

## **I Enlisted in Wine Boot Camp**

By Nancy G. Freeman

“Ten-hut! Time to listen up,” barked “Major” Barbara Drady, would-be drill instructor, wine writer, maker and educator, to twenty recruits gathered in a downtown Saratoga parking lot. We were about to be inducted into Wine Boot Camp, a one-day intensive course in wine appreciation, amidst the redwood-draped slopes of the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Members of the group ranged from carpenters to computer programmers, wine newcomers to experienced drinkers. The one thing we had in common was a desire to have fun. But before we took off for our first maneuver, Drady insisted that we raise our right hands and take the pledge—that we would enjoy the fruits of the vine for the rest of our lives. Then we tossed our car keys into a spit bucket and loaded into the motor pool. We would have to demonstrate sufficient sobriety at the end of the day to get our keys back.

Our first step toward intimacy came with a jostling ride up the graveled switchbacks to Cinnabar Vineyards and Winery. Nestled in the mountains, surrounded by deeply sloping vineyards, Cinnabar was drop-dead gorgeous. But there was no time for gawking. Drady marshaled her forces and turned us over to “Major General”—also known as winemaker—George Troquato. Troquato explained the distressing impact of this record-cool year on his grapes, then marched us into the vineyards where we studied the results of his decision to prune half the clusters in hopes of getting the rest to ripen. We harvested random bunches, tossed them into a bucket and crushed them into juice.

Troquato pulled out a red instrument that looked like a small microscope with a slanted end. This was a refractometer, used to measure the sugar level in juice. As we passed it from hand to hand, he said, “Don’t say anything!” But by the time it had gone halfway round, he was too excited. “Did you see 23.5?” he asked. We nodded yes. “Oh great!” Maybe his cabernet grapes were going to make it to full ripeness before the rains.

Next we filed indoors for an aromatic workshop. Twenty-one little cups and two wine glasses were set before each of us. The cups were filled with items whose flavors and aromas—apple, melon, chocolate and others—that are frequently found in wine. The assignment was to learn how to find these flavor elements in eight different wines. As we smelled and tasted, we grew increasingly confident and able to identify the wines. Soon we were calling out aromas and guessing at varieties. Sometimes we were right and sometimes we weren’t. But it didn’t matter. This was camp, after all, and we were drinking wine. The more we drank the better it got.

After lunch, we headed off for Cooper-Garrod Estate Vineyards, yet another glorious spot visibly, audibly and aromatically surrounded by horses. Drady handed us over to “Brigadier General” (Associate Winemaker) Bill Cooper. Cooper wove us through the workings of crushers, hoses and storage tanks, explaining all the steps involved in wine

making. By the time he finished, it was clear that the most valuable piece of equipment in a winemaker's toolkit is a simple plastic picking bin.

With all this information bubbling through our brains, Drady and Cooper ordered us to the blending tables where we created our own personal blends selecting from five different wines. By now many of us were champing at the bit. It was late afternoon and some had signed up for a combination vineyard tour and trail ride on horses of the Garrod Stables. Finally we mounted up and took off along the eastern slopes of the mountains with San Jose glittering in the distance like a tiny jewel. By the time we staggered back with our legs bowed like cartoon cowboys, the party had started and our fellow recruits were socializing like old friends.

“Boot Camp people are the kind who take the raft rides, not the bus,” said Drady. “And they always bond.” She should know. She runs four every year for the general public and approximately 30 for corporate groups.

No one wanted to say good-bye after a dinner that was long, drawn-out and delicious. But at last it was time to head back to Saratoga where, remarkably, we all managed to get our keys back. We left with plenty to prod our memories—our personally bottled blends, our “I survived Boot Camp” T-shirts and certificates claiming that we have become Winemakers First Class.

And I have my own personal memento—two red splashes on an otherwise pristine straw Stetson that just happened to be sitting on a table when someone poured a little too generously. Do I plan to clean them off? Not on your life.

*Information about Wine Boot Camp is available at <http://winebootcamp.com/>. Look up Cinnabar Winery at <http://www.cinnabarwine.com/> and Cooper-Garrod at <http://www.cgv.com/>. Other great wineries to visit in the Santa Cruz Mountains include Thomas Fogarty, <http://www.fogartywinery.com/>, David Bruce, <http://www.davidbrucewinery.com/> and Savannah-Channelle, <http://www.savannahchanelle.com/>.*

## Sent Sovi—

### Crown Jewel Dining in Saratoga

If you're headed for Sent Sovi, prepare for romance. This jewel of a restaurant in bejeweled Saratoga has a cozy French feel with its deeply recessed windows, burnished copper wainscoting and main dining room that seats no more than 35.

Chef Josiah Sloane presents a French/California menu that's in tune with the seasons and executed with precision and flair. Drizzles of aged balsamic vinegar and scatters of sea salt play an important role in his culinary tool kit, coaxing flavors out of ingredients simple and sublime.

Dishes here sing which is why the chef's tasting menu exerts such a powerful pull. A creamy duck paté on toast with microgreens and balsamic vinegar provides two bites of perfectly balanced flavors. The chef's hit on gazpacho comes in a martini glass spiced, colored and flavored with smoked *pimenton*. Foie gras with figs, grapes and pecans is buttery and sublime—particularly with a glass of Sauternes. A almost-too-rich diver scallop heaped with lobster chunks in a bacon-tinged sauce brings the palate close to overload. Fortunately a mango sorbet with balsamic vinegar clears it for a marinated hanger steak on a bed of cheddar mashed potatoes.

In addition to the chef's tasting menu, an à la carte and prix fixe menu are available, both of which change nightly. The restaurant features many Santa Cruz Mountain wines, including Cinnabar and Cooper-Garrod. Check the website, <http://sentsovi.com>, which contains current menus and wine lists. Reservations are available at [www.opentable.com](http://www.opentable.com) as well as by phone. —NGF

*Sent Sovi*  
*14583 Big Basin Way*  
*Saratoga*  
*408-876-3110*