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Explore Santa Barbara County's smallest and best wines at the Garagiste Festival



The Garagiste Festival: Southern Exposure comes to Solvang for the second year, this time spread over two days and featuring 56 winemakers. (The Garagiste Festival)

By S. Irene Virbila

Tickets have just gone on sale for “[The 2nd Annual Garagiste Festival: Southern Exposure](#),” returning to Solvang’s Veterans Memorial Hall March 29 and 30. And if things go anywhere near like last year, they won't last long.

An offshoot of the original Garagiste Festival held in Paso Robles in November, this one ferrets out cutting-edge, small-scale wine producers from the Santa Ynez Valley and Santa Barbara County.

Last year’s Southern Exposure was a sellout. And at \$50 per ticket, it’s still pretty inexpensive for such a wildly exuberant and fun wine event. Proceeds for the nonprofit event go to the Cal Poly Wine and Viticulture Program in San Luis Obispo.

Last year's festival featured 32 winemakers who each produce fewer than 1,500 cases. This year's will be even bigger, with 56 winemakers pouring their wines over two days. Half of them are new to the festival (some presenting their very first vintage). Three-quarters of the participants don't have a tasting room of their own, so this may be the only opportunity to taste their wines--and most important, get on their mailing lists.

According to Garagiste Festival co-founder Stewart McLennan, the event continues "to serve as both starting gate and incubator for some of the Central Coast's (and the world's) most important small-lot winemakers and to offer consumers the unique joy of connecting with artisans whose passion and maverick spirit pulse through the 'terroir' of their wines."

Since this year's event stretches over two days, each showcasing 28 different wineries, why not make it a weekend? If you do, better book a room — and make a restaurant reservation soon.

You might want to check out the new chef and owner at Mattei's Tavern in Los Olivos, Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn in Santa Ynez, the Ballard Inn and Restaurant in Solvang or that old favorite the Hitching Post II in Buellton. In Los Alamos, take a look at Bell Street Farms or get in line for flatbreads from the woodburning oven at Full of Life Flatbread.

Winemakers pouring at Saturday's Grand Tasting from 2 to 5 p.m include newcomers Archium Cellars, Ascension Cellars, Carucci Wines, Dubost Ranch, DV8 Cellars, Graef Wines, Kita Wines, Moretti Wine Co., Turiya and Vinemark Cellars. Returning wineries include Casa Dumetz, Cholame Vineyard, Cordon Wines, Ground Effect Wines, Pence Ranch, Press Gang Cellars and Seagrape Wine Co.

Sunday's lineup from 1 to 4 p.m. includes Baehner-Fournier, Cloak & Dagger, La Fenêtre Wines, ONX Wines, Plan B Cellars and Stanger Vineyards, along with newcomers Bradley Family Winery, Brophy Clark Cellars, Calilove Winery, Clos Des Amis, Desparada, and Weatherborne Wine Co. For a complete listing of wineries pouring, [visit the website](#).

Tickets for the Grand Tasting on either day are \$50 each. A \$100 VIP pass (\$90 on Sunday) gains you admission to that morning's seminar, a box lunch, and early access to the tasting. A two-day Tasting Pass is \$90, while a Weekend All-Access Pass is \$175.

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