

On July 22, 25 FOW members and guests visited three relatively young wineries in Los Gatos.

We began our afternoon at the highly acclaimed Testarossa Vineyards. Now located in the historic 19<sup>th</sup> century stone cellars formerly home to the Novitiate Winery of Los Gatos, owners Rob and Diana Jensen founded Testarossa in 1993 in their garage. Our host, Mark, told us that “testarossa” means redhead in Italian, the nickname given to Rob by his host family when he was studying in Italy. After convening in the main tasting room, we walked out the entrance, passing the large basket press owned by FOW, to our private tasting area in a downstairs cellar built for the 1939 World’s Fair. For those of you who remember the print advertising Novitiate wines, showing our founder Bro Korte seated with several other Jesuit brothers at a very long dining room table, that photo was taken in and hangs in this room, formerly a tasting room for the Novitiate.

While tasting, Mark shared with us his extensive knowledge of the winemaking practices used, the vineyard sources represented and how the various climate and terroir differences influence the wines. The primary fermentations are almost always done using the natural yeast, commercial yeast being added only if the fermentation is going awry. The Chardonnays are all 100% malo-lactic fermented and barrel aged after cold stabilization. The Pinot Noirs are aged about 18 months in oak, using a combination of some new and some one to two year old neutral barrels.

We began our tasting with the 2005 Novitiate Chardonnay (\$19), a fruit forward wine with moderate oak, smooth on the palate with good mouth-feel and a slightly sweet finish. Next was the 2005 Castello Chardonnay (\$28), a blend of several vineyards. Mark told us that “castello” means castle in Italian. The tropical fruit character (banana and pineapple) of the nose comes from the Bien Nacido fruit, according to Mark; the mouth-feel is silky with a crisp finish. Moving to the reds, we tasted two 2005 vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs. The Garys’ Vineyard (from Gary Pasoni’s and Gary Francioni’s vineyards) Pinot Noir (\$59) was bottled less than a month ago; Mark noted that Garys’ Vineyard Pinot Noirs typically improve with bottle age. Even now, the nose offers a combination of tobacco, chocolate and oak, and the palate shows moderate tannin and a long finish. The Sleepy Hollow Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$59) expressed black pepper and cherry in the nose, moderate tannins, a good acid structure and a long finish. Our last wine was the 2005 Subasio Syrah (\$34), which Mark told us was the first wine they have made from this vineyard. The nose offered yummy blueberry and the palate is silky with moderate tannin, overall a very nice wine.

Our second stop was at the home of Frank Ashton, owner/winemaker of Downhill Winery. Frank is also the General Manager at Byington Winery, where his Downhill wines are made. Frank is very knowledgeable about winemaking techniques and shared much of that knowledge with us throughout the tasting. We began with the 2006 CA Rosé, a blend of Merlot from Saratoga and Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa County. The nose was lovely, a very pleasant offering of strawberry and vanilla; the wine was dry with a nice crisp finish; and the alcohol was 14.2% (who knew!). Frank told us that the French term “sangée” means “to bleed”, in the case of winemaking to draw off the juice before it becomes too red in order to make a rosé. The next wine was the 2005 Sleepy Hollow Chardonnay, from Santa Lucia Highlands. With one-half malo-lactic fermentation and barrel-aged for 13 months in French oak, the wine exhibited a lovely tropical fruit and lightly oaky nose and a nice but not over-powering buttery character with a crisp finish. As we moved into the red wines, Frank noted that he uses 60% 1-year old, 30% 2-year old, and 10% 3-year old barrels. He told us that French oak barrels sell for about \$900 each, whereas American oak barrels are only about \$350 each. Our first red was the 2005 Amador County Barbera, from Shenandoah Valley. Aged for 13 months in French oak, the nose offered bramble, berry and spice, the mouth-feel was smooth with medium body, and overall it was very yummy. The next wine was the 2005 Alexander Valley Slipstream Red Wine Blend, 65% Merlot and 35% Cabernet Sauvignon. Frank explained that “slipstream” is a biking term that means drafting the rider in front of you, simply “enjoying the ride”. What more needs to be said? Next we tasted the 2005 Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel. Frank told us that this wine was from the

Unti clone, a primitive clone. Aged 13 months in French and American oak and unfiltered, the wine was classic blackberry and spice. The last wine was the 2005 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, from Yountville. Also aged in French and American oak and unfiltered, the nose was of black cherry and chocolate and the mouth-feel was smooth with soft tannins.

Our third stop was at the tasting room of Fleming Jenkins, on Main Street in Los Gatos. Both Peggy (Fleming) and her husband/winemaker Greg (Jenkins) were there, and were delightful hosts. We began our tasting with the 2005 Victories Rosé (\$20), a wine created specifically to raise funds for breast cancer research, 100% of the net profits being donated to charities that support that cause. The wine has a lovely fruity aroma and flavor, good acidity and a nice dry finish. The 2005 Santa Cruz Mtns Chardonnay, Jenkins Vineyard (\$35) was whole-cluster pressed and fermented and aged in French oak barrels. The aromas were of pear and green apple, the flavor was of melon, the acidity was crisp, and the lingering finish was of fruit and mineral. The first red was the 2005 Livermore Valley Syrah, (John) Madden Ranch (\$40), from the Concannon clone, one of the oldest Syrah clones in California. The dark plum aroma and dark fruit flavor was classic Syrah. Likewise, the 2005 Santa Cruz Mtns Syrah, Black Ridge Vineyards (\$38), exhibited classic aromas of cherry, dark fruit and black pepper with a touch of smokiness, and classic cherry and spice flavors. Our final wine was the 2004 Napa Valley "Choreography", Cabernet Blend (\$50), otherwise known as a meritage wine, consisting of the five traditional Bordeaux varietals. The aromas of cherry, leather and tobacco with a hint of cocoa and mint were wonderful, and the mouth-feel was smooth with moderate tannins; another lovely wine.

After our wonderful day of tasting, 18 of our group finished the day with a marvelous dinner at I Gatti Restaurant. We began with a terrific antipasti assortment, served on platters for the table. Then we each enjoyed the pre-selected entrées of our choice, ranging from lasagna, cannelloni or risotto to linguine frutti di mare to osso buco. And of course, some of us complemented our meal with wine from I Gatti's list. We concluded with some very creative, eye-appealing and tasty desserts and coffee. I believe we all left quite satisfied!