

Wine Guy: Family partners bring French wine to San Diego

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By Mark Stuart

Family, ambition and a little love brought a wine previously unknown outside of France to San Diego.

La Jolla residents Claudette and Bill Berwin recently formed a wine importing business called Prime Vines after Kevin and Cassi Whiting, Bill's sister and husband, purchased a French vineyard and Chateau in 2005. The import company was created to bring the Chateau's award-winning wine to San Diego, and to continue to build family bonds.

Chateau Vaux Sous Targe (pronounced Vo-soo-tarj) - roughly translated as "castle under the hill" - has a long history of winemaking, reaching as far back as the Middle Ages. In 1820, a wealthy merchant family acquired the property and rebuilt what once was a medieval castle, and has been involved with its vineyards for generations thereafter. The historical family connection continues with the property today as Benoit Neyrand, a descendent of the previous owners, serves as the Chateau's winemaker.

The Whitings met as students at Oxford University. They married and settled down in Greenwich, England. After vacationing near Chateau Vaux Sous Targe for nearly a decade, an opportunity arose for them to purchase the property.

Bill and Claudette were too deeply involved with their La Jolla-based real estate responsibilities to invest directly in the French property at the time of purchase, but wanted to support this new venture.

To prepare themselves, the Berwins studied wine under the International Sommelier Guild, passing a sommelier exam. Claudette's experience with French wine runs even deeper through her veins as her great grandmother is originally from Paris.

"We want to bring (a piece of) the French culture to San Diego and share it with everyone," Claudette said.

With distribution of their first vintage in full swing, the Berwins are enjoying the benefits of being in the wine business. When visiting customers and wineries, they get to share their knowledge of French winemaking techniques and the wine they represent, while partaking in special tastings not available to the general public.

"Being involved has opened up the inside world of the wine business," Claudette said.

They have also participated in the final blending process of new releases from Chateau Vaux Sous Targe.

The southern portion of Burgundy, or the Macon, is home to the property. This region is heralded for its dry, mineral driven and food friendly chardonnay. Chateau Vaux Sous Targe is no different. It features vines that are upwards of 65 years old.

Chateau Vaux Sous Targe 2005, the current release, has been a big success so far. In fact, it was one of only four wines to receive a gold medal at the Macon Fair. The 2006 is scheduled to be released by Prime Vines early next year.

Chateau Vaux Sous Targe is currently available at Jack's La Jolla, Burgundy Grill & Wine Bar and The Crab Catcher.

For more information, visit www.primevines.com.

Recommendation:

2005 Chateau Vaux Sous Targe

Light to medium weight, with firm, integrated acidity. This is a silky smooth wine made without the use of oak. Instead, it was aged in concrete vats, allowing its natural stone minerality to shine. Ripe pear and green melon on the palate with buttery walnut finish. Try with grilled salads or veal. Decant for an hour. 13.3% alcohol, 88 points.



Courtesy of Prime Vines



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