



TAKE THE EPICURE Lamb osso buco is paired with biodynamic syrah or sangiovese at Le Cigare Volant Café.

Doonright Spectacular

Bonny Doon Vineyard's deluxe new tasting room delights and amazes

BY CHRISTINA WATERS

The word “wow” acquires new spin with the very first glimpse of Bonny Doon Vineyard's new tasting showcase. Sleek yet loaded with eclectic energy, the spacious tasting room offers daily opportunities to sip, swirl and learn. But even better, thanks to its Le Cigare Volant Café, connoisseurs can now enjoy small plates that are every inch the match for Randall Grahm's oenological poetry.

The vast space—once a part of the winemaking facility itself—has been cunningly organized to maximize the flow for small tasting parties and vast tour groups alike. Deconstructed oak barrels, playfully repurposed wine bottles (as suspended chandeliers) and monumental oak tank staves fashioned into cozy wine-tasting “pods”—and all the witty uses of architectural winery paraphernalia promote eco-interior design. Invoking the cyclical rhythms of Rudolph Steiner's biodynamism, the circular tasting bar, curved seating areas, even multitiered fountains swirling from cow's horns into clover-leaf basins, all make cosmic sense. Conceived by winery founder Randall Grahm, the tasting arena was developed by architect

Mark Primack, Dutch design firm Storage and Schutz Construction. And after 25 years up in the mountains, the showcase for Bonny Doon's dazzling dooniverse of wines is distinctly sophisticated.

Armed with a short menu of beautiful dishes created by chef Sean Baker of Gabriella Café, the wines receive not only loquacious explication from the tasting bar staff but sensational flavor accompaniments as well. I'm hoping that cafe hours will be extended—it would be great to come here after work for a small plate and a glass of wine.

Still in its infancy, the cafe offers a lively listing of seven dishes, each paired with two possible wine choices or a flight of three selected wines. Winemaker and chef boldly decided to showcase the winery's top vintages in the company of equally vibrant foods. These are not shy flavors, as I discovered on two separate occasions.

An example: At one lunch, we chose lamb osso buco joined by the 2005 Bien Nacido Syrah (\$18) and an order of braised octopus with a glass of 2007 Vin Gris de Cigare (\$15). Here's how it works. Your order includes the glass of selected wine. If you choose to

forego the wine, \$5 is deleted from the price. Conversely, you can order the wine alone by the glass or the bottle. In essence, you can pretty much have it your way, which is very Randall Grahm, in my humble opinion.

We sat at the spun aluminum cafe tables in the front tasting area—the Biodynamic Lounge, if you will. Our order was brought, along with a basket of fragrant franceses. The dishes were almost too good-looking to eat. Almost. Tender morsels of octopus sat on a tiny cushion of braised escarole and earthy garbanzos. Everything was drizzled in an addictive sauce laced with mint and chiles. My companion's osso buco was fork-succulent and redolent of smoked tomato essence. Placed on a bed of pumpkin-laced semolina, like a Native American polenta, it was accented by almond gremolata. The meaty octopus embraced the berry flavors of the delicate blush wine, and the syrah was big and spicy enough to handle the osso buco. While these are certainly not dinner-size portions, they're generous enough to last through an entire glass of wine. Which is, after all, the point.

On another occasion, I sampled

the rich braised pork cheeks, accompanied with leek-braised cranberry beans and woody roasted chanterelles. A topping of very crisp bread crumbs played counterpoint to the slow-stewed pork, which was fabulous with a glass of 2005 Ca'del Solo Sangiovese (think cherry and cassis). My companion ordered the hamachi crudo, fat strips of yellowtail bathed in fennel olive oil and sided with a shaved fennel and pungent cress salad, plus a sensuous confit of fennel. Incredibly delicious, the fish adored its accompanying 2006 Le Cigare Blanc, a complex, violet-driven white Rhône-style blend that gives fresh appeal to the entire idea of white wine. I'm making myself hungry all over again.

And of course, there's hip, stylish wine tasting as well. Come see what the biodynamic future of Bonny Doon Vineyard looks and tastes like. ☞

LE CIGARE VOLANT CAFE

BONNY DOON VINEYARD TASTING ROOM
ADDRESS 328 Ingalls St., Santa Cruz
PHONE 831.425.4518
HOURS Open 11:30am–5:30pm Thu–Sun
 (tasting room open daily)