

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Thursday, July 7, 2016

Life

Limited production Nagy Wines

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Clarissa Nagy's day job is winemaker at Riverbench Vineyard in Santa Maria Valley (nice work if you can get it!), where she does a great job making chardonnay and pinot noir, as well as bubbly from the estate vineyard.

But she also makes a very small amount of wine under her own label, Nagy Wines, which may be a little hard to find, though you can now sample them at her tasting room (145 S. Gray St. #103, Orcutt, 286-7228). Utilizing vineyards that she respects and is familiar with, she only makes a few barrels of each variety, so you know she keeps an eagle's eye on the entire process, from picking and crushing to barrel aging.

Her Nagy Wines label predates her time at Riverbench; she was willing to start her own label back in 2005, when she finally had access to Garey Ranch Vineyard, one of the few parcels she never had the opportunity to work with. And the wine she now fashions from her specifically chosen vineyards reflects her personality: graceful and elegant. Ultimately what I find in her wines is balance, something that takes most winemakers a lifetime to achieve. Did I mention that there are not a lot of her wines to go around?

Nagy Pinot Blanc, Santa Maria Valley, Bien Nacido Vineyard 2013 (\$24): Who is their right mind makes pinot blanc anymore? Well, judging by this Nagy bottling, maybe it's time for that varietal to make a comeback. Citrus, lime, apricot, tangerine, and fig, buffered by minerality, come through on the nose. On the palate, lemony citrus,

along with apricot and orange peel, as well as talc, chalk and minerals. Bright and sunny in the mouth, it has great acidity that invites another sip. The more you taste and revisit this wine, the more cumulatively generous and enjoyable it becomes.

Nagy Viognier, Santa Barbara County, White Hawk Vineyard 2013 (\$24): As with most fine viogniers, this one has a perfumed nose: citrus, peach, pear, honeysuckle and ginger with a hint of orange marmalade. There's a big splash on mouth entry but then it focuses on the flavor task at hand on mid-palate, showing stone fruit — like nectarine, peach and apricot — with a zippy lemon/lime chiffon on the back beat. The nicely honed flavors are spot on, never veering into excess as so many viogniers do. It uses grace and subtlety as a way of making its points on the palate.

Nagy Syrah, Santa Barbara County, White Hawk Vineyard 2013 (\$48): A dense, extracted color gives way to brooding plum, dark berry, lavender, graphite and a surprising lift of white florals on the nose. Damson plum, blackberry, boysenberry, beef jerky. hot oozing melting asphalt and desiccated tanned leather are the complex flavor elements and, while they sound a little rough, its all integrated into an elegant and seamless package. Firm but giving tannins complete the picture, leading to a lush and lengthy finish.

Nagy Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley, Garey Ranch Vineyard 2012 (\$48): From a vineyard not far down the road from Riverbench, this pinot noir shows red cherry, Asian five spice powder (particularly star anise) and rose petal on the nose with a dollop of red licorice. Voluptuous red cherry and red raspberry flavors make a big impact on mouth entry. Bright, lithe and elegant, its supple mouth feel — well rounded and sustained — just increases the deliciousness factor. A bit of brown baking spices and treble notes of damp earth round out the flavor profile. The additional time in the bottle has allowed this pinot to become more complex and well knit.

Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. E-mail: food@newspress.com.