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Vinoteca



By James Knight

Though wineries number in the hundreds, their bottles clinking shoulder-to-shoulder on overcrowded shelves, every day some novitiate leaves a lucrative career to trammel dusky juice out of a heap of black grapes—culled, perhaps, from the same vineyards as dozens other of their bewitched brethren. Would it not be more efficient to put these in the hands of one winery with the economy of scale to produce excellent sips for less than the cost of a parking ticket? "In a world without variety, it would be easier to answer that question," Chris Taddei of Super Sonoman Wines replies. In wine, alas, variety is not just the spice but the very stuff of life.

That's where Vinify Wine Services fits in. Furnished with the latest in tanks, presses and sorting tables, Vinify provides small-time vintners with the means to their dream, with the efficiency of a midsized winery. Much more than a "vanity label" outfit, Vinify is like a Russian doll of wineries within wineries making brands for yet other clients, a labyrinth of "type 2" winemakers (a legal designation, not a personality trait—that would be type A, for the most part) and "17/20 licenses." Of these, six are currently pouring in a newly opened, on-site tasting room in Northwest Santa Rosa.

Frostwatch makes its 2010 Kismet (\$24) mainly from Sauvignon Blanc grown in its own Bennett Valley vineyard. Stony, with an initially sulfurous tinge to prettier white flower aromas, it's otherwise nice and zesty, a sizzling crisp cocktail of lime and agave.

From former Flowers Winery viticulturist Greg Bjornstad, a 2008 Van der Kamp Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$40) is perfumed with ethereal strawberry and red cherry, with a finish as dense as fog, while Olson Ogden's 2007 Unti Vineyards Syrah (\$45) boasts bucketfuls of wild grape and black cherry flavors in every pour. Super Sonoman, on a mission to show that Cab from the mountains of Sonoma County can be as serious as that of the Napa Valley floor (would a serious person doubt it?), pours a 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$50) that binds concentrated blackberry liqueur to a firm, dry hammer of tannin, and should reward the patient after some downtime.

For most boutique hopefuls, the overhead and hard work of winemaking might barely yield a living, says Taddei. "It's really a labor of love. The flip side is, you get to drink wine at 9 in the morning!" He's kidding, of course. But isn't it pretty to think so?

Vinoteca, 3358 Coffey Lane, Ste. C, Santa Rosa. Friday-Sunday, 11am-5pm, or by appointment. \$10 fee waived with purchase. 707.542.3292.

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