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# SCHAEFER ON WINE: Ampelos amps it up

by Dennis Schaefer

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Since my last visit to Ampelos Cellars in Lompoc, Peter and Rebecca Work have been busy.

Their estate vineyard in Santa Rita Hills has been certified as organically and biodynamically farmed and they have implemented the California winegrowers Sustainability in Practice (SIP) program. The grapes grown in their vineyard are the essence of each varietal in its purest form. Their winemaking is minimalist; meaning, nothing artificial is

introduced in the process.

They've amped up things, so to speak, not in bigger-is-better terms but in a more energized way that has produced wines that are more balanced, expressive and complete. Some thoughts on the current releases:

- **Viognier "Phi" Santa Ynez Valley 2013** (\$25): The nose is fresh with aromas of apricot, peach and nectarine. It's also wonderfully fresh and lengthy in the mouth with flavors following the nose, with a bit of mango and pineapple in the mix too. Great acidity with mineral overtones yields a strikingly crisp finish.
- **Pinot Noir "Lambda" Santa Rita Hills 2010** (\$35): The grapes for this pinot are picked a little bit later in the harvest, a la Sea Smoke, and the wine typically seems more Burgundian. The fruit is there, including lush dark cherry, aided by cola and rhubarb. With a year and a half in barrel, one-third new French oak, it has acquired a pleasant toastiness and additional hints of butterscotch, white pepper and exotic spices.
- **Pinot Noir "Rho" Santa Rita Hills 2009** (\$45): The big daddy of the lineup, it spends two and a half years in barrel and one year in bottle before being released. Drawn from the best barrels in the winery, it's appropriately dark and inky, redolent of dark cherry with cardamom, clove and coriander. Chewy and textured but supple and mouthcoating at the same time, it's a silky and sophisticated sip that lingers long on the finish.
- **Grenache "Delta" Santa Rita Hills 2010** (\$35): From the Alban clone of grenache, this bottling is dark and extracted. The ripe red fruit flavors are initially bright and sunny but it shows depth and texture on midpalate. Strawberry is prominent and blueberry chimes in as well, while a savory quality permeates the proceedings. It's more elegant than most grenaches and a bit spicier, too, but it's not without the requisite balance, along with integrated tannins, to make the whole thing taste delicious.
- **Syrache "Sigma" Santa Barbara County 2010** (\$28): The

name is a mashup, as is the blend of syrah and grenache, two grapes that balance each other out. Bright and juicy flavors of cherry, blackberry and plum reflect that kind of flavor pop in the mouth that you get from Jolly Rancher or Jelly Belly candy. Enticingly easy to drink, it's a white wine drinker's red wine.

- **Syrah "Gamma" Santa Rita Hills 2010** (\$35): Cherry cola on the nose leads into a big fruited wine in the mouth with flavors of blackberry, black cherry and blueberry shaded by cracked pepper and hints of chocolate. While boisterous with flavors, it still displays plenty of elegance. This is one lip-smacking wine with a finish that just goes on and on.

*Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. Email him at [food@newspress.com](mailto:food@newspress.com).*