



You Get the Finest Ten Percent at Tolosa

BY KATHY MARCKS HARDESTY

When you're headed to the beautiful wine trails of Edna Valley from downtown San Luis Obispo, you can't miss the stately stone gate and winding vineyard road that leads to Tolosa Winery tasting room. And that's a fortunate for people who love fine wine. A Chardonnay and Pinot Noir specialist, Tolosa offers tastings of their premium wines and a selection of artisanal varietals only available in the tasting room. They're also unique in featuring the Central Coast's most elaborate selection of fine Riedel wineglasses and decanters. The friendly, knowledgeable staff adds to Tolosa's popularity, and visitors always appreciate the comfortable patio overlooking the estate gardens and vineyards. There, you can relax and enjoy a picnic lunch or nibble on bread and cheese while exploring Tolosa's array of fine wines.

This winery earns high praise for the educational tastings it offers consumers year round. You're likely to find more than a simple tasting of new releases available for purchase. Tolosa's seminars may feature a selection of four Chardonnays with different closures, a lesson in the art of pairing cheese and wine, or the thrilling experience of creating your own blend of different varietals, just as their winemakers do it. You'll find every event is kept affordably priced in an effort to build a more informed clientele and that's good for the wine industry on the whole. These in-depth studies are taught to their tasting room staff, which allows them to provide visitors an educational experience every time they visit Tolosa.

Winemakers Larry Brooks and Nathan Carlson, both of whom gained their expertise by working for Pinot Noir specialists in California, Oregon and France, focus on making premium wines they describe as "honest to the grape." This means they're making wines that stay true to their varietal character in traditional winemaking methods, just as it's been done for centuries at the family-owned estate wineries in Burgundy, France. Larry and Nathan's commitment to quality is reflected in all of Tolosa's wines. They only select the top ten percent of grapes grown on

their estate vineyards, which allows them to consistently make distinctive Chardonnays, Pinot Noirs and other classic varietals during each year's harvest.

Clearly, few American wineries with estate vineyards can boast that they only choose a minute amount of the grapes from 720-acres of grapevines. It amounts to under 20,000 cases, which is small production, and includes all of Tolosa's estate grown varietals. Owners Bob Schiebelhut and Jim Eford named it after the historical Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa in San Luis Obispo. Formerly a lawyer in business litigation, Bob made his first wine Pinot Noir in 1988 with encouragement from his good friend Romeo "Meo" Zueck of Piedra Creek Winery, an Edna Valley pioneer. For Bob, Pinot Noir is the Holy Grail, and he's enthusiastic about his newest project: a special series of Pinot Noirs grown in very specific sweet spots in the estate that are so brilliant, they'll be bottled on their own.

Jim is highly respected as a pioneer in Edna Valley. A graduate of California State University in Fresno, he relocated here in 1973. Over the past 30 years Jim planted most of the vineyards along Edna Valley's rolling hillsides, earning fame as a visionary at winegrape growing. He began working with Bob in 1992 when he planted the five vineyards that would become Tolosa's estate vineyards. Bob and Jim became partners in 1998 when they established Tolosa winery.

Tolosa

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Tolosa remains focused on varietals best suited for the cool climate of Edna Valley. Besides their flagships wines, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, they make small, artisanal wines of Syrah, Viognier, Pinot Gris and Grenache that are only available at the winery. Tolosa's tasting room, which opened in 2004, is your best source for trying all of these unique selections, and you'll find them all well priced for their quality. No matter how great their scores from wine critics, the passionate people behind Tolosa remain solidly down to earth — and they believe the pursuit of perfection is never-ending. For wine aficionados it means you can count on Tolosa for consistently excellent wines at consumer friendly prices.