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Dreaming of lazy days with Spanish wine

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CHEERS FROM THE VINEYARD

These hectic days of the winter holiday season makes me wish for those lazy days of autumn, especially the sunny, warm afternoons when you can kick back and relax by sipping a glass of Spanish wine.

If I had my druthers, I'd rather be sitting in a vineyard atop a hill along the Central California coast than standing in a line backed up through the front doors of a store selling the latest electronic gizmos for Christmas.

I'd rather be with Louisa Sawyer Lindquist; her husband, Bob Lindquist; and my wife, speculating on what the 2005 harvest has brought or on why on God's earth this enterprising mother is making classic Spanish wines in a metal barn off a remote road near the metropolis of Sisquoc, Santa Barbara County.

Louisa is the soul of the Verdad Wine Cellars, who says she fell in love with Spanish albariño and tempranillo in the late 1980s while working in a wine shop on Long Island, N.Y. This wasn't her first attachment to wines. That came in 1982 when, as a 21-year-old, she took an externship from Long Island University to be a "cellar rat" at Hargrave Winery on the island.

Soon after her discovery of the Spanish varietals as extremely food-friendly and good aperitifs, she became a fine wine importer and distributor first in New York and then in San Francisco. The latter city is where she got to know Bob Lindquist and his Qupé wines. Soon thereafter, she became a saleswoman for Qupé.

Although there are a lot of similarities between the Spanish wine country and California, very little albariño or tempranillo had been planted. She obtained cuttings from the vineyards of Bryan Babcock in the Santa Rita Hills, and in 2000 she planted small blocks of the two grape varietals at the Ibarra-Young Vineyard in Los Olivos, where there are foggy mornings and warm, sunny afternoons.

The 2004 Verdad Wine Cellars Albariño (\$18 a bottle) is a complexity of aromas and flavors. The bouquet is floral with hints of orange blossoms, but the flavors of lemons, Asian pears and melons are tart. There is a touch of smoke, almonds and minerals in a crisp, but lingering finish. To get this nose and tastes, 75 percent of the must after the grapes were crushed was stored in stainless steel tanks and 25 percent was housed in neutral oak during the cool fermentation.

The 2004 Verdad Wine Cellars Rose (\$14) is a treat. It's 95 percent grenache and 5 percent estate tempranillo that spent six months in neutral oak barrels. The flavors are wild strawberries and cranberries with a smoky middle and a caramel finish.

The varietal that demonstrates Louisa's flair as a grower/winemaker/saleswoman is her tempranillo. The 2002 and 2003 vintages are night and day. The '02 (\$17) is bold, dark, deep and rich, with its blackberry flavor tamed by new oak. The '03 (\$20) is soft, dainty and mellow with a pinot noir-like look, aroma and taste. The '02 is blended with Bien Nacido Vineyard syrah, and the '03 is composed of 67

percent tempranillo, 17 percent syrah and 16 percent grenache.

In reviewing my tasting notes from that lazy, autumn-like day I spent with the Lindquists, one phrase was penciled again and again with all of Louisa's bottled successes: "Great sipping wine."

To reach Verdad Wine Cellars, call 805-784-0747 or visit www.verdadwines.com.

• To reach Jack Eddy about his column, Cheers from the Vineyard, which runs weekly in Our Town, call him at 830-4233, fax to 835-0655, or e-mail jwe@tracypress.com.

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