



Somerset Winery

In with the Old: Aging Wine in Clay Amphorae



“I fell in love with this one. I said to myself ‘I have to have that!’”

LEFT - KURT TIEDT, CO-OWNER, GLEEFULLY EXPLAINS THE FERMENTATION AIRLOCK THAT CAME WITH SOMERSET'S INITIAL 145-GALLON AMPHORA. RIGHT - WINEMAKER DAVID RAFFAELE DISCUSSES HOW THE 500-GALLON TERRACOTTA TANK AFFECTS THE FLAVOR AND STRUCTURE OF SYRAH.

Callaway Winery

Discovering Local Terroir via Wild Yeast Fermentations

INSIDE

Reviews

Somerset and Callaway, as well as other top picks

INSIDE

VINTNERS RESERVE

Chaparral

This wild, thick vegetation is the essence of Temecula wine

BACK

PROPRIETOR'S BLEND

Quarterly Top Picks Our Scoring System About the Quarterly

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Aging wine in clay pots and terracotta amphorae date back thousands of years before the Roman Empire. Around 50 BC, Julius Caesar conquered the Gauls (in modern-day France) and applied their utilization of wood barrels to transport, age, and store beer to wine. Unlike clay, wood allows for easy, mass transport with little breakage, imparts flavors and tannins, and allows for slow oxygen contact. Given these factors, clay vessels quickly fell out of favor in all but small areas of Georgia, Spain, and Italy.

Two thousand years later, this ancient method of aging wine is gaining steam, especially among small producers looking to experiment and stand out from thousands of other producers. For Somerset Vineyard and Winery co-owner Kurt Tiedt, the revelation came immediately after being introduced to a handcrafted, 145-gallon Italian vessel at a Northern California trade show. Exclusivity, curiosity, and nostalgia led to an impulse buy, “I fell in love with this one. I said to myself ‘I have to have that!’” And like that, Somerset became one of nearly a dozen verified authentic terracotta amphorae producers in the U.S.

After the long drive back to Temecula, winemaker David Raffaele began experimenting with this unfamiliar material. Based upon his research, David decided that Syrah’s natural resistance to oxygen would lend itself to the breathable, micro-oxygenating surface. But beyond that, he didn’t know what to expect. The acidity would drop as the wine matured, giving it a creamy smooth mouthfeel with more pronounced earthy and savory notes. David also noted that the terracotta imparted a chalky minerality.

Smitten with the initial results, Kurt went all-in on investing in additional clay vessels - purchasing a small, cigar-shaped 64-gallon terracotta vessel and a massive, 10 ton 500-gallon vessel made from terracotta, sandstone, cement, and ancient Roman brick. With a multitude of options at his disposal, David evaluates the flavor and structure of each wine weekly, “I’m still learning, honestly. I think there is a sweet spot. As it micro-oxygenates, it may lessen the maturity length.” His current red wines template combines equal parts French Oak barrel aging, amphorae aging, and bottle aging. Each step imparts specific qualities to the flavor and structure yet is as flexible as needed. “We’ll continue and modify as we go along. I like how amphorae focus the tannin on the center of the tongue, bringing balance to the wine. Whereas oak gives the wine a solid backbone to build off of.”

As of late 2020, Somerset had just recently released that initial “experimental” 2018 Syrah for purchase. And their first white wine, a wildly exotic Spanish-themed blend of Xerello, Macabeo, Verdelho, and Garnacha Blanca, should be available in early 2021. Recent vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah are gracefully aging in their respective vessels. At the same time, plans include two different red blends: Tempranillo-Monastrell-Grenache and Sangiovese-Barbera.

TOP PICKS - RED

SUBTLE - DRIED HERB - BLACK FRUITS

2015 Palumbo Family “Sophia’s Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon

Redolent with the aromas of black plum, balsamic vinegar, dried sage, and roasted bell pepper. Lighter-bodied than expected, the subtle, layered palate shows fleshy black currant, lead pencil, tea leaf, olive brine, toasted vanilla, and eucalyptus. Fine-grained tannin and a breezy 14.1% alcohol gives this an easy, early-drinking appeal with enough structure to improve.

EXCELLENT+

BOLD - EARTHY - JAMMY BLACK PLUM

2015 Fazeli Hafez

A bold, expansive blend of Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon built for those that love this style of wine. Jam packed with black plum and black currant, and supported by flavors of cedar, vanilla, black licorice, black pepper, and earthy undertones. Supple tannins and a well-disguised 14.9% abv.

EXCELLENT

SMOOTH - PEPPER - CANDIED CHERRY

2016 Vindemia “More Cowbell” Zinfandel

This cheerful, smooth sip cranks out as much candied cherry and berry confection as Will Ferrell’s exuberant cowbell banging does in the infamous SNL skit. Bold flavors of licorice, wet stones, and black pepper meet up with toasty, sweet vanilla oak notes on the juicy palate.

EXCELLENT

POLISHED - BAKING SPICE - PLUMS

2016 Oak Mountain Cabernet Franc

Plum, raspberry, and currant notes are accented by smoked Ancho Peppers on the nose. Rich black plums and roasted red peppers carry the polished, fuller-bodied palate, with currant leaf, cardamom, and baking spice on the finish. Moroccan Beef Stew or grilled Sausages would be a fun pairing this Winter.

VERY GOOD+



Callaway Vineyard & Winery

“We want to focus on and show the distinct terroir of Temecula Valley, and especially the vineyards of Callaway Winery.”

CRAIG LARSON, WINEMAKER

Not only is yeast the primary reason for alcoholic fermentation, but it is also one of the more significant factors contributing to taste. Yeast imparts a wide variety of flavors and aromas - cream, sourdough, butter, cheese, hay, sauerkraut, and even soy sauce. Today’s winemakers can choose between cultured yeasts or native yeasts, and sometimes a combination of both. Cultured or commercial yeast fermentation gives the winemaker better control and confidence-inspiring consistency every time you use it. In contrast, a wild fermentation uses natural (or indigenous, if you prefer) yeast found on grapes in the vineyard, the cellar, the winery, and winemaking equipment for fermentation.

Relying on native yeasts allows a winemaker to capture the essence of *terroir* - vineyard, climate, soil, weather, vintage - in a bottle. On the other hand, challenging things can occur during fermentation. Off-flavors of horse manure and rotten eggs can overwhelm the wine, *Brettanomyces* contamination can ruin the wine, or the fermentation can stop. Even the chemicals used in poorly managed vineyards can decimate the microflora in the native yeast. So, it’s quite a winemaking decision to weigh if the risk is worth taking.

With Cabernet Sauvignon’s 2012 vintage, Callaway Winery winemaker Craig Larson kickstarted what would become their “Wild Yeast” program. “We want to focus on and show the distinct terroir of Temecula Valley, and especially the vineyards of Callaway Winery.” Since then, single-variety bottlings of Viognier, Syrah, and Petite Sirah have debuted. Wild fermentation produces wines that are not as fruit-forward as their cultured yeast counterparts. Additionally, they are usually lower in alcohol with complex, savory flavors ranging from olive brine, salt, truffle, and dried leaves to wildflowers, brioche, and cheese rind. White wines can feel more creamy/oily in the mouth, and red wines can feel more sharp/spicy/tangy.

To prevent any of the wines from going sideways, Craig monitors each fermentation daily. “Wild yeast wines need more nutrients during fermentation. And need to be monitored daily for off-odors or any signs of contamination. It can change rapidly.” Post-fermentation, he finds that the wines don’t show their real character until about eight months in barrel - which is more time than their commercial yeast counterparts.

According to Craig, despite many consumer’s unfamiliarities with wild fermentation, reactions have been positive. “The tasting room team points out the difference between the two yeast styles and their attributes, often doing a side-by-side tasting of the same variety. Our guests, particularly Wine Club members, have been very positive. With many preferring the “Wild Yeast” versions.” So far, Craig believes that the best results are in Callaway’s Cabernet Sauvignon and Viognier. However, each variety develops unique characteristics that vary from vintage to vintage, allowing people to find a wine that favors their palate. The Callaway team is looking for ways to expand the offerings too. Plans call for Tempranillo, a grape that shows quite well in Temecula, and possibly some blends.



Somerset Vineyard & Winery Reviews

Somerset co-owner Kurt Tiedt and winemaker David Raffaele were kind enough to share barrel samples of two of their amphorae wines. The **2019 Syrah (NR)** was resting away in their 500-gallon terracotta vessel after spending eight months in French Oak. While it was wildly floral with fresh berry fruit, the palate was noticeably chalky. This wine is the first wine to age in the vessel, and it will be interesting to revisit this wine a year or two down the road. The recently bottled **2020 Amphorae Blanca (EXC+)** is a wildly exotic Spanish-themed blend of Xerello, Macabeo, Verdelho, and Garnacha Blanca. Fragrant, ethereal aromas of peach, gooseberry, honeysuckle, chamomile tea, and fresh spring flowers leap from the glass. Behind it sits an unmistakable chalky minerality, sage honey, and orange peel. Deceptively smooth when it hits the mouth, a creamy mid-palate leads to an exciting, tension-filled finish that is long with notes of white pepper and ginger root. As unique as you will find in Temecula or anywhere else.

The **2017 Le Meridio (EXC)** (53% Grenache, 31% Cinsault, 16% Mourvedre) is a Southwest France inspired flashy red blend that offers up an overflowing jammy core of red and blue fruits. Backed by vibrant acidity and solid tannins, layered notes of rose petal, white pepper, bourbon, vanilla bean, and raw pipe tobacco are prevalent on the electric finish. “Fresh” would be the best way to describe Somerset’s **2018 Cabernet Sauvignon (VG)**. This sourced fruit bottling shows a bit of gritty tannin to go with a fresh fruity profile supported by mint, graphite, mineral, and green pepper notes. Not the usual “big” Cab many might be accustomed to tasting. Finally, the **2019 Viognier (VG)** is everything most would expect from a Southern California take on this variety - highly aromatic flavors of honeysuckle, musk, and peach accompanied by a waxy, high alcohol palate and a touch of nuttiness.

Callaway Vineyard & Winery Reviews

I decided to concentrate my tasting notes on Rhone varietals that I know exceptionally well - Syrah and Viognier. The **2017 Winemakers Reserve Syrah (VG)** is not unlike most Temecula Syrah - ripe, sweet boysenberry and plum fruited, herbal, and influenced by oak. Lighter in color and more rounded in tannin, this approachable Syrah nimbly balances black pepper, licorice, violets, bacon fat, sweet tobacco, chocolate, and toast notes. However, as we move over to the **2015 Wild Yeast Syrah (VG)**, the quirky, piquant notes take center stage. Aggressive, savory aromas of olive brine, fresh-picked tobacco, black truffle, and green peppercorn flow from the glass. Behind that sits cassis, blackberry, eucalyptus, vanilla, and coconut. Unlike the Winemakers Reserve, the palate is quite sharp with lively acidity, tangy bitter orange peel, tart rhubarb, and drying tannin. It won’t be a win for everyone, though it is pretty darn intriguing. But perhaps it needs a little age to show what the **2013 Wild Yeast Syrah (VG+)** has going for it. A few years of bottle age, and perhaps a little riper fruit and darker barrel toast, is reflected in the richer molasses, brown sugar, and coffee flavors. The alcohol is a bit higher than the 2015 bottle, and the acidity is a bit lower. Those aspects, along with the savory/herbal notes, provide a more balanced, enjoyable experience. Pair both wines with some black truffle, wild mushroom risotto, or a coffee/maple syrup brined pork chop. Lastly, the wild yeast fermentation followed by 63% French Oak maturation adds a lush, hedonistic, fleshy texture to the **2017 Wild Yeast Viognier (VG)**. Creamy butter, brioche, caramel, clove, and vanilla notes integrate nicely with the primary varietal flavors - tropical fruit, peach, apricot, and honeysuckle. Given the rich, creamy aspects of this wine, many will find it comparable to an oaky Chardonnay.

WHITE & SPARKLING

FRESH - GREEN TEA - GUAVA & APPLE

2018 South Coast Chardonnay Sans Chêne

Shows super-fresh, juicy fruit flavors of citrus, guava, melon, and apple. An energetic acidity supports the pure varietal fruitiness and finishes with subtle layers of gravel, lemon peel, honey, and green tea leaf. Surprisingly concentrated for wine in its price range, at roughly \$10 this is one Temecula’s few value bottlings.

VERY GOOD

FOCUSED - FLORAL - STRAWBERRY

2019 Akash Winery Rosé of Zinfandel

Lazer focused linear flavors of tangy cherry and wild strawberry, jasmine and rose petal, green tea leaf, and fresh-cut tarragon and thyme. The finish shows some slight tannic bite while a stony minerality lingers on the palate. One of Temecula’s best Rosés and due to the beautiful bottle, a strong contender Temecula’s most distinctive wine.

EXCELLENT

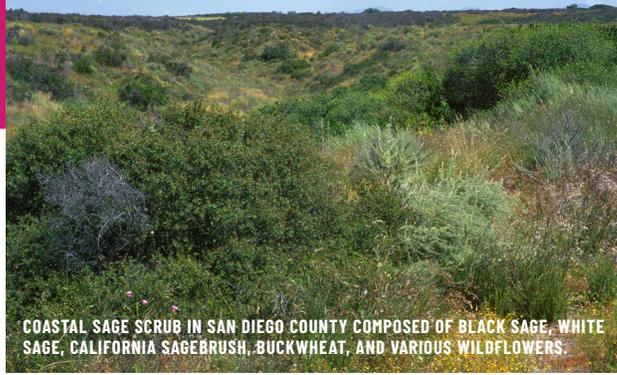
OTHER WINES

- 2009 Vindemia Syrah (EXC)
- 2019 Palumbo Viognier (EXC)
- 2017 Wiens Family “Waxman Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon (VG+)
- 2019 Uys Family Vineyard Grenache Blanc (VG+)
- 2014 Fazeli Yalda (VG+)
- 2019 Doffo Viognier (VG)
- 2017 Oak Mountain Steve Wine (VG)
- 2017 Robert Renzoni Montepulciano (VG)
- 2016 Frangipani Sangiovese (VG)
- 2019 Otra Cosa Grenache Carbonic (VG)
- 2015 Lorenzi Estate Syrah Private Reserve (VG)

Chaparral

The Essence of Temecula Wine

For anyone who's driven through Temecula wine country, the shrub-covered steep rocky hillsides are unmistakable. Besides providing erosion control and natural habitats, these beautiful Spring blooming plant varieties give off an array of aromas that permeate the air. Pungent scents of fennel and licorice, sage, lavender, rosemary, lilac, mint, lemon, and sweet floral are typical in this habitat.



COASTAL SAGE SCRUB IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY COMPOSED OF BLACK SAGE, WHITE SAGE, CALIFORNIA SAGEBRUSH, BUCKWHEAT, AND VARIOUS WILDFLOWERS.

PHOTO: CC BY SA-4.0

Chaparral, or Creosote bush, is a dense desert evergreen shrub that thrives in the arid, drought-affected American Southwest. In broader terms, the term *chaparral* describes the overall landscape of the area, including Creosote, a wide variety of Sage, Sagebrush, Juniper, and Ribbonwood. In the wine world, it's a term not unlike what describes a similar occurrence in France's southern Rhone Valley - *garrigue*. Kermit Lynch, the famous wine writer, describes *garrigue* as "a concentration of resinous herbs and flowers, giving such environments a distinctive scent. Furthermore, the perfume is especially palpable in the summer when the sun's heat causes these plants to release their oils, creating an unmistakably Mediterranean essence that saturates the air." Temecula climate and landscape can be considered Mediterranean, so it's no surprise that similarities exist beyond geography and weather.

Wines produced from chaparral-ridden areas are often described as an herbaceous bouquet recalling the wild vegetation covering the hillsides. While it may sound like a romanticized power of suggestion, scientists have proven that grape skins' waxy texture can capture the aromatic compounds and impart those flavors in the finished wine. For someone who has tasted a vast amount of Temecula wine, I find that the best wines display this local terroir in the way of sun-baked earth, a mix of dried herbs, and sometimes sweet flowers (such as jasmine and honeysuckle).

Several Temecula producers make fine examples that show *chaparral* influence. Sangiovese, GSM/Rhone blends, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Viognier varieties show the most impact. In particular, seek out bottles of **Fazeli Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon Khayyam**, **Lorenzi Estate Syrah Private Reserve**, **Danza Del Sol GSM**, **Carter Estate Winery Malbec**, **Frangipani Sangiovese**, and **Viognier from Doffo or Palumbo**.

The next time you find yourself drinking a glass, bury your nose deep in that Temecula wine to see if you can detect the redolence of chaparral's beautiful wild herb and floral influence. *Cheers!*

Elements of Wine Class

Elements of Wine is a bi-weekly wine class designed to help you better understand your preferences and expand your world in terms of wine communication. Learn to identify grape varietals, structure, winemaking, regions, and quality. The class is open to all levels of interest - beginner to expert.



Classes meet bi-weekly on Sunday afternoons between Noon and 2:00 pm at Grapes and Grains (28061 Jefferson Ave. #5, Temecula, CA 92590). Classes usually last for 90 minutes. A small \$10 donation covers the cost of the 4-6 wines being poured. Contact Brian at 951-297-7203 or grapesngrainsca@gmail.com for more information.

Upcoming Classes

February 7	Sweet & Dessert Wines
February 21	Volcanic Wines
March 7	Fruit Flavors in Wine
March 21	Tempranillo!
April 4	Rare Grape Varieties

Sandy Hermes
 Broker Associate, DRE# 00882719
 (760)791-1547 cell | (951)261-8768 efax
 Coldwell Banker Realty
 32675 Temecula Parkway | Temecula CA 92592
www.sandysellsyourhome.com

[sandysellsyourhomesocal](https://www.facebook.com/sandysellsyourhomesocal)
 Love wine? Join me at FB Group:
 Temecula Winery Lovers

OUR RATING SYSTEM

CLASSIC

97-100. The pinnacle of quality.

OUTSTANDING

94-96. A great wine.

EXC - Excellent

90-93. Exceptional style & quality.

VG - Very Good

87-89. Special qualities.

G - Good

84-86. Solid, well-made

AVG - Average

80-83. Simple, drinkable

NR - Not Rated

+ Signifies a wine of elevated quality within that rating tier

ABOUT THE QUARTERLY

The *Temecula Wine Quarterly* is devoted to the independent discussion on the style and quality of Temecula Valley wines. Wine tastings occurred in a non-blind format between April 2020 and January 2021. TWQ hopes you have found our third edition educational, exciting, and enjoyable. Please contact me with any comments or suggestions.

Richard R. DeLucio, aka Vino Temecula (@vinotemecula), has been collecting and tasting wine for over two decades. He currently holds WSET 3 certification and is a wine educator in Temecula at Grapes & Grains. Some of his greatest wine memories include tasting multiple vintages of old Barbaresco with Angelo Gaja, attending extensive Bordeaux horizontal tastings, and sharing amazing bottles of old Vintage Port with great friends. Over the past two years, Richard has tasted over 1,000 bottles of Temecula wine. He is hopeful that vineyard improvements, climate management, winemaking, and consumer education will lead to an increase in quality.

Quality matters.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, OR
 TO RECEIVE A PRINT COPY PLEASE

VISIT - TEMECULAWINEQUARTERLY.COM
OR EMAIL - VINOTEMECULA@GMAIL.COM