



SoCal Spirits

# The Ampelos Cellars Hat Trick: Organic, Biodynamic, and Sustainable

(<http://www.kcet.org/living/food/socal-spirits/ampelos-wine-organic-biodynamic.html>)

by **George Yatchisin**

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Some wineries say things like, "Well, we're organic, *mostly*, unless we really need to spray... plus all that paperwork...and the expense." Some say, "We like most of Rudolf Steiner's teachings, but we *might* fudge the biodynamics if the right moon doesn't happen when we have to get the grapes in." Some say, "Sure we *want* to do what's best for the environment when it comes to shipping, but Styrofoam is cheap and secure, so...."

And then there's **Ampelos Cellars**, one of the first, if not the first wineries (it's hard to be sure of the timing on things like this) to be certified in three ways: organic, biodynamic, and sustainable. "It's important to me because when I say to people I'm doing something they can be sure I'm actually doing it," says Peter Work, co-owner of Ampelos with his wife Rebecca. "It's a guarantee and a stamp on it."

Peter Work will be leading a tour of Ampelos in the Sta. Rita Hills on Sunday, June 22 as just one part of the **Santa Barbara Vintners Key to Wine Country Weekend**. (You can do everything from have a Rhone Scent-ual Experience at **Cold Heaven** to take a horseback tour of **Fess Parker Winery**--check the full schedule out.) On the tour, in addition to wine and a picnic lunch from **Succulent Café**, attendees will learn what it means to be certified three ways, and how, as Work puts it, "We can produce great wines after great practices. Our vineyards are in tip-top shape and we believe good wine is made in the vineyards."

While the Works, after success in the corporate world, owned the prime real estate in what would become the Sta. Rita Hills AVA before it became one of California's prime hot spots for pinot noir, it was ultimately a dramatic catalyst that sped along the development of Ampelos (which means "vine" in Greek). Peter and Rebecca landed at Newark Airport on the morning of September 11, 2001, and his meeting at New York's World Trade Center was canceled. Luckily, he was merely near and not at the disaster. "I tell people that at some point in our lives we need to change, and sometimes we need a kick in the rear end to do that," he explains. "We had accumulated enough wealth to do what we wanted to do but kept doing the same things anyway. After 9-11 we thought, 'Maybe we should redirect our lives?'"

That meant moving to the Santa Ynez Valley full-time, getting to do what the only used to do on weekends: "meet our great neighbors, walk with our happy dogs, spend time with our son and daughter," Work says. "This was going to be the last chance in our life, but it was going to be a long chance." Their son Don Schroeder, who is also the assistant winemaker at Sea Smoke, heads up wine operations, and by 2004 they had their first harvest. Now they make acclaimed pinot noir, syrah, grenache, and viognier.

And they keep thinking about the long game, as one would expect from a winery that was a pilot member of the Central Coast Vineyard Team's Sustainability in Practice (**SIP**) certification in 2008. "We were just in France, and they think we're only about overnight sensations, twenty-five year olds after high Robert Parker scores," Work point out. "There's the whole family aspect we need to learn from the French, where it's about doing something you can pass on from generation to generation."



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