

USA



Santa Barbara

WHERE ON EARTH

Santa WINE COUNTRY

by LAURA SUTHERLAND

Barbara

BY THE SEA

PHOTO THIS SPREAD
Santa Barbara
coastline.



*...Chilly ocean breezes
are pulled inland,
creating a patchwork
quilt of microclimates...*



PRAITINO

WE'D STARTED OUR DAY riding fat-tire cruiser bikes past the landmarks that give this glamorous California beach town its Spanish-colonial-meets-the-French-Riviera vibe. There was Mission Santa

Barbara, established in 1786 and considered the queen of the California missions and the Courthouse's magnificent 1929 mural and bell tower. The architecture of nearly every building we passed showed the town's love affair with Spanish/Mexican architecture with its thick white stucco walls, red tiles roofs, and graceful arched doorways.

When we had our fill of architecture and history, we pedalled over to beautiful East Beach and paused to take in the scene. Yes, it was definitely the place to throw down a beach towel on a lazy afternoon...but later. At that moment our plan was to make our way along the beachfront bike trail to Stearns Wharf where our first wine tasting room, Deep Sea, was perched on a deck above the ocean. After all that pedalling it was time to relax, sit outside, and watch seagulls

and sailboats while we sampled some of the region's noteworthy wines.

A few people on stand-up paddleboards drifted by as we studied the Santa Barbara Urban Wine Trail map, with a taster of 2014 chardonnay in our glasses. To our surprise, we noted more than 30 tasting rooms in the downtown area alone that were within walking distance of each other.

Soon we headed a few blocks away to the town's hottest new neighbourhood, The Funk Zone, which got its name from the fish processing plants that perfumed the area for decades. Artists and surfers eventually moved in, and the feel of the neighbourhood shifted, although the industrial character remains. It's now Santa Barbara's pocket of cool where 25 wine tasting rooms, trendy bars, shops, galleries, and some of the most popular restaurants in town are found.

A gigantic floor-to-ceiling map of Santa Barbara's six official AVAs greeted us at The Valley Project's tasting room and helped explain how the region's geological oddities make it ideal for grape growing. Coastal mountains run east west, rather than north south — the only configuration like this between Alaska and Patagonia — so chilly ocean breezes are



THIS PHOTO *City Hall Santa Barbara.*

pulled inland, creating a patchwork quilt of microclimates. World-class, cool-climate Burgundy grapes like pinot noir and chardonnay grow well closer to the coast, while the hot interior valleys are ideal for Bordeaux varietals like cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and sauvignon blanc. The county is also gaining a reputation for Rhône grapes like syrah and viognier. It sounded like a miniature version of France.

Two sleepy-eyed honeymooners tasting next to us insisted we try the tacos at Mony's around the corner. It was the fourth time we'd heard about the popular taqueria, so after stopping and sipping at Area 5.1's tasting room with its stark alien visitor decor, we wandered over and loaded our tacos with eight different salsas from the salsa bar, including pistachio, mango, avocado and habanero. We'd purposefully eaten light so we could stop in for an appetizer in at The Lark, The Funk Zone's, and possibly Santa Barbara's, most popular restaurant and the place that is considered to have launched the revival of the neighbourhood.

When we finally made it back to our beachfront hotel, The Santa Barbara Inn, we relaxed for a few hours on our deck looking out at the ocean. It was so pretty that we decided to have dinner at the hotel's restaurant Convivo, and sat on the patio surrounded by palm trees as the sun set. We'd seen artichokes the size of babies' heads at the local Farmer's Market, so ordering the braised artichoke hearts was a no-brainer.

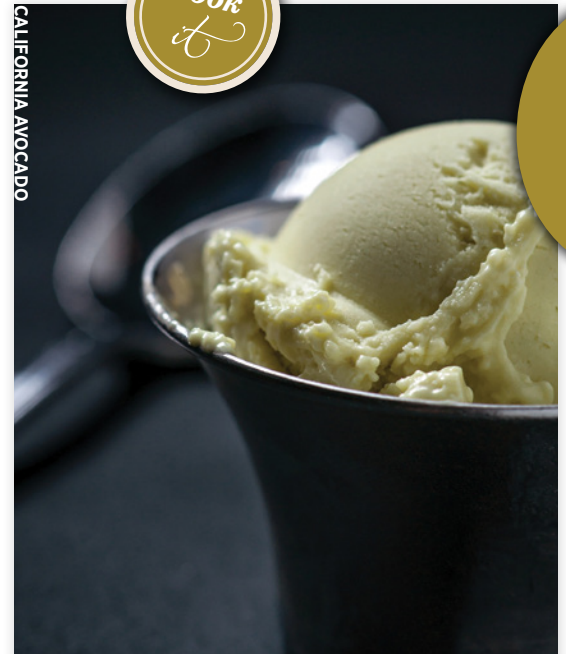
The next day after lounging on the sand and playing in the waves, we headed downtown to El Paseo, an elegant Spanish-colonial complex just off of State Street, Santa Barbara's mile-long ritzy shopping area. Of the wine tasting rooms here, Grassini Family Vineyards (2013 Cabernet Sauvignon a stand-out) and Cebada Wines (2012 Estate Pinot Noir an award-winner for good reason) were favourites. The weather in Santa Barbara is Mediterranean-perfect so we sat outside in the Wine Cask Restaurant's romantic stone courtyard for dinner, marveling at its Wine Spectator award-winning wine list and its fresh seafood dishes like seared sea scallops with asparagus, honji mushrooms and squid ink.

As a food writer who relies on a smartphone for photographs, I was really looking forward to Eat This Shoot That!, a three-hour food photography class. Our guide was a graduate of Brooks Photography Institute, and as we ate our way through more places in the Funk »

CALIFORNIA AVOCADO



USA



SERVES 6-8

Avocado Lime Ice Cream

ALL KINDS OF avocados are grown year round in Santa Barbara, and you can use just about any ripe variety available for this creamy, healthy ice cream. It freezes really well and doesn't get super hard — the perfect consistency.

Avocados
2, ripe but not too mushy

Coconut Milk
1 x 400 ml can

Lime 1,
juice and zest

Simple Syrup or **Agave Syrup**
¾ cup

- 1 SCOOP** out the flesh from the avocados and put in a blender with all the other ingredients but just half the lime zest and blend until smooth. Taste and adjust sweetness to suit. This ice cream often tastes sweeter the next day so don't over-sweeten.
- 2 MIX** in an ice cream maker according to the machine's instructions.
- 3 PUT** into a freezer-proof container and sprinkle with the rest of the lime zest. Freeze until ready to serve.



SERVES 6

Grilled Santa Barbara Spot Prawns

Cook

THIS RECIPE IS from Market Forays, a Santa Barbara cooking school where classes include the chance to shop with the chef/teacher at the local Farmers' Market. Santa Barbara Spot Prawns are large, sweet shrimp highly sought after and therefore expensive, a delicious luxury to serve for special occasions. Use Gulf Shrimp as a substitute.

Fresh Spot Prawns 12–18, deveined, shell and head left on

Garlic 2 cloves, peeled and crushed

Fennel Seeds 1 tsp

Lemon grated zest and juice of 1

Olive Oil 2 Tbs

Kosher Salt 1 ½ tsp

Freshly Ground Black Pepper ½ tsp

- 1 PREHEAT** the grill or cast iron griddle.
- 2 IN** a mortar, mash the fennel seeds, garlic, lemon zest, salt and pepper. Add the lemon juice, whisk in the olive oil. Adjust the seasonings to suit your taste, and toss the prawns in the mix.
- 3 SKEWER** the prawns and grill over medium-high heat, about 3 minutes on the first side, 2 minutes on the second side. Serve hot.



«Zone, she showed us how to improve our shots. I felt like the teacher's pet when she praised my picture of American Ale's peanut butter and jelly bacon burger that caught the natural light from the window just right.


It was time to see where the real wine making magic happens, so we made the 30-minute drive to the Santa Ynez Valley, a land of vineyards containing the greatest number of wineries in Santa Barbara County. First stop was one of the area's original wineries, Brander, known for exceptional sauvignon blancs and a lazy winery cat who slept on the bar as we tasted. A short drive away, relative newcomer Vincent Vineyards and Winery specializes in fine Bordeaux varietals that we enjoyed on an outdoor patio overlooking rolling hills of vines.

Bridlewood's Winery's expansive grounds were originally a rehab center for race horses and you'll still find horses on the property. We'd arranged to try the black glass wine tasting experience, "Vino Noir," to test our knowledge and see just how much colour influences recognizing wines. Luckily our pourer spilled a drop so we could see it was red, and we ultimately guessed right — a fruity, peppery zinfandel.

A virgin olive oil tasting sounded like a welcome break from wine tasting, so we stopped by Global Gardens to sample organic olive oils pressed from trees grown on their farms. Our helper poured different olive oils and unusual vinegars into a painter's palette, and as we dipped chunks of bread, we tasted firsthand how terroir plays an important role in the flavour of olive oil, just as it does with wine.

We could have stayed in any number of wine-rich towns, like Solvang and Buellton, but we wanted to headquarter in the quaint, wine-centric village of Los Olivos to further educate our palates. We wandered and browsed but ultimately stopped at Epiphany Cellars, since we'd read about its award-winning grenache blancs. Wine tasting rooms were so thick we practically tripped over them — even our Los Olivos hotel, The Fess Parker Wine Country Resort, had an onsite "Bubble Shack" featuring sparkling wines.

Dinner that night was at Sides Hardware and Shoes (and yes, it was once a hardware and shoe store all in one), where we feasted on dishes with their two different house bacons — one cured in maple syrup and the other cured with miso and used in an exotic banh mi taco made with a dim sum bun instead of a tortilla — all accompanied by local wines, of course.

Completely satiated, we walked back to the hotel, poured ourselves a final glass of wine, and settled in by the fire. Sure we had to turn up the air conditioning a little bit to avoid getting overheated, but it was cozy and pretty and the perfect way to end our Santa Barbara wine country experience. 

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HARSLIGH

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *Santa Barbara vines; Potted plants on the chapel steps at Santa Barbara Mission; Cebada tasting room; American Ale's peanut butter and jelly bacon burger; Mony's Mexican Food exterior; Mony's chicken taco loaded with salsa.*



LAURA SUTHERLAND



LAURA SUTHERLAND



JESSELYN PERKINS



IAN D. KEATING

The Brander Vineyard
www.brander.com

Bridlewood Estate Winery
www.bridlewoodestatewinery.com

Cebada Wine
www.forbiddenfruitorchards.com/cebada-wine

Deep Sea Wine Tasting Room
www.conwayfamilywines.com

Eat This Shoot That! Food Wine and Photo Tour
www.eatthisshootthat.com

Epiphany Cellars
www.epiphanywineco.com

Fess Parker Wine Country Inn and Spa
www.fessparker.com

Global Gardens
www.globalgardensonline.com

Grassini Family Vineyards
www.grassinifamilyvineyards.com

Mony's Mexican Food
www.facebook.com/Monysmexicanfood

Market Forays
www.marketforays.com

Santa Barbara Inn
www.santabarbarainn.com

Sides Hardware and Shoes
www.sidesrestaurant.com

The Valley Project
www.thevalleyprojectwines.com

Vincent Vineyards and Winery
www.vincentvineyards.com

Urban Wine Trail
www.urbanwinetrailsb.com

Wine Cask Restaurant
www.winecask.com

LAURA SUTHERLAND

is a travel writer based in Northern California.

You can contact her at

LauraSutherland.net and

follow her @WanderandTaste

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