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Around the Town



Flights of Five

BY ELISA WILLIAMS PHOTOGRAPHY LORI EANES

Local Wineries Form New Cooperative Tasting Room

In California, wine tasting was once a rural experience. Oenophiles would trek up to Napa or Sonoma, braving dusty roads in daylight to sample sips before 6 p.m. closings. If they were lucky, the winery might serve them some crackers. Today, the East Bay is home to numerous urban wineries, but most tasting rooms still shutter at 6 p.m. and serve minimal nibbles. →

DUFFEY, COURTESY OF GARY COMOGGIO



Vintners (left to right) Barbara and Kevin Brown, Alexandra and Jeff Cohn, Bob Rawson and Charlie Dollbaum

Topic du Jour: An Alameda Saturday

Terri Long: For an inveterate treasure huntress who writes a blog about treasure hunting, it's natural to get up early most Saturday mornings and hit the garage-sale trail. Lately my hubby and I have been taking to the garage-sale trail on our bikes and spending the entire morning enjoying all that Alameda has to offer like our beautiful Indian summer weather, quaint neighborhoods, views of San Francisco, great coffee, and good eats.

Gary Sternberg: It starts with sleeping in at Villa Sternberg in Alameda. Next up is enjoying the Marketplace with that fantastic bakery and coffee shop while reading the *Financial Times'* special Saturday insert, "How to Spend It," which allows us to dream in fantasyland of the rich and famous. Afternoons consist of a good bike ride in the favorable Alameda landscape, which means bay views and flat trails. Then off to the Harbor Bay club for a [whirlpool] soak. Evenings would include another new ethnic restaurant that seems to be popping up daily on Park or Webster streets, a movie at the Alameda Theatre. To be concluded with a root beer float at Tucker's.

Evelyn Shellenberg: I always like to spend time puttering in my garden. Meeting up with friends for a local dinner and a movie is always fun. It's so great that we don't have to leave the Island anymore to be entertained.

Ken Freeman: For starters, I love to hop on my bike and go with my wife and family to one of our favorite breakfast spots. Then I like to get some exercise at the Harbor Bay Club, steam and sauna; or bike more along the water and take in the great views of the bay. It's always fun to enjoy our small town atmosphere and walk to dinner to one of our wonderful little restaurants or have dinner with family and friends at home on the deck and enjoy our good weather.

Terri Herko Anderson: First hit the Blue Dot Cafe for a cup of coffee, scone and eggs Benedict (to share!) or Marti's for a Swedish pancake. I then attempt to burn off the calories with a Pilates class and a run or ride through the Gold Coast, along Shoreline or through Harbor Bay. All the while, I am keeping my eyes open for estate sales! Next would be some family time at the Harbor Bay Club, hitting balls at Chuck Corica or playing tennis at Franklin Park. For dinner, we crack a bottle of wine from local wineries or head out to Park Street for dinner and a movie. Oops, I almost forgot getting a facial and massage at Sumbody!

—Gina Jaber

Alameda is changing all that. Located at Angela's Bistro & Bar, the Alameda Vintners Club offers tastings from five East Bay wineries from noon until 9 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Instead of just crackers, the wines can be paired with special small plates designed to complement the wines. "As winemakers, we wanted to have a place where our wines were accessible to the public," says Kevin Brown, owner of R&B Cellars. "Being downtown, near shopping on

"EVERYONE LOVES DISCOVERING A NEW FAVORITE WINERY, BUT IT'S EVEN BETTER TO DISCOVER FIVE NEW ONES. WE HAVE SUCH A RICH ASSORTMENT OF GREAT WINES IN THE EAST BAY."

—Kevin Brown

Park Street and the Alameda Theatre, and being open later than 6 p.m. gives people the option of coming before or after dinner or before or after a movie."

In addition to R&B Cellars, local wineries include Carica Wines, Ehreberg Cellars, JC Cellars, and Urbano Cellars. Brown stresses that having tastings from multiple wineries in one location enhances the overall experience. Wines are served in flights of five — usually featuring tastes of wines from each of the wineries — and range from \$7.50 to \$15. Themes include "Splendid Blended," "Ode to Zinfandel" and the option to select your own. "Everyone loves discovering a new favorite

winery, but it's even better to discover five new ones," says Brown. "We have such a rich assortment of great wines in the East Bay."

The wineries in the cooperative have their own specialties, but each has won awards for their quality and their value. R&B Cellars has racked up recent kudos for its red blend called The Improviser and its Swingsville Zinfandel and Serenade in Blanc Sauvignon Blanc. Carica focuses on single-vineyard designed varietals, including Petite Sirah, Syrah, Rosé and Sauvignon Blanc, and also makes a proprietary Rhône-style red wine, blending Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Ehrenberg Cellars has won gold medals for its Cabernet Sauvignon and its Zinfandels. Urbano was awarded silver medals at the 2011 California State Fair for its Chenin Blanc and Sangiovese wines. JC Cellars specializes in Napa Syrah, Sonoma Zinfandel and Mendocino Petite Sirah.

Each winery has its own separate wine club, with discounts for regular buyers. For now the "club" in Alameda Vintners Club is just a name, although a wine-buying program may come along in the future, Brown says. Visitors who like what they taste can buy bottles to take home or, for a corkage fee, open a bottle with their dinner.

The small-plates menu by Angela's chef Saboor Zafari are designed to complement the wines and include braised short-rib sliders, bruschetta served three ways, shrimp and salmon fritters and a variety of pizzas.

Alameda Vintners Club at Angela's Bistro & Bar, 2301 Central Ave., 510-522-5822