

# EDIBLE NOTABLES

## HARD CORE

*Cider is Santa Cruz's newest bubbly*

BY LAURA NESS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHELLE MAGDALENA AND PATRICK TREGENZA

Hard cider is considered America's original drink, but in the early days it was made in order to purify water. Orchards with hundreds of apple varieties were planted everywhere the early settlers ventured. Remember the legend of Johnny Appleseed?

Crushed apples were fermented to create an alcohol-infused beverage, which was then blended 50/50 with water to kill the bacteria in it. Colonists typically drank about a gallon of low-alcohol cider per day. Eventually, industrial progress introduced deep well-drilling technology, which provided naturally clean water, reducing demand for cider. Later, waves of European immigrants brought with them a growing preference for beer, and then, sadly, Prohibition and The Temperance Movement led to many orchards being destroyed.

But, recently, cider has been bubbling into craft breweries, grocery stores, and hip restaurants and bars all across the United States. Cider shipments jumped more than 88% in 2013 from the year before. While California has lagged somewhat behind the Northeast and Canada in its embrace of cider, it already has a sure foothold in Santa Cruz.

### SANTA CRUZ CIDER: A CHANGE OF BREW

The newest venture to start fermenting local apples into cider is Santa Cruz Cider Co. The business officially launched in March, and it happens to be our region's first company dedicated solely to making cider. Other notable local cider makers include John Schumacher of Hallcrest Vineyards, who has been developing his own "Santa Cruz Scrumpy" line of ciders since 2009, and Bonny Doon's Randall Graham, who has been brewing ciders since 2010.



### BONNY DOON: CIDER FOR FRANCOPHILES

Randall Graham began the quest for "Query," a spin on the French word for pear cider, "Perry," in 2010, out of a love for the dry French ciders from Normandy, especially those made by Eric Bordelet.

"I love the elegance of French ciders," Graham says. "They are lower in alcohol, higher in acid than other styles and, above all, are tremendously fragrant."

Graham's first batch was made from primarily Bartlett and Seckel pears, Pippin apples and crabapples and a wee dram of quince, hence, the name "Query." The quince is unmistakable.


"There was a little bit of cider-maker error in the first batch," Graham says, referring to the 50% of his bottles that exploded. "But we got that under control, and had a very successful run in 2011."

By retaining carbonation from the primary fermentation and not allowing a secondary fermentation in the bottle, the cider is somewhat less carbonated and also lower in alcohol than Bonny Doon's first vintage. And less explosive.

The 2013 Query (under screwtop) is 62% pear, 36% apple and 2% quince, and the tartness of the latter does a lot of the talking. Bonny Doon also makes Winter Nélis, from a late-ripening heritage pear. Wonderfully fragrant, crisp and flavorful, it boasts an acidity lacking in Bartletts. These pears, however, need a long hang time, risking bird devastation, despite their nasty thorns. Graham jokes that pickers evaporate during harvest.

Graham hopes the friendly, fruity nature of these sparklers will appeal to adventurous younger drinkers and older ones who can no longer tolerate high alcohol. He says "Query" makes a superb apéritif or a substitute for a white wine with a starter course.

By last year, Bonny Doon's cider production had grown to 7,000 cases. Query is now dispensed in 750-ml wine bottles (retailing at \$16 from the winery's website), but the plan is to bottle 20% of the 2013 vintage in 375-ml splits. Query can be found locally at Bonny Doon's Davenport tasting room and Gabriella Café, at Oakland's Oliveto and in San Francisco at Coi, Upcider, Tosca Café, and St. Vincent Tavern and Wine Merchant.

Here's to a new way to enjoy your "apple a day!" 

Laura Ness spends a lot of time in vineyards, fields, cellars and kitchens, observing the magical process of turning Earth's bounty into heavenly delights. She writes for several Monterey and San Francisco Bay area publications and blogs at [www.myvinespace.com](http://www.myvinespace.com).