



The Wine Guy - Greg Walter

Three great Glen Ellen tasting rooms

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Being as focused as I am on the town of Sonoma proper in general — I live here, work here and for the most part play here — it's easy sometimes to forget about other places around this really great valley we live in. Glen Ellen is a great example. Here are three great places to visit up there that also just happen to make seriously great wines.

Pangloss Cellars

The name Erich Bradley should be familiar to a lot of you reading this. The quality of Erich's Pinots at Sojourn Cellars have placed him pretty high on the list of top Pinot winemakers as far as I am concerned.

Pangloss Cellars is the sister winery to a truly ambitious venture Erich and partners launched a few years ago called Repris Wines, based up at the Moon Mountain Vineyard and the winery that was originally Carmenet in the mountain range that divides the Sonoma and Napa valleys. While Repris focuses only on wines made from the Moon Mountain estate, the Pangloss label is focused on approachable wines sourced from other top vineyards in the North Coast.

The name Pangloss comes from Voltaire's fictional character of the same name that stood for the idea of optimistic thinking. Wines produced include Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Sauvignon Blanc and three excellent red blends named "Red Blend," "Tenacity" and "Optimism." Pinot bottlings include an Anderson Valley blend and a vineyard designate from the Charles Vineyard in Anderson Valley.

The Pangloss Cellars tasting room is located 13750 Arnold Drive in Glen Ellen and is open daily from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, call 933.8565 or visit Panglosscellars.com.

Talisman Wines

Scott and Marta Rich are the founders and owners of Talisman Wines, a small-lot Pinot Noir specialist winery with their winery in Sonoma and a new tasting room in Glen Ellen.

Scott has broad experience as a winemaker — he's worked as winemaker for the old Carneros Creek Winery and Etude and in addition to Talisman and some consulting he's also winemaker and general manager of Moraga Vineyards in Southern California. Scott's experience and intuition about wine and Pinot in particular are reflected in his wines; they are soulful, deep expressions of the vineyard. The Talisman Pinots are texture-driven, age well and well worth your attention.

And after two decades of making Pinot Noir, the couple decided to take the leap and open a tasting room; a comfortable, "living room" style room in a 110-year old building in the heart of Glen Ellen.

Talisman's Pinot bottlings include a Sonoma County Cuvee and vineyard designates from the Spring Hill Vineyard in Sonoma Coast, Adastra Vineyard in Carneros, Red Dog Vineyard in Sonoma Mountain, Wildcat Mountain Vineyard in Carneros, Gunsalus Vineyard in Russian River Valley and Weir Vineyard in the Yorkville Highlands.

The Talisman Wines tasting room is located 13651 Arnold Drive in Glen Ellen and is open Thursday through Monday from 12 noon to 5 p.m. Appointments are encouraged. For more information, call 721.1628 or visit Talismanwine.com.

Benziger Family Winery

Benziger is one of the only wineries that is always on my short list of recommendations when people ask for wineries to visit. The reason? This family owned and operated winery really is the total package. A beautiful winery and vineyard estate located off the beaten path, but easy to get to; terrific wines across the board and on top of it all a commitment to sustainability and biodynamics that is not just some trendy idea from the marketing department.

All of this started in the late 1970s when Mike Benziger, the oldest son of Bruno and Helen Benziger and his wife Mary found the property that would become the Benziger wine estate in Glen Ellen. Early on Mike's brothers Bob, Joe and Jerry and sister Patsy and her husband Tim Wallace (now company president) joined the business with the rest of the family coming out west and on board soon after.

Today, Benziger Family Winery produces a couple of dozen wines across five labels — Benziger Estate, Benziger Family Winery, Signaterra, Tribute and de Coelo. And that doesn't include the related Imagery Estate Winery across the valley to the east along Highway 12. Imagery Estate is another story for another column.

Visiting the winery is a treat —they have great tours of the winery and the vineyard and full menu of tasting options. If you haven't been there, check it out!

Benziger Family Winery is located at 1883 London Ranch Road in Glen Ellen and is open daily for tasting and tours from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For information, please call 490.2739 or visit Benziger.com.



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13651 Arnold Drive, Glen Ellen 95442