

Santa Barbara Urban Wine Trail Part 1

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Enthusiastic wine lovers crowd the Grassini Family Vineyards tasting room on the Santa Barbara Urban Wine Trail.

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Explore the wines of Santa Barbara County in the urban winescape of downtown Santa Barbara, the [Urban Wine Trail](#) of America's Riviera. [Wine tasting](#) in this coastal paradise is an epicurean delight, a joyful treasure hunt of [Santa Barbara County wines](#), dotted with mouth-watering food stops along the way.

Seventeen tasting rooms, most clustered like wine grapes in Santa Barbara's [Funk Zone](#), give day trippers and vacationers a chance to maximize their wine tasting. Instead of bumping around Santa Barbara County's vineyard covered hillsides, you can relax and leisurely sip wine in the city. Amble through downtown, from the hills to the sea, and discover many small production wines that don't have their own dedicated tasting rooms in their vineyards. Here are some of the standout stars from my day of tasting, six tasting rooms, one lunch, one



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afternoon pastry, and one dinner, a fun outing along the wine trail. Where wine lives, great food follows, and there are numerous choices, from French bakeries to gourmet bistros to taco stands.

Au Bon Climat Library Tasting Room, located in the historic El Paseo complex on Anacapa Street, is a rustic, welcoming space. Long wooden bars offer ample space to linger over the current flight of 6 wines, and sometimes a few extra, depending on what's open, on sale, or just released. **Au Bon Climat** crafts distinctive, elegant wines, long on flavor, and light on alcohol. Focused on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, made in the classic Burgundian style, these wines reflect the best of California's Central Coast and the skill of winemaker Jim Clendenen. Six wine tastes for \$10, plus a few bonus wines, was a great way to kick off the tour, and Madeleine, my wine host, was gracious and informative. The **2007 Au Bon Climat Santa Maria Valley Chardonnay** is a rich, balanced wine with good acidity, aromas and flavors of baked apple, pear, baking spices, notes of tropical fruit and hint of fig, with some oak framing, normally \$40 retail but offered as part of a mix and match case special, discounted 40%. The **2007 Au Bon Climat Nielson Vineyard Pinot Noir** is black cherry fruit, toasty oak, with an edge of black tea, very nice and balanced, although not the usual European Au Bon Climat style. The 2001 Vita Nova Santa Barbara County "Reservatum", a blend of Merlot, Sangiovese, and Cabernet Franc, has an intriguing nose of blackberry, dark plum, and spice with a stemmy herbal note, a nicely balanced blend. And my favorite, an unusual offering, was the **2006 Clendenen Family Vineyards Bien Nacido Petit Verdot**. Wow, what is usually a blending grape in France shines on its own here in California. It's an elegant, dark-fruited, violet-scented beauty, balanced, good acidity, with a long finish, and good persistency of fruit flavor. I snatched up one of the few remaining bottles, an unexpected jewel of a wine. Note, if you buy a bottle of wine at any of the tasting rooms in this article, they waive the tasting fee, good incentive to find something you like.

Without leaving the El Paseo complex, I went out the door, turned the corner, and walked into the **Grassini Family Vineyards** tasting room. They specialize in Bordeaux varietals grown on their estate vineyard in the **Happy Canyon AVA** of Santa Ynez, especially renowned for growing top Sauvignon Blanc. A flight of three wines was offered, for a \$10 fee. The **2009 Grassini Family Estate Sauvignon Blanc** is a very rich, round, guava, peach, ripe apple, butterscotch flavors from smoky oak, a very different wine from its European counterparts, to me, more Chardonnay-like because of the oak.

Still within El Paseo, another local legend, **Margerum Cellars**, was closed due to a tasting room renovation, and I look forward to visiting them soon, to evaluate what are widely acclaimed as premium wines, made in limited quantities from the best grapes grown. Margerum has many wines in their lineup, from Sauvignon Blanc to Syrah. Doug Margerum has also assembled an import wine portfolio, from France to Italy to Slovenia, that should prove a fascinating contrast to California.

Part 2



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