

Wine

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Manresa's wine man aims to take guests on journey



Preston Gannaway, Special To The Chronicle

Manresa Wine Director Jeff Bareilles grew up in the East Bay and fell in love with wine as a student at St. Mary's College in Moraga.

By Jon Bonné

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One of Northern California's most thoughtful voices on wine can be found most nights on the floor at Manresa.

Jeff Bareilles is of that old school of wine director - cultured, intellectual, as interested in discussing art as Burgundy's 2010 vintage. It is an increasing rarity in an era when sommeliers often seem to be more interested in chasing merit pins.

David Kinch's restaurant, a tribute to regional bounty tucked into a quiet street in Los Gatos, might be the perfect spot for him. If Kinch's cooking is a contemplation of the bounty of Santa Cruz and nearby Monterey Bay, Bareilles' wine tendencies have a bit more wanderlust - including a fair amount of Spanish and French wines.

But always, there's homage to Manresa's home, particularly the wines of Mount Eden

Vineyards in nearby Saratoga, where Kinch worked shortly after coming to California. Because most meals involve tasting menus, Bareilles has up to 20 wines open at any time to pair. "I try and take our guests on a little journey," he says. "I make sure the mountains are included."

Bareilles, 50, is a Bay Area native - born in Berkeley and attending high school in Hayward. It was during school at St. Mary's College of California in Moraga (run by the Lasallians, who also ran the Christian Brothers winery) that he became interested in wine. After college, he worked in restaurants in San Francisco before moving to New York, where he helped open the restaurant Zoe in the late 1980s, pioneering an all-California wine list.

He came back to the West Coast to be closer to family, and after his sister and brother-in-law found a house in Aptos in 2005, Bareilles was drawn to the Santa Cruz area - particularly Los Gatos. He sent a resume to Manresa, and within weeks had a job.

Living in Santa Cruz, Bareilles admits, isn't always the easiest choice for a wine intellectual. It's



not that there isn't a dedicated posse of gastronomes nearby - more that Surf City, in its way of being tucked away from modern California's bustle, requires a more laid-back philosophy than you might find among San Francisco's Yelp addicts.

Which is why you might well find Bareilles enjoying a sunset drink at the Crow's Nest down by the harbor.

"Even though it's the cheesiest coastal restaurant concept you see in beach towns all over the world, they have a great happy hour. You're right on the bay, and it's beautiful.



Preston Gannaway, Special To The Chronicle

Wines from the region are an important part of Jeff Bareilles' offerings at Manresa restaurant in Los Gatos.,

"It's hard," he concludes, "to be a snob down here."

Bareilles' picks

Los Gatos

Enoteca La Storia and Donostia: This brother-sister pair of venues offer a counterpoint when Bareilles wants to escape the restaurant for a bit. He gets a plate of salumi at La Storia, with its Italian-focused wine bar and retail shop, and sits outside. Donostia, with its Basque focus, brings such northern Spanish wines as the fresh whites of Txakoli, plus excellent sardines. Bonus: They're open late on weekends.

Enoteca La Storia, 416 N. Santa Cruz Ave., Los Gatos; (408) 625-7272.

www.enotecalastoria.com

*Donostia, 424 N Santa Cruz Ave., Los Gatos; (408) 797-8688. ***http://donostiapintxos.com****

Dio Deka: A lot of people-watching; investor Stratton Sclavos was CEO of VeriSign and co-owns the San Jose Sharks, making it one of Silicon Valley's see-and-be-seen spots. But the town's other anchor restaurant has a wine list that, in addition to affinity with its Greek-inspired menu, goes far beyond, with about 1,200 bottles, or more than double Manresa's, including a lot of gems sprinkled between Napa stars like Screaming Eagle. "Some of it's predictable, but there are a lot of things that are off the beaten path. They have an interesting Loire selection that caught me off guard."

*210 E Main St., Los Gatos; (408) 354-7700. ***http://diodeka.com****

Santa Cruz

Soif: This bistro and wine bar is a wine lover's salvation in the Cruz, thanks in part to the work of wine buyer John Locke, who also runs the Birichino label and who mixes Santa Cruz bottles with things like the Jura wines of Jacques Puffeney. "He's really a fascinating person, and has great selections." Bareilles' tip: Get the duck breast if they have it.

*105 Walnut Ave., Santa Cruz; (831) 423-2020. ***www.soifwine.com****

Bantam: Splendidly baked pizzas from chef Melissa Reitz (a veteran of several Bay Area spots, including Pizzaiolo) have made this "my go-to recently on my days off."

*1010 Fair Ave., Santa Cruz; (831) 420-0101. ***www.bantam1010.com***.*

Ristoranti Avanti: The cooking is Italian, and there's a new location on Santa Cruz's Westside, but Bareilles prefers it for one of the few great lunches in town. Also: "they make a really good Bloody Mary."

1917 Mission St., Santa Cruz; (831) 427-0135. <http://ristoranteavanti.com>

The Penny Ice Creamery: Mostly organic ice creams from Manresa's former pastry chef, Kendra Baker, include everything from vanilla to wild fennel. "She always was super into ice cream," he says. There's now a second location in the Pleasure Point area.

913 Cedar St. and 820 41st Ave., Santa Cruz; (831) 204-2523.

<http://thepennyicecreamery.com>

41st Avenue Liquor: An unexpected find in a storefront near Capitola, next to a dry cleaner, whose owner has assembled a surprisingly diverse roster of wines, top-notch beers and more. "He's got a great Armagnac selection."

2155 41st Ave., Santa Cruz; (831) 475-5117

The wines

As his list reveals, Bareilles is a bit of a classicist when it comes to Santa Cruz, including the original power duo of Ridge Vineyards and Mount Eden, plus new star Rhys Vineyards. But his proximity has given him a chance to scout some of the area's other, smaller standouts, like Windy Oaks (www.windyoaksestate.com) in Corralitos, which Bareilles recommends for a weekend tasting trip. Other highlights:

Alfaro Family: "I actually like Richard's Syrah. That's the strong point. It has this bacon fat quality that I like." (www.alfarowine.com)

Cooper Garrod: "Their Cab Franc is pretty solid and it's a cool place. They've got stables there." (www.cgvc.com)

Bates Ranch: The Bates family continues to farm their vineyards near Mount Madonna. "I love

the Cabernet they make out of the vineyard site." (www.batesranch.com)

Sonnet Wine Cellars: A tiny label from Tony Craig, former winemaker at David Bruce. "I like the Pinot Noirs. It's a good lineup." (www.sonnetwinecellars.com)

Beauregard: Ryan Beauregard's family has been farming for decades in the Bonny Doon area. "I'm liking his Byington Vineyard Pinot Noir. I'm pouring it by the glass right now." (www.beauregardvineyards.com)

Birichino: "People are going over the moon over his Pinot Noir. It's from Lilo vineyard in Aptos, just out Trout Gulch Road." (www.birichino.com)

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