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Sippers' Havens

THE CENTRAL COAST WELCOMES A NEW CROP OF WINE TASTING ROOMS.



Longoria Winery opened its second tasting room recently on downtown Santa Barbara's State Street.

California's wine tasting rooms are evolving. Patrons aren't just angling up to the bar and drinking anymore. Experiences now lean toward the culinary and the immersive, all buoyed by personalized service and stylish designs. Here's a look at a sampling from the newest batch of wine tasting rooms to spring up across the Central Coast.

Longoria Winery, Santa Barbara

A stylish spot that just opened in March along downtown Santa Barbara's State Street marks the second tasting room for Longoria Winery (longoriawine.com), which hosts guests at a location in Lompoc as well. The new spot also helps mark the label's newest chapter, in which owners Brooke and Lindsey Christian acquired it from pioneer winemaker Rick Longoria 40 years after he founded it. "We're thrilled to open a venue that honors the legacy of the Longoria brand and one that will be a showcase for

hospitality," says Brooke Christian.

The 2,100-square-foot tasting room located across from the Paseo Nuevo shopping mall features plenty of natural light and sumptuous decor marked by plush seating and modern design touches. The soothing blue color scheme is inspired by the proximity of Stearns Wharf and the Santa Barbara shoreline. There's also a spacious back patio. Winemaker Eric Wilson produces a wide range of reds and whites, including Bordeaux varieties. Longoria's Spanish varieties, like graciano and tempranillo get high marks. Reservations are recommended.

La Lief Wines, Santa Barbara

One of the newest entries into the hip scene of Santa Barbara's Funk Zone, the new La Lief Wines (lalieffwines.com) tasting room is airy, beachy, laid-back, and dog-friendly. And while what's in the bottle is definitely a big draw, this outpost has quickly become a favorite for community meetups, with groups like the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network, Opera

Santa Barbara, and Women's Economic Ventures holding regular events here.

"Because of the terrible isolation toll of COVID-19, I wanted this tasting room to be a resource for our community," says founder Gretchen Lief, "where people could come together to share—a home away from home—where everybody knows your name."

The brand has also positioned itself as a champion for women. The label's logo features Gaia, goddess of the earth. Winemaker Kris Curran crafted the inaugural 2019- to 2021-vintage wines, and the portfolio is currently run by winemakers Sally Sigouin, who focuses on reds and red blends, and Lauren Rava, who made La Lief's 2021 Sparkling Grenache Rosé. Fruit comes from the brand's proprietary Alamo Creek Ranch in San Luis Obispo County.

Camins 2 Dreams, Lompoc

Camins 2 Dreams (camins2dreams.com) is a label that pays homage to the paths people follow in life to achieve their dreams and is a joint creative effort by the wife-and-wife team of Tara Gomez and Mireia Taribó. Current releases include syrah and grüner veltliner. The winemaking duo enjoys an accomplished pedigree: Gomez, a native Chumash Indian, garnered a following with the tribe's now-shuttered Kita label, while Taribó flourished as an enologist in her native Spain (*camins* is Catalan for *paths*) before an internship in Santa Barbara County would, serendipitously, lead the way to her future partner.

The wines focus on the celebrated cool-climate Sta. Rita Hills region near Lompoc, and the brand's new tasting room which opened in March, was originally earmarked for barrel storage. But its prime location surrounded by other popular wine brands in Lompoc "meant more foot traffic for a tasting room," says Gomez. Decorated by the winemakers, the space features artwork and a bevy of framed accolades. While they're keeping a previously opened Lompoc venue on North F Street for appointment-only tastings, the new location is open for walk-ins on weekends.



La Lief Wines aims for its new tasting room in Santa Barbara's Funk Zone to become a community gathering spot.

Terre et Sang, Los Olivos

The acclaim for the wines from Terre et Sang (terreetsang.com) has been swift: the label launched in 2019 but has quickly become a favorite among collectors. In this mother-and-son enterprise, founders Dalita and Duncan Harmon exercise as much hands-on involvement in the look and feel of their new tasting room as they do in the premium wines they produce.

Located along Grand Avenue in the heart of Los Olivos, the space is an eclectic mix of old and new. A 1905 home meticulously refurbished with modernist touches, it's designed as a lounge with tables and couches. Stormy gray hues prevail indoors, enhanced by stone, steel, and leather accents, as well as stylish moldings throughout. Double-hung windows let in lots of natural light, and a cutaway porch leads to a spacious backyard that includes secluded spaces for private tasting experiences.

Self-taught winemaker Duncan Harmon maintains a focus on top-notch vineyards, like Kimsey, Larner, Peake Ranch, and Bien Nacido. This has led to noteworthy syrah and grenache wines with alluring names like *Kissing Vespers* and *The Shadow*. The new tasting room is open later than most other Los Olivos wine stops, and reservations are recommended.

Optik, Los Olivos

The cozy tasting room in downtown Los Olivos that was occupied by the Bien Nacido label for more than seven years has a new tenant. Sort of. As the Miller Family prepares to open a new tasting outpost on the grounds of their famous Bien Nacido Vineyard this summer, their Optik (optikwines.com) partnership with winemaker Joey Tensley is taking over the Grand Avenue location with a pop-up tasting room that opened in April and will welcome guests through August.

The homey spot is

spacious and has various sitting nooks and elegant wood floors throughout. Banks of windows usher in sunlight. Launched in 2021, the Optik project was an experiment that would give the well-known winemaker access to the Miller Family's various properties and the ability to craft wine through his own lens in his singular style. The pop-up will be pouring a pair of just-launched wines, a 2021 petite sirah and a 2021 valdiguíé, both made with fruit from the French Camp Vineyard in the Paso Robles Highlands AVA. These join the lineup of chardonnay,

pinot noir, and syrah from the Bien Nacido and Solomon Hills vineyard sites.

Kukkula, Paso Robles

Opened this month, the destination tasting venue at Kukkula (kukkulawine.com) takes full advantage of what's been a calling card for this brand for years—its elevation. This is home to one of the highest vineyards in all of Paso Robles, and the label's name literally means *high hill* in Finnish, an homage to founder Kevin Jussila's roots. The recently opened Hilltop Vista allows small groups to taste the wines and enjoy a picnic alfresco, set well above the modern, sustainable, state-of-the-art winery. The views are stunning, offering guests unobstructed peeks at Kukkula's steep vine-covered slopes and the entire Adelaida District beyond them. Ninety-minute reservations are available for groups of up to six, with a two-bottle minimum buy per picnic table.

This highly regarded vineyard is organically dry-farmed. The vines depend on rainfall for irrigation, and the resulting wines are an intense, aromatic, elegant expression of the site. The focus is on Rhône-style wines, blends of syrah, grenache, mourvèdre, and counoise with intriguing names, like *Aatto* (which made *Wine & Spirits* magazine's Top 100 Wines in the World list in 2018), *Lothario*, and *Pas de Deux*. ♦



A cozy backyard setting lures guests outdoors at the Terre et Sang tasting room in Los Olivos.