

The International Wine Review

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Wrath Wines

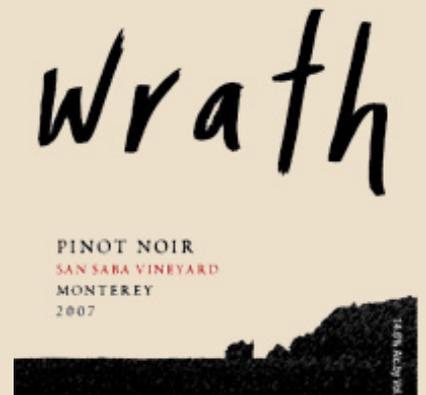
The Grapes of Monterey

Wrath is one of the up and coming producers of Monterey County. Located just below Foothill Rd, which is the border of the Santa Lucia Highlands AVA, Wrath's 72 acre estate vineyard [called San Saba] enjoys much the same terroir as the Santa Lucia Highlands, which we discussed in depth in our **Report # 20, The Santa Lucia Highlands: Unique Terroir, Marvelous Wines**. We had the opportunity to meet and discuss winemaking with chief winemaker Sabine Rodems in June of this year. Of course, we also tasted, and we were blown away by her Chardonnays.

Sitting on the bench just above the Salinas flats made famous by John Steinbeck, the vineyard enjoys cool, fog-drenched mornings, sunny days, and brisk afternoon winds that bring cool Pacific air to the vineyards in the late afternoon. The cool weather and long growing season bring about complete phenolic ripeness of the grapes. To supple-

ment its estate fruit, Wrath also purchases grapes from the Santa Lucia Highlands.

Owner (and classics professor, which explains some of the wine names) Michael Thomas has assembled a first-class winemaking team that includes vineyard manager/consultant Steve McIntyre, enologist Sabine Rodems, and winemaking consultant Byron Kosuge, who is well-known to us from his superb work with Pinot Noir and Syrah both elsewhere in California and in the Casablanca Valley of Chile. The winemaking emphasizes careful sorting and gentle handling of fruit, use of indigenous yeast, minimal use of filtration, and judicious use of oak. Total production is small, about one thousand cases.



Tasting Notes

2009 SAUVIGNON BLANC SAN SABA VINEYARD MONTEREY
(\$23) 89

The San Saba Sauvignon Blanc is an enticing combination of bracing New Zealand like pungent gooseberry and tropical California fruit typical of the Musque clone. Fruit for this wine is picked twice to give added complexity. The early picking contributes an aggressive green apple character, while the second picking provides complementary tropical flavors. The nose is clean with mineral and gooseberry notes, while the palate is full-flavored and round. It finishes clean, long, and crisp. A very well made wine.

2008 SAUVIGNON BLANC DESTRUCTION LEVEL MONTEREY (\$29) 90

The Destruction Sauvignon Blanc is an exotic, Bordeaux style Sauvignon Blanc that needs food to show its best. About 45 percent of the wine is aged in new French oak for five months, the rest done in stainless steel. Pale yellow straw in color, it shows honeydew, white peach and a touch of smoke on the nose. The palate is subtly flavored with very well integrated oak that shows through as accents of smoke and cream soda. This is the kind of wine that connoisseurs like to talk about for hours on end.

2009 CHARDONNAY EX ANIMA SAN SABA VINEYARD MONTEREY (\$29) 91

The Ex Anima Chardonnay is perhaps the most delicious un-wooded Chardonnay I've ever tasted and quite different from what one would expect, starting with its yellow straw-gold color. It's mostly fermented in stainless steel with a small percent fermented in neutral oak with stirred lees, and it sees no malo. It's made from old-vine, self-rooted Clone Four, which gives the wine its rich tropical mango nose. There's an abundance of gorgeous, rich mango and pineapple fruit on the palate and a very long finish. Huge for an un-wooded Chardonnay.

2008 CHARDONNAY MCINTYRE VINEYARD SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS (\$45) 90

The McIntyre Vineyard Chardonnay is an example of a classy California style Chardonnay done with restrained oak. Showing smoke and tropical fruit on the nose, the wine is beautifully balanced on the palate with tropical fruit and coconut flavors and great natural acidity. Made from Clone 96 and fermented in 30 percent new French oak. Only 45 cases produced.

2008 CHARDONNAY FERMATA SAN SABA VINEYARD MONTEREY (\$43) 92

The Fermata Chardonnay is an amazing wine, the kind that can convert an ABC drinker into a Chardonnay lover. Dark yellow straw in color, the nose is a wonder of honey, lemon curd, and lemon tart. The palate shows huge depth and complexity with completely integrated oak. But this isn't one of those California Chardonnays that one has to sip like a dessert wine; it has the acidity and brightness to beautifully complement roasted fowl. The wine is made from a barrel selection of old Wente clone vines with very small berries. About half the oak is new, and the malo fermentation is stopped at the halfway point, thus the name "fermata". Just 146 cases produced.

2008 CHARDONNAY SAN SABA VINEYARD MONTEREY (\$49) 92+

The dark yellow straw San Saba Vineyard Chardonnay is Fermata plus. It's fermented in 70 percent new oak and shows a lemon marmalade-like nose with a hint of smoke. The palate is unctuous, dense with rich tropical flavors of mango, coconut and even a dulce de leche note. A gorgeous, opulent wine that is wonderful to sip but requires very careful pairing with food.

2008 PINOT NOIR MCINTYRE VINEYARD SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS (\$45) 88+

Just a two barrel lot, one new, one old, this medium ruby Pinot Noir has some nice complexity with cherry, herbal and earth on the nose; a full mid-palate; and a creamy, nicely balanced palate of red fruit with a vanilla note and an element of stems. The tannins are very gentle. Made using the 115 clone and 20 percent whole cluster. Only 37 cases produced.

2008 PINOT NOIR QUASI NULLA MONTEREY (\$38) 89

The medium dark ruby Quasi Nulla Pinot Noir is a barrel selection from the San Saba Vineyard that sees mainly neutral oak and whole cluster fermentation. On the nose there's loads of raspberry and dark cherry with an earth note. On the palate, it's full-flavored and delicious with cherry, plum, and light herbal flavors. This flavorful and very approachable wine sees no new oak and is just 13.7 percent alcohol.

2008 PINOT NOIR SAN SABA VINEYARD MONTEREY (\$49) 91

The San Saba Pinot Noir is beautifully balanced and nicely structured with spicy complexity and fullness in the mouth. It's a mix of Pommard 4, 667, and 777 clones and aged for 12 months in 60 percent new French oak. On the nose it shows dark red cherry, earth, and spice. The palate is hugely flavored with dark cherry, spice, and forest floor flavors and a full, rich and lush mouth feel. Delicious!

2008 SYRAH DOCTOR'S VINEYARD SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS (\$49) 92

The opaque purple Doctor's Vineyard Syrah is quite simply an exceptional wine—complex, rich, and deeply flavored. Made from both free run and pressed juice and aged in about 30 percent new French oak, the wine shows dark cherry, chocolate, smoke, and savory meat on the nose. It is smooth on the attack and full, ripe and rich on a beautifully balanced palate. Even better than the 2007 vintage, in our opinion.

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