

805

LIVING



The Restaurant Issue

Where Plate and Glass Meet

VINTNERS AND CHEFS GO TOGETHER LIKE FOOD AND WINE AT LOCAL WINERY EATERIES.



Many wineries across the 805 are taking the wine-sampling experience to a new level: they're opening their own restaurants run by chefs who work with winemakers to thoughtfully create dishes that complement what's in the glass. Here are a few examples and a pairing from each.



Roblar Winery & Vineyards, Santa Ynez **Buttermilk Fried Half-Chicken + 2023 Fumé Blanc,** **Santa Ynez Valley**

The secret to the popularity of the Buttermilk Fried Half-Chicken at Roblar may be the unhurried way it's prepared. "We brine our chickens for 24 hours and then put them on racks to dry for 24 hours," says the winery's executive chef, Terri Buzzard, who also oversees the culinary program at sister brand Refugio Ranch Vineyards.

"It's a process for us," she adds, "but necessary so the chicken shines." Buzzard also uses only Jidori chickens because they're raised humanely and without hormones. The dish is only available on Thursdays and is part of a menu that also includes plates like yellowtail crudo, lamb skewers, and butternut squash risotto.

Roblar proprietor Max Gleason pairs the dish with the 2023 Fumé Blanc, Santa Ynez Valley (\$38, roblarwinery.com), which he calls "an iteration of sauvignon blanc that is fuller, owing to barrel fermentation." He says: "The textural weight of [this wine] can hold up well to the fried chicken."



Center of Effort Wines, San Luis Obispo **Green Curry Mussel Shooter + 2023 Oro Bianco** **Chenin Blanc, Edna Valley**

The wine experience at Center of Effort in San Luis Obispo is actually led by the estate's chef, Lindsey Carroll. What's more, the tasting room is built around her exhibition kitchen, furthering the brand's emphasis on making wine and food mutually inclusive. Guests are treated to five wines paired with five small bites—like the Green Curry Mussel Shooter—each created with ingredients sourced from the on-site gardens and orchards and the farmers market.

Carroll makes the green curry paste from scratch, thinning it with coconut milk "and passing it through a strainer for some refinement, to make it nice and smooth," she says. She steams the mollusks in chenin blanc and returns them to their shell before bathing them in curry.

Center of Effort is the only Edna Valley winery that produces chenin blanc, and Carroll deems its 2023 Oro Bianco Chenin Blanc, Edna Valley (\$40, coewine.com) the perfect match here. "The bright acidity is really food-friendly, and the richness on the palate can stand up to a lot of dishes," she says. "I also love the apricot and stone fruit characteristics."



**Opolo Vineyards,
Paso Robles**
**The Wow Platter + 2022
Cabernet Sauvignon,
Paso Robles**

Opolo Vineyards serves fresh and wine-friendly food offerings, like salads and pizzas. It's the Wow Platter, though, inspired by the Serbian roots of cofounder Rick Quinn, that has the real wow factor.

"A modern twist on traditional Balkan cuisine, the Wow Platter is a tantalizing feast crafted with premium ingredients," says marketing director Ricki Quinn (Rick's daughter). Featuring cured meats, house-made sausages,

cheeses, pickled vegetables, *kajmak* (a thick dairy product similar to clotted cream), *lepinja* (Balkan-style flatbread), and caramelized onions, the lavish spread feeds three to six guests.

Opolo's 2022 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (\$42, opolo.com) matches perfectly, says longtime Opolo culinary director, Aric Grimes. "The tannin-forward profile, with the rich sausages and assorted cheeses, results in an elevated wine and food pairing experience," he notes.



Villa San Juliette, Paso Robles
**Paella + 2023 Rosé of Grenache Sparkling
Wine, Paso Robles**

Dan Smith has been winemaker at Villa San Juliette for 10 years and is a big fan of the culinary program. "As soon as you throw food in the mix, it completely changes the wine," he says, "and creates flavor profiles that you probably didn't expect." Helmed by head chef Bradley Spence, the kitchen at the Tuscan-inspired winery treats guests to rotating, seasonally inspired menus of shared plates, like Truffle Fries, Wagyu Empanadas, and Cheese & Charcuterie. Most ingredients are regionally sourced. The star add-ons atop the very popular Spanish Garlic Mushrooms, for instance, come from nearby Mighty Cap Mushrooms.

Smith's order is usually the Paella, which serves two to three people and incorporates all the classic elements, like chicken, andouille sausage, and shrimp. "I love the char at the bottom of the pan," he says.

In his glass, the label's first bubbly, the 2023 Rosé of Grenache Sparkling Wine, Paso Robles (\$70, villasanjuliette.com), showcases "fresh, crisp acid and flavors of strawberry and guava that nicely contrast this seasoned, flavorful dish," he says.



**Vega Vineyard & Farm,
Buellton**
**Cavatelli Cacio e Pepe + 2023
Barbera, Santa Ynez Valley**

Just off Highway 101 on land that was once part of a Spanish land grant is Vega Vineyard & Farm, which has a full-service restaurant. Executive chef Christopher Rossi is at the helm with seasonally evolving menus that are driven by what grows on-site and inspired by winemaker Steve Clifton's Italian-focused portfolio.

"We make everything from scratch," says Rossi, "including the pastas that we roll fresh every day." The Cavatelli Cacio e Pepe is "our

standout dish," he says. The semolina flour pasta is tossed in butter, Parmesan cheese, and black pepper.

Rossi's favorite pairing for the dish is the estate-grown Vega 2023 Barbera (\$47, vegavineyardandfarm.com). The ringing acidity, mild berry flavors, and soft tannins of this red wine "strike a really nice balance with the richness of the dish," he says.



Clean Slate Wine Bar, Solvang
**Gumbo Z'Herbes + Bocce Ball Wine 2021 Kiss
the Jack White Wine Blend, Santa Ynez Valley**

The wines-by-the-glass lineup at Clean Slate Wine Bar is one of the most comprehensive in the Santa Ynez Valley: 50 labels rotate throughout the year representing boutique brands across the Central Coast. "We try to bring the best of the bunch into one particular place," says sous chef Jason Spira-Bauer.

Clean Slate—the name refers to a chalkboard menu that's wiped clean each morning—caters to locals with its themed nights: Mondays are Cajun, in homage to chef and co-owner Melissa Scrymgeour's Louisiana roots; Tuesdays are Indian. The Gumbo Z'Herbes is inspired by a dish at Dooky Chase, the New Orleans restaurant on which Disney's *Princess and the Frog* is based, but with a vegan twist. It consists of cold-smoked black-eyed peas, seasonal greens, bell peppers, onion, and celery, served on jasmine rice.

Spira-Bauer matches it with the 2023 Kiss the Jack White Wine Blend, Santa Ynez Valley (\$34, cleanslatewinebar.com) from the wine bar owners' label, Bocce Ball. Its bright fruit on the tongue "pairs well with the heartiness of the dish," he says, and its crisp acidity on the finish "balances the spices." ♦