few years and that's been very good for us. It's been great for our tasting room next door and it will be good for our new room here too I suspect."

Mr. Lafond graduated from McGill University in Montreal with a degree in architecture, and has lived in Santa Barbara since 1957. After practicing

Please see **LAFOND** on **D8**



Michelle Lafond and her father, Pierre Lafond, outside of Lafond Winery's new Funk Zone tasting room at 111 E. Yanonali St.

BRETT LEIGH DICKS / NEWS-PRESS



Italia Vista

Sorriso Italiano puts an Italian smile on the face of Isla Vista

By **BRETT LEIGH DICKS**
NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

The middle of a campus town is the last place you would expect to sit down for authentic Italian homestyle cooking. But when Antonio Gerli and Elisabetta Penso and their three young children immigrated to the United States early last year, that is precisely what they came to California to establish.

"It was my dream to open an Italian restaurant close to one of the California universities," said Mr. Gerli, who arrived in the state from Padua, Italy, about 18 months ago to scout possible locations for both a restaurant and new life for his family, including Davide, 15; Sofia, 12; and Filippo, 9. The setting would, in part, allow the couple to expose their children to university life.

"I came and drove to all the universities between San Francisco and San Diego. I visited the campus here at UC Santa Barbara and saw all the students riding their bicycles along the bike path in one direction. So I followed them and they rode into Isla Vista — and I knew straight away this was the perfect place for our restaurant."

Mr. Gerli, 44, and Ms. Penso, 42, secured one of the commercial spaces below the new apartment building at Embarcadero del Mar and Pardall Road, right in the heart of Isla Vista. They christened their restaurant Sorriso, which means smile in Italian.

The couple gave the interior the clean and modern feel of a contemporary Italian cafe. But it also has plenty of homey touches. The walls feature artwork collected during the family's extensive travels around the world; the chic, white leather sofa that sits near the entrance comes from their home in Italy; and, then, of

course, there is the menu.

Prior to opening Sorriso Italiano last July, neither Mr. Gerli nor Ms. Penso had restaurant experience. Mr. Gerli ran a company that produced LED street lights while Ms. Penso worked as a tax consultant. But what the couple did have was plenty of experience throwing dinner parties as well as a treasure trove of family recipes that Ms. Penso has been reworking and adapting over the years.

"My family is from north Italy and Antonio's is from south Italy and both of our mothers have always been very wonderful cooks," Ms. Penso said. "The food in Italy is very different in all of the different regions. The cuisine is influenced by the ingredients that are available in a region and that varies all across Italy. So we want to offer a little

FYI

Sorriso Italiano, 901 Embarcadero del Mar in Isla Vista, is open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday and 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. For more information, call 324-4367 or visit sorriso-italiano.com.

of everything."

Not only did the pair want to ensure the authenticity of the dishes, they also wanted freshness to be another defining component. The menu isn't extensive, and that is because everything is prepared fresh. The pizza and pasta sauces, meatballs, lasagna, eggplant parmigiana, panzerotto and desserts are all made each day in-house and never frozen. They even make their own bread.

"We don't have a freezer; that's how serious we are about everything being fresh," Mr. Gerli said as he gave the News-Press a tour through the restaurant's kitchen. "We use only quality ingredients that are fresh, natural, organic ...

"This is our passion and our customers are our family," he added. "This is how we cooked at home in Italy for our family and friends, so this is how we want to cook for our new family and friends here."

Please see **SORRISO** on **D8**



BRETT LEIGH DICKS / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Having long held a passion for food, Antonio Gerli and Elisabetta Penso's dream was to open an authentic Italian restaurant in California. At top, with the feel of a modern Italian cafe, Sorriso Italiano offers a variety of traditional family dishes — in the heart of Isla Vista.

Light and lovely thirst-quenchers

■ **SCHAEFER**
Continued from Page D7

(\$35): This Edna Valley version displays its aromatics more readily: peach and nectarine skins along with pear, citrus and mineral. Immediately more engaging by its gregarious nature, it shows the sweet ripeness of fruit on midpalate that's built on a solid medium-bodied structure with a lingering finish. The stone fruit flavors are mouthcoating and persistent and the subtle undercurrent of LePage's glue (a good thing!) adds a little something pleasantly extra to the proceedings.

- **Qupé Bien Nacido Cuvee 2012 (\$20):** Not sure if I would call this a misunderstood wine, a blend of two-thirds viognier and one-third chardonnay. Sometimes people scratch their head when they hear that combination, but when they taste it, all preconceptions fade away; it just becomes darn tasty white wine. The viognier provides the great aromatics and flavors of the typical peach, buoyed with florals, while the chardonnay adds pear, citrus and a good spine of acidity to the mix. A pleasant pungency on midpalate gives the flavors staying power and invites another sip.

- **Qupé Marsanne, Santa Barbara County 2012 (\$20):** This is incredibly refreshing, considering the heaviness that marsanne sometimes carries. It's light on its feet at first sip but it eventually evolves into something richer and more complex. Peach, orange creamsicle, wet stone and mineral flavors unfold with some time in the glass and are compelling all the way to the lengthy finish. A great introduction to what marsanne is all about.

- **Qupé Marsanne, Edna Valley, Sawyer Lindquist Vineyard 2012 (\$28):** This wine ups the ante and has a bit more of everything that marsanne has to offer. It hangs its aromas and flavors on a bigger framed structure that allows for more texture and depth to shine through. Apricot jam, quince, kiwi and citrus are the concentrated flavors that provide more oomph to this bottling, though it's still vibrant and refreshing.

- **Qupé Roussanne, Santa Maria Valley, Bien Nacido Vineyard 2010 (\$40):** This is incredibly rich and mouthcoating on entry, with a whole panoply of flavors, including green apple, pear, citrus and peach, and a sprinkling of hazelnut, honeysuckle, lavender, vanilla and floral notes. Big and rich, the fruit profile is totally integrated so as to become all of a piece, as well as totally lush and seamless. With a bit of age, it's just now starting to hit its stride and will likely improve over the next 10 years. One of the best roussannes I've tasted in recent times.

- **Qupé Chardonnay, Santa Barbara County, Bien Nacido Vineyard, "Y" Block 2012 (\$20):** If your history with Qupé chardonnay stretches back, you might remember the great bottlings that were sourced from Sierra Madre Vineyard. The 2012 vintage, with the grapes now drawn from Bien Nacido Vineyards, is a return to the classic form. The nose is quite inviting with aromas of pineapple, mango, kiwi and citrus. The ripe fruit flavors of apple, pear, pineapple and citrus come through effortlessly and are coupled with vivacity and freshness on the palate. A hint of crème brûlée adds some bottom notes, rounding out the presentation. Perfectly balanced, this wine is the timeless representation of a complete and seamless Santa Barbara County chardonnay. I could drink this wine every day and never tire of it.

Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. Email him at food@newspress.com.

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presents



Saturday's
6:30pm

THE INN CROWD

with Chef Budi Kazali

the Tastiest Show

on television

The Inn Crowd is a cooking show peppered with a healthy dose of fun, easy gourmet recipes, breathtaking scenery and very special guests.

The Inn Crowd features Budi Kazali, an amazingly imaginative chef and owner of the Ballard Inn & Restaurant in the heart of California's famous wine country.



Join Chef Budi Kazali cooking with friends: Tracy Losson, Sue Turner-Cray and, Andrea Smalling at Crossroads Estate, Saturday at 6:30 p.m.



Craig Case, Host



Produced by



This episode will be available for viewing on the Food Channel at <http://tv.newspress.com> from Sunday-Saturday.

Watch Season 3 on www.hulu.com/the-inn-crowd



BRETT LEIGH DICKS / NEWS-PRESS

Pierre Lafond and daughter Michelle Lafond inspect the plans for Lafond Winery's new 1,200-square-foot tasting room in the Funk Zone.

Luminous setting

■ **LAFOND**
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architecture for several years, his burgeoning interest in winemaking led him to establish Santa Barbara Winery in 1962.

Not only was it the first winery to be started in Santa Barbara County since Prohibition, it also gave Santa Barbara its first tasting room.

After acquiring a tract of land in the Santa Rita Hills at the western end of the Santa Ynez Valley in 1971, Mr. Lafond began planting a vineyard of his own, which was originally used for Santa Barbara Winery wines and has since grown to encompass 137 acres. In 1998, a new winery was constructed at the vineyard for the Lafond label and in 2000 it netted its first harvest. The family-run enterprise now produces wines under the labels of Santa Barbara Winery and Lafond Winery.

What differentiates the two labels are the grapes. While Santa Barbara Winery uses the finest grapes it can source from around Santa Barbara County and its dozen or so wines are aged in barrels stored in the same building as its tasting room, Lafond Winery uses grapes from its own vineyard in the Santa Rita Hills or its immediate neighbors and ages the wines at the Buellton-based winery. Though Lafond Winery has operated a tasting room at its Buellton vineyard since the beginning, until now, its presence in Santa Barbara was simply through being poured at Santa Barbara Winery.

"Because of the boom here in the Funk Zone, we thought we might as well have one here too," said Mr. Lafond, surrounded by construction equipment in the new tasting room.

The 1,200-square-foot space will be open daily to the public from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday

FYI

Lafond Winery, 111 E. Yanonali St., will be open daily, beginning later this month, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday through Thursday and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, call 845 2020 or visit www.lafondwinery.com.

through Thursday, and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Designed by Mr. Lafond himself, the facility has a contemporary feel, incorporating extensive use of windows along its Yanonali Street frontage.

In addition to being able to sample Lafond Winery's selection of chardonnay, pinot noir, syrah and riesling in the tasting room's luminous setting, visitors will have the chance to peruse and purchase local products, ranging from fine art paintings to jewelry to food.

"People like to take home some sort of reminder of a winery or tasting room they've visited," said Michelle Lafond, 53, one of Mr. Lafond's three daughters (he also has a son) and marketing director for both Lafond Winery and Santa Barbara Winery. "It is nice to have a token of a day spent wine tasting or a weekend visit to Santa Barbara, but how many coasters or wine glasses can you have? So we're going to also have various artisan products here for people to buy and try."

The opening of the tasting room will bring Mr. Lafond's winemaking presence in the Funk Zone full circle.

"We were the first winery here and now we are the newest," he said. "Santa Barbara turned out to be a great area for growing grapes and people are now taking advantage of that, including us."

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All of Sorriso Italiano's dishes are freshly prepared in-house daily and never frozen, including the Bolognese Lasagna.



The menu at Sorriso Italiano is the result of an evolution, with dishes like its Pesto Pasta coming from customer suggestions.

Evolution of food

■ **SORRISO**
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The menu reflects Mr. Gerli and Ms. Penso's traditional homestyle ethic. Bolognese Lasagna, Vegetarian Lasagna, Eggplant Parmigiana, Meatballs, Chicken Piccata and Chicken Parmesan constitute the "Our Favorites" portion of the menu. Pastas include those with sauces such as Fettuccine Alfredo, Meat Sauce, Marinara, Arrabbiata, Mamma Rosa and Pesto, to which meatballs, diced chicken, sausage or vegetables can be added. Whole wheat and gluten-free pastas are also available.

Mini Pizzas are available in Margherita, Pesto or Create Your Own, the latter coming with 10 topping options. The salads include Mista, Caesar and Caprese, while the Panzerotto, a savory, deep-fried filled pastry, comes with tomato sauce and Mozzarella cheese, and Italian pepperoni, meatballs and Italian sausage as possible add-ins. The menu is rounded off with Sweet Sorriso, essentially Italian doughnuts that are filled with either Nutella or berry preserves. A selection including beers, wines and espresso is also available.

Main dishes range from \$6.95 to \$9.95, salads \$3.95 to \$6.25, mini pizzas are \$3.50, and panzerotto are \$3.95.

The menu is the result of a gradual evolution Sorriso Italiano has undergone. When the restaurant first opened, the menu was more focused on calzones, mini pizzas and panzerottos. But after listening to the wants of customers, Mr. Gerli and Ms. Penso introduced more plated dishes.

"Our customers have given us lots of valuable advice," Ms. Penso said. "We started with a different kind of menu that we made when we were in Italy before moving here. And when we opened, people asked us for more things, like pasta, so we changed, following what the customer wants."

"Opening a restaurant in California was our dream. We want this to be successful for us and our kids, so, of course, we will listen to what people want."

"Some of the things we now have, you won't find in Italy," Ms. Penso added. "But we are not in Italy anymore."

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This week on Nippers Table Talk

Jaime Heer & Tucker Huget,
owners of the new beer & wine merchant "Armada Wine Bar" will fill us in on all their upcoming events and the best happy hour in town!





Will Powers, president and co-founder of "Festivals 4 Cause" will tell us all about the upcoming "Brews at the Beach" festival on April 12th at Chase Palm Park.

And... The Mystery Restaurant Contest!

Nippers Table Talk

The Central Coast's leading food and restaurant show on both **AM1290** radio and the internet (Nippers.com) every Thursday at 9 AM.

Get the latest news on the local food & wine scene. See and hear from the top food and wine leaders. Win free meals and other prizes on the weekly "Name That Restaurant" competition.





Antonio Gerli and Elisabetta Penso have brought a piece of Italy to Isla Vista.