

SANTA MARIA TIMES

Central Coast, Past, Present, Future

Need Holiday Wine? Hancock Has You Covered

By Mark James Miller, December 9, 2018

“Wine is life” — Petronius, Roman writer.

If you are in the market for wine for the holidays, you may be surprised to know Allan Hancock College’s enology program has just what you need.

Alfredo Koch, program coordinator, was literally born into wine making. He began harvesting grapes with his father and grandfather, both of whom were wine makers, in his native Argentina when he was five years old.

“It all begins with the grapes,” he said. With a PhD in plant biology from UC Davis, Alfredo knows every aspect of wine making, from planting to harvesting, pressing, fermenting, aging and bottling. He enjoys every step, but is especially pleased when he sees the look of delight on a person’s face when they imbibe from a glass containing one of his creations.

“Good wine is often a matter of taste,” he said, and he is “always looking for ways to improve the wine.”

If winemaking is in Alfredo’s blood, it is a passion he is glad to pass on to his students, two of whom I met with following an Introduction to Winemaking class. Michelle Ball works as a freelance journalist for wine-related publications, and Steve McCrank is already employed by a local winery’s tasting room. Both have picked up Alfredo’s enthusiasm for the art of making wine.

Michelle recently returned from a trip to Italy, where she visited wineries in Tuscany, Florence, and Sardinia. She enrolled in the Hancock program to get a formal education in enology and loves the stories behind the wines. She describes her education in winemaking “as an ongoing learning process, involving history, biology and chemistry.”

Steve, an ex-photojournalist, is attracted by the “artistry” of the craft and aspires to be a winemaker when he completes his education at Hancock.

Winemaking is an ancient art. Archaeologists have found evidence of winemaking in Georgia — the country, not the state — dating back to 6,000 B.C. The Sumerians, Babylonians and Egyptians all drank wine. Homer tells us in the “Iliad” and “The Odyssey” that the ancient Greeks were avid wine drinkers. Odysseus was able to escape from the cyclops Polyphemus’ cave by making the monster drunk on wine. The Romans planted vineyards close to where their legions were billeted so the soldiers could have ready access to wine. Wherever humans have been, they have brought wine along with them. As Ernest Hemingway said, “Wine is the most civilized thing in the world.”

The viticulture program at Hancock covers every aspect of winemaking, from soils and plant nutrition to grapevine physiology. But it also offers its students a wonderful opportunity to take their wine-making skills to an even higher level. After two years in the Hancock program, they are eligible to go to France and study at the world-famous Bordeaux Sciences Agro, where students can earn a Bachelor’s degree in viticulture and enology. Since the world consumed 42,501,600 bottles of wine in 2017, a degree in winemaking sounds as if it would offer a promising future.

This is especially true in California, which produces 90 percent of the wine made in the U.S. Not only would California be the world’s fifth-largest economy if it were a separate country, it would also be the world’s fourth-largest producer of wine.

Hancock’s inventory boasts a full array of wines, with 18 vintages from which to choose, including Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Abarino, Chardonnay, as well as Captains Reserve Red and Captains Reserve White.

To find out more about Hancock’s viticulture program, or to order wine, go to www.hancockcollege.edu/AHCWinery/



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