

Bonny Doon: Out of the mountains, to the Westside

- Sentinel staff report.

Posted: 12/10/2008 01:31:31 AM PST

Bonny Doon Vineyards, which had a tasting room on Pine Flat Road in Bonny Doon for 25 years, has slid down the hills with a splash.

A new, lavish tasting room built in the shape of a nautilus now dominates the back corner of the Swift Street Complex, offering three tasting bars and a food and wine pairing menu.

Owner Randall Grahm originally had a bottling line at the Swift Street Complex, which was being shut down as Bonny Doon's Big House Red and Cardinal Zin wines were spun off. Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard took over the space in a collective with other wineries, and Bonny Doon decided to keep some of the space and join the party.

The move away from the rural tasting room, which was taken over by Beauregard Vineyards, mirrors Grahm's move away from Bonny Doon-grown grapes to concentrate on biodynamically grown grapes from a variety of sources. Grahm also has focused on small production estate varietals such as dolcetto and nebbiolo, while keeping his signature Le Cigare red and white blends.

Known for his outside-the-box thinking in both winemaking and marketing, calling Grahm a

"character" is somewhat of an understatement.

The tasting room, reflecting his personality and beliefs, unfolds in cells, or pods, with a main area, a biodynamic tasting room and an area where you can purchase food from a menu to match the wines, designed by Gabriella Cafe's executive chef, Sean Baker.

Setting itself apart from the more simple tasting room of its neighbors, Bonny Doon offers a tasting for \$7 or a private tasting with a "wine ambassador" for \$20-\$30, depending on wines.

For \$40, you are seated in a private pod and guided through a tasting of four wines paired with foods designed to emphasize the wine. You can also purchase foods, but winery staff is quick to point out that it's all about the wine.

The nautilus shape is deliberate, as well as the pictures of crystals on wine labels of recent releases. Bonny Doon is emphasizing the intelligence of nature, which is being used through biodynamics to bring out terroir, or the flavors of where the grapes are grown.

How perfectly Santa Cruz.

