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Carmel's Newest Tasting Room: Also Its Most Unique

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There's something different about Carmel's newest tasting room, **Caraccioli Cellars** (622-7722).

It's the educated effervescence of magnetic manager **Jill Botelho** (above left).



No, wait, it's the lively-but-loungy, hip-but-old-world feel generated by architect **Si Teller**'s eye, the ceiling-high riddling wall in the back (above), the hanging glass shelves and varying stone, wood and leather textures. (Riddling walls allowed vitners to rotate bottles of fermenting, yeasty Champagne over time.)

No, it's the fact that C.C. ferments both sparkling and still Monterey County wines with differentiated excellence.

OK, it's all of the above, and each of the elements is striking.

Better yet, the fact that the place is already generating buzz after just a few weeks bodes well for the peerless **Dolores Street** food scene. The thick wooden bar, albeit small, was at capacity the entire time I was there (it opens at 2pm), despite the fact it was an early Wednesday evening and flights aren't cheap (\$12). There are also tastes for \$4 and some nice snacks upscale salumes, cheeses and such.



Sparkling winemaker **Michele Salgues** pioneered **Anderson Valley** for top bubbly makers **Roderer Estate** before he came to Santa Lucia Highlands, where C.C. grows its own grapes on the **Escarole Vineyard** but currently contracts with neighboring **Talbott** for some of its best fruit.



His 2006 Brut Cuvee Champagne (\$53) rode the tiniest bubbles to a walk-on-air crispness that was chased by a long, soft finish provided by the 40 percent Pinot; his Brut Cuvee Rosé (\$57), meanwhile, enjoyed the palest pink tint and a richness you don't get with bubbles too often.



I took home a bottle of still winemaker Joe Rawritzer's lively, light and mineraly 2007 Chardonnay (\$29) over his acidic-but-still-full-bodied '08 (also \$29).



I also joined the ranks of those surprised by the unique profile of the 2007 Pinot Noir (\$47), a smoky, fruity testament to their desire to do small plot wines with both uniqueness and distinction until they've established a name for themselves.

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