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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2015

Local winemaker opens tasting room at Casa de la Guerra

By GARE SAGLE
NEW PRESS COMMUNITY NP

Santa Barbara’s newest wine tasting room is in fact, a link to its past. I love this space,” winemaker John Wright tells the News-Press in an exclusive interview. “It’s original, and it’s rustic in an organic and natural way.”

Mr. Wright, 46, has transformed a small room inside Casa de la Guerra into a wine venue. He calls it “The Bodega, which is Spanish for ‘warehouse.’ For years, this quaint, 400-square-foot space, with undulating adobe walls and waning patches of paint, was used as a storage room. But Mr. Wright’s goal is to return it to its 19th century roots, when los de la Guerra, the fifth constable of the Presidio, used it as a wine cellar.

Casa de la Guerra was built between 1839 and 1858. It became the social epicenter of Santa Barbara at the time, and Mr. de la Guerra’s descendants actually used it as a residence all the way into the 1940s. Today, it’s part of the picturesque El Paseo crenellations, just off State Street, and is under the auspices of the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, which runs it as a museum.

The trust tasked Mr. Wright with the modern-day use of the former wine cellar as much as for his knack as a winemaker as for his expertise as a preservation architect. The group’s goal was to find a creative and deferential way to increase visitor foot traffic to the historic Casa.

“I spent many years restoring farmhouses and barns on the East Coast, throughout New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania,” says Mr. Wright, who earned myriad degrees in historic preservation from the University of Maryland and new lives in Santa Ynez.”

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The Bodega tasting room was added as a creative way to increase visitor foot traffic to historic Casa de la Guerra.

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IF YOU GO
Standing Sun’s The Bodega is located at Casa de la Guerra, 15 E. de la Guerra. St. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday. For more information, call 805-565-7015 or go to www.santabarbaranewspress.com.
Mr. Wright’s hands-off approach to the use of this former wine cellar means adding freestanding elements, like a leather couch and half-barrel tables, and hanging original paintings using already-existing holes in the walls.

The Standing Sun label, with a focus on Rhone wines, is offered via a tasting flight or by the glass.

From architecture to winemaking

For his Casa de la Guerra location specifically, John Wright plans to introduce a second label sometime in 2016. He’s also working on intimate seating in the open-air courtyard that overlooks both The Bodega and De la Guerra Plaza across the street.

Standing Sun operates a tasting room in Buellton that doubles as both a concert venue for various high-profile groups and an art gallery.

For his Casa de la Guerra location specifically, Mr. Wright plans to introduce a second label sometime in 2016. He’s also working on intimate seating in the open-air courtyard that overlooks both The Bodega and De la Guerra Plaza across the street. For now, Mr. Wright is offering a tasting of six wines for $15, and he’s selling wines by the glass.

“We’ll have wines by the carafe soon, as well as food components, like cheese and charcuterie plates,” he says. “I’m trying to create a cool, laid-back place for locals to walk in, kick back and just enjoy some wine.” And get a little taste of Santa Barbara history, too.

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John Wright was an ideal fit for opening the new wine tasting room at Casa de la Guerra because of his experience as a preservation architect.