

Barrel of fun at El Dorado County wineries

By Kathryn Reed

PLEASANT VALLEY – Who needs a bottle when you have the whole barrel?

It was more like who needs today's wine when you can have tomorrow's during the annual Bring Out the Barrel wine tasting event at 22 El Dorado County wineries last weekend.

Tasting rooms were full of people out for a sunny drive through the foothills to sample wine straight from the barrel.



Barrel tasting
at Busby
Cellars.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

"I'm all about research," said Deborah Robinson of Sacramento as she sipped wine in the back room of Latcham Vineyards.

Seeing what the wineries are doing, finding out projections about the next vintage to be released and being able to purchase the wines before they are bottled are all reasons Robinson attends the barrel tastings.

Kevin Gleave, who Robinson was with, also touched on another reason to attend the event. "I like the drive," he said.

This sentiment was echoed at various wineries. A distinct hint of spring is in the air in the wine region, even though the vines still look dormant.

Many of the wineries pair food with their wines. Several had hot soup to ladle out on this cool Sunday.

At Narrow Gate, Sue Wood of South Lake Tahoe said she would go back just for the ham and white bean soup. She was fond of the gumbo at Busby, as well

“It’s a great soup because it doesn’t offend any of the wines. Bay leaves are the only spice. The ham hock flavors the broth,” Narrow Gate owner Teena Hildebrand said of her soup.



Plenty of barrels to taste from at Narrow Gate.

At Narrow Gate the one future (barrel tasting) for sale was a Syrah-Viognier blend that Frank Hildebrand created after tiring of paying \$80 a bottle at other wineries for that blend. At the event last weekend the futures were selling for \$20.80 bottle, but will be \$26 when released this summer.

That’s one of the advantages to this event – getting a discount before the bottles are released.

At Busby Cellars, owner Elliot Graham said the barrel tasting event is good because it brings people to the region during a slow time of year.

“Sales-wise they are worthwhile,” Graham said of special events.

This particular weekend was picked because no significant football games were played. Some wineries, like Busby, plan to close Super Bowl Sunday because in past years traffic has been so slow.

It was so quiet last year that it was ideal for a movie to be filmed at Busby. The old barn will be part of a Spanish-language film. The area was doubling as Chile.

From the barrel, people could taste the 2007 Petite Sirah. The 2006 won best of class at the 2009 California State Fair.

At Sierra Vista Winery, 5 percent of the sales for the barrel tasting event were being designated for Haiti relief efforts.

Owner John MacCready said the barrel event doesn't always bring a lot of buyers to his winery, but added that this year people were buying more than in 2009.



John MacCready taps into the barrel at his Sierra Vista Winery.

His wife and co-owner, Barbara MacCready, said overall ticket sales were up by a couple hundred people this year.

Tom and Madge McLennan of Granite Bay bought a couple bottles of the 2005 Cabernet. Sierra Vista was offering this in

comparison to the 2007 that is still in the barrel.

This was the first barrel event for the McLennans who said they were enjoying finding out what the various wineries have to offer.

Passport Weekend is the next big event for the El Dorado wine region. The dates are April 10-11 and April 17-18. Tickets are \$65. For more information, [click here](#).