

Discover the wineries along Colfax Highway

by Shelly Hemig

The wine region of the North Sierra foothills isn't the secret it once was. Wines from our area have won awards over the last few years and have recently been written about in the San Francisco Chronicle. People are taking notice of this region and how it's growing.

The most recent addition is Katoa Cellars. Katoa opened its doors this summer, just in time to be part of Sierra Vintners' Summer Regional Wine Trail in mid-July.

Even though it was the first day they were open to the public, owner and winemaker Riki Pollock was excited to participate.



PHOTO BY SHELLY HEMIG

"To have that amount of people come through and experience our little winery was really cool," he said.

Pollock has been working closely with another local winemaker since 2007. Jacques Mercier, owner and winemaker of Solune Winegrowers, has provided an apprenticeship of sorts to Pollock. He even continues to share his equipment



PHOTO BY SHELLY HEMIG

while Katoa is still in its infancy.

"Jacques is gracious enough to let me custom crush at his facility," said Pollock.

Solune and Katoa are just down the road from each other along Highway 174. Together, along with nearby neighbor Montoliva Vineyard & Winery, they have formed wine174.

A scenic section along the Peardale and Chicago Park areas of Colfax Highway makes up wine174, which encompasses not only the three wineries, but also a produce stand, a restaurant and some shops.

"I would like people to start thinking of us as this side of the valley's Silverado Trail," said Mark Henry, owner and winemaker at Montoliva.

Henry strongly believes that the spaces between the current wineries, and the land all along Highway 174, will start to fill in over the next several years.

Lively and talkative, Henry is eager to share every aspect of winemaking,

from the viticultural to the nuances of tasting.

When asked why he chose this area, Henry cites an article he read in the mid-1990s in which a representative of an Italian wine company noted that the growing conditions in the Sierra foothills was most similar to those of central Italy. Since Henry knew he wanted to grow Sangiovese, the grape from which Chianti is made, it was only natural he'd look for a place here.

"I chose the North Sierra foothills area because of the geology," he said.

Mercier chose this area for a similar reason. He points out that the name Solune is a combination of the French words for sun (soleil) and moon (lune) and refers to the large temperature difference between the warm days and cool nights in this region. It provides the ideal ripening conditions for wine grapes.

Pollock and his partners, wife Andrea Tiernan-Pollock and her best friend Laurie Zoulas, were familiar with the area and knew they



PHOTO BY SHELLY HEMIG

wanted to be along Highway 174 because it's a more scenic drive than Highway 49.

"I saw this property and thought if I could ever own a piece of property in Nevada County, this would be it," Pollock said of the land he purchased three years ago, which now houses his tasting room.

With these three wineries in such close proximity, they have decided to host their own mini wine trail on Saturday, October 10, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. They'll each have food and new wine releases available and will share a little of the history of the area with those who participate.

"We'll sort of help each other to be discovered," Mercier said.

For those interested in visiting even more of the area's wineries, Sierra Vintners will be hosting their final Wine Trail of the year on Saturday, September 26, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to Mercier, Sierra Vintners' idea to bring the Wine Trail back and split it into three separate events has been successful.

"It was more manageable, more focused for both the wineries and the visitors," he said.

He also said the July Wine Trail, which he organized for the six wineries who participated (including his own), almost doubled the numbers of the first one. He expects the third one to grow even more.

It seems as though people out of the area really are discovering our hidden gems. Locals interested in being part of the third Wine Trail may want to go online now at sierravintners.com to buy tickets and make sure they don't miss out on all the fun.

Sierra Vintners Harvest Regional Wine Trail

WHEN:

Saturday, September 26
11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

WHERE:

Bear River Winery
Fawnridge Winery and Vineyards
Lone Buffalo Vineyards
Mt. Vernon Winery
Naggiar Vineyards & Winery
Sierra Knolls Winery
Vina Castellano

COST:

\$30 - General admission
\$25 - Wine Club members
\$10 - Designated drivers
(No wine tasting)

INCLUDES:

Wine tasting, food, music

MORE INFORMATION:

www.sierravintners.com

wine174 Event

WHEN:

Saturday, October 10
1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

WHERE:

Solune Winegrowers
Katoa Cellars
Montoliva Vineyard & Winery

COST:

Free

INCLUDES:

Wine tasting, food, history chat

MORE INFORMATION:

www.wine174.com
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