



THE CELLAR

Wine Fit for Palisadians
By Patrick Frank

Coaching Grape Vines and Water Polo

By PATRICK FRANK
Contributing Writer

When commercial real estate broker Dean Heck became a member of the fundraising committee for the Maggie Gilbert Aquatic Center, he already had the dream of owning his own vineyard and winery.

When the pools opened in 2010, he began a five-year stint as coach of several Westside Aquatics water polo teams, using expertise that he had gained as a multi-year member of the nationally ranked UCLA varsity squad.

Also in 2010, he and his wife Christi bought a 15-acre lavender ranch just outside Buellton in Santa Barbara wine country. They named the property Lavender Oak and planted half of it to grape vines.

Dean retains a connection to Pacific Palisades through his brother Gary who lives on El Medio Drive. But the winery, which recently released its first home-grown vintages, is taking more and more of his time.

"We figured that this venture would lose money for the first 10 years and it has," Heck shared with the *Palisadian-Post*. But Lavender Oak got off the ground with some of the best help available.

Heck engaged Michael Benedict, an industry veteran who planted the first Pinot Noir grapes in Santa Barbara County in 1975. Benedict serves as botanist and general mentor for Lavender Oak, and he advised Heck to plant Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.

This is because the farm is located in a slightly warmer microclimate than would be normal for the region's famed Pinot Noir. It's still somewhat on the cool side for Cabernet, but that only gives the wines more freshness.

While the Lavender Oak grapevines were reaching maturity, Benedict established a small winery on the property, and he made some tiny batches of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with grapes from the Sanford & Benedict Vineyard that he had planted all those years ago.

The winery still has some bottles of both available from the 2015 vintage, and they are fascinating rarities. The Pinot is medium-bodied with cherries and exotic spices complemented with



Barrel room

Photo by Patrick Frank

cedar notes. The Chardonnay shows leesy flavors and citrus in a fine balance.

The Lavender Oak estate grapes, which are now coming into production, are all planted on the property near the east end of Santa Rosa Road. The vines are closely spaced, with competition for nutrients causing the vines to limit yields. Minimal intervention in the cellar with aging in mostly used barrels is the plan, to let the vineyard express the style.

The 2016 Chardonnay from the Lavender Oak vines continues the winery's focus on balance,

with just the right amount of oak enriching the lemon and wax flavors. The most recent release is the 2014 Estate Red Blend, a mix of Bordeaux varieties that shows red plum and spicy forest floor tones.

It also brings lively tannins at the finish, portending a good future in the cellar. Christi is learning the ropes for winemaking, and she will gradually assume all of those duties over the next few years.

The winery is open only by appointment—for now. Current production totals about 1,000 cas-

es per year. They have just planted nine more rows of Cabernet vines, showing their optimism for the future. Sales come through the website and a mailing list, though Lavender Oak is already on the menu at several restaurants in Santa Barbara County.

When Dean and Christi bought the property, the nearly barn-sized house did not need many modifications. One change that they did make, however, was to install a beautiful 25-yard outdoor swimming pool.



Dean and Christi Heck

Photo courtesy of Christi Heck



Grapes ripening

Photo by Patrick Frank



Photos courtesy of Christi Heck

Worship Directory

CHURCHES

Calvary Church of Pacific Palisades

Sunday Worship Gathering 10:00am
701 Palisades Drive • Pacific Palisades
Connect with us online and on our app:
www.calvarypalisades.org
Calvary Palisades App

Community United Methodist Church

Pastor Wayne B. Walters
Worship: Sundays, 10 a.m., Sunday School, Childcare
Weekly Children and Youth Programs for all ages
www.palisadesmethodist.org
Preschool — Enroll now: 310-454-4600
801 Via de la Paz • Pacific Palisades • 310-454-5529

Corpus Christi Catholic Church

Rev. Msgr. Liam Kidney, Pastor
Reverend Larry Neumeier, Associate Pastor

Palisades Lutheran Church

Pastor Bart Loos
Sunday Adult Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Sunday Confirmation Class 8:45-9:45a.m.
Summer Service 10:30 a.m. • Lunch to follow
Communion — 1st & 3rd Sundays
Spiritual Growth Study Thursday 6:30-8:00 p.m.
15905 Sunset Blvd. • 310-459-2358 • www.plc.cc
STAR Preschool @ PLC: Enroll Now • 310-629-2598

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

The Reverend Bruce A. Freeman, Rector
The Reverend Christine Purcell, Associate Rector
Sunday Services: 8:00 am Holy Eucharist,
10:15 am Choral Eucharist
and Children's Education
Nursery/Toddler Care available
Weekday worship: Wednesdays, 10:00 am
1031 Bienvenida • Pacific Palisades • 310-454-1358
www.stmatthews.com

REPRESENTING EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE & THEIR HOMES

RANDY FREEMAN