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AND FUN

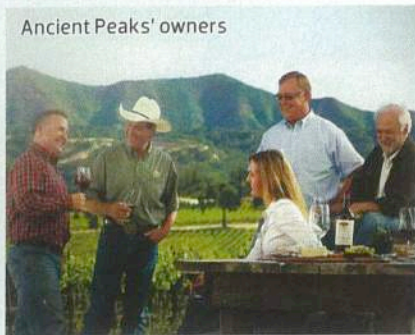


FEBRUARY 2015 | \$4.95

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Ancient Peaks' owners

Just listen to Mike Sinor, board president of the SLO Wine Country association and director of winemaking at **Ancient Peaks Winery**, and you get a sense of the community. "There's the small-town vibe and so much camaraderie," says Sinor, who acquired **Bassi Ranch Vineyard** in 2013 and makes artisan wines under his own Sinor-LaVallee label. "We're farmers. Everyone shares."

Do a winery hop, and you discover he's right. Sinor might make wine for Ancient Peaks and grow his own grapes for his label, but he'll send visitors to **Tolosa** winery for chardonnay or to **Kynsi Winery** for a certain pinot noir from a specific block of a certain vineyard (Estate Stone Corral, actually) that takes its name from the original Spanish land grant for much of the Edna Valley. Sinor knows his stuff, and he knows his neighbors. He tilts glasses with them regularly and tells stories that go back decades. Similarly, Brian Talley of **Talley Vineyards/Talley Farms** will happily speak highly of wines from **Laetitia** or **Chamisal** wineries—as he sits sampling with yet another winery's winemakers—and so forth. The people in the SLO wine industry, from the winemakers to vineyard owners to Cal Poly viticulture interns, all speak of information shares, idea swaps and equipment trades, and whenever more than one SLO wine geek turns up in the same room, they talk grapes, soil, wind, harvest. When asked

if awards erupt jealousy, they laugh and shake their heads. "There's plenty to go around," says Jac Jacobs, winemaker for **Kelsey See Canyon Vineyards**. "This is a lifestyle, not a competition."

Food goes with wine—or it might be the other way 'round. Either way, the region teems with the goods. Olives, avocados, berries, apples, asparagus, melons, lettuces and other greens, corn, pomegranates, herbs—name it, and it grows in San Luis Obispo County, some of it on Brian Talley's family farm, which runs one of the area's most active Community Supported Agriculture programs. Add to that the local meat and poultry, much of it sustainably pasture raised, and seafood plucked straight from the sea, and the SLO plate packs a tasty punch.

Go ahead, head south for some food and wine. Yes, we realize we're sending you right past Paso Robles, the more famous wine region to San Luis Obispo's north, but nothing's stopping you from stopping there as well. Just make sure to devote at least a few days to the SLO scene. It's got its own flavor. But before you go, one bit of advice: Bring a cooler.

#### WHERE TO STAY

For a combination beach, food and wine getaway, stay in Avila Beach, a little village of shops and restaurants hugging the waterfront. At **Avila La Fonda**, a boutique hotel with 28 rooms, you'll find Spanish and Mexican architecture, fountains, stained-glass windows—and a whirlpool tub for two in every room. It's a richly colorful cocoon, and one block away: the beach. Another favorite aspect of Avila La Fonda: the munchies. Morning chocolate chip croissants and



Avila La Fonda

## DRINK AND DON'T DRIVE



Laura Jeffrey of **101 Wine Tours** knows how to (help you) have a good time. Behind the wheel of her Mercedes Sprinter van, she will lead you on a tour of San Luis Obispo's wineries and fill you in on the back stories, too. From her time spent volunteering at local wine events—including as wine coordinator for the San Luis Obispo Jazz Festival—Jeffrey knows the winemakers, the wineries and the wines, and she's happy to share her knowledge while she totes visitors to and fro. She and her husband, Dave, moved to the area when their son Kyle began studying enology and viticulture at Cal Poly, and she threw herself into the world of wine, even making a few barrels of it herself. She'll customize a tour for your group; the van seats 12, the air-conditioning/heat works front, middle and back, and the broad windows allow for scenery viewing from all angles. Plus, Jeffrey brings snacks.

TOP LEFT: CHRIS LESCHINSKY