

BARGETTO returns to making pomegranate

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John Bargetto likes to joke that in the 1970s his family's winery was 30 years ahead of its time. Now that it's 30 years later, Bargetto Winery indeed appears to have perfectly timed its decision to return to making pomegranate wine, a dessert wine bottled under the winery's Chaucer's label that was first made by the winery in 1977.

With the Oct. 20 release marking the reintroduction of its pomegranate wine, Bargetto Winery hopes to take advantage of the current health-food craze surrounding the pomegranate, a rugged-skinned fruit filled with a multitude of edible seeds that is reported to contain vitamins B and C, potassium and antioxidants.

Often referred to as a superfood, the pomegranate is no longer just a challenging-to-eat food best known for producing juice-stained fingers. Found in beverages ranging from straight juice to a Jamba Juice smoothie named Pomegranate Paradise to a Pomotini — a drink made with pomegranate vodka, fresh lime and pomegranate juice — pomegranate juice has arrived at a previously unseen popularity.

The juice is purported to have a wide array of health benefits ranging from helping to prevent prostate cancer as well as preventing plaque building in arteries, and Bargetto hopes that the wine will also be embraced for its taste as well as its possible benefits.

"I remember as a young winemaker here at Bargetto's that I used to ferment it myself in an old redwood tank," said

Bargetto, the director of winemaking whose grandfather John and granduncle Phillip emigrated from Italy and established Bargetto Winery in 1933. "A big tanker truck would arrive filled with chilled pomegranate juice. Back then, it was the easiest wine I made."

Not much has changed since Bargetto first made pomegranate wine. The winery again turned to George Stieb of Porterville, the same grower who provided the juice before. Last October, the juice arrived at Bargetto's already pressed and chilled, and Michael Sones, Bargetto's winemaker since 2004, said he enjoyed making the wine.

"This was my first experience making it, and the variety of pomegranate we're using is wonderful," said Sones, a former cellar master at David Bruce Winery. "There's a lot of interest right now in people drinking pomegranate juice. I think because of the health aspect of antioxidants people are well aware of eating and drinking things that are good for them. I'm glad we're resurrecting the pomegranate wine."

Both Bargetto and Sones gave credit for the winery's return to pomegranate to Jim Vaughn, the Western sales representative for Bargetto's — which is in the middle of its 75th vintage and is one of the oldest wineries in the Santa Cruz Mountains appellation. "Jim saw the pomegranate craze going on, and he knew we used to produce it," Bargetto said. "He said, 'Why don't we try it?' I hadn't seen any other domestic pomegranate wine produced."

"Ironically, on my last trip outside of California, I went into a retail store and here's this guy coming in with two pomegranate wines from Armenia," he continued. "What's the chance of that? Pomegranates are native to Armenia and Persia, and we hadn't realized it."

Bargetto said the winery stopped making the wine in 1990 because it decided to streamline its selection of fruit wines. Priced at \$15 a bottle and with 11.5 percent alcohol, the pomegranate wine was first made available to Chaucer's Wine Club members this fall.

Roughly 450 cases were produced, and plans are to test market the wine at the retail level in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Florida, South Carolina and throughout California. If results are favorable, pomegranate may become a regular alongside olallieberry and raspberry as the fruits made into wine under the Chaucer's label. An orange muscat was recently released and rounds out the Chaucer's line which also features port, mead and raspberry Mead.



CHAUCER'S CELLARS
Pomegranate Wine

While all of the fruit wines made by Bargetto's are classified as dessert wines, Bill Galarneau, the owner and winemaker of Adams Point Winery in Berkeley, believes that wine made from fruit other than grape doesn't have to be relegated to the end of a meal.

Although his winery produces dessert wines made from mango and persimmon, Galarneau also makes table wine from the two fruits and said they pair nicely with Thai or Caribbean food. Adams Point began selling wine commercially in January, and Galarneau — who credited Sones with helping him learn about the commercial fruit wine industry — said he expects his mango-papaya blend to become his signature wine one day.

"It's been clear to me from the beginning that if I was going to go commercial it wasn't to make another cabernet sauvignon or merlot," said Galarneau, previously an investment trainer with Charles Schwab before his foray into winemaking. "The world doesn't need another merlot. I knew I would have to do something different."

Because he makes some of his wines with tropical fruit, Galarneau can make those wines year-round. While all of the persimmons he uses are grown in the San Francisco Bay Area, he has bought mangos from Mexico, Ecuador, Peru and India.

"A lot of people have had fruit wine made by someone in their backyard," said Galarneau, who grew up on the south side of Boston where his grandfather used to make rhubarb wine in their backyard. "Many of those who grew up in Prohibition made fruit wine in their backyards so they could have alcohol."

"Everyone has a story about someone making fruit wine in their backyard, and the wine was usually pretty bad," he continued. "That's something the fruit wine people have had to overcome."

On a recent Sunday afternoon tasting wine at Bargetto's with friends, Marina resident Micky Rangel said she grew up with a pomegranate tree in her backyard, but had never had pomegranate wine before. "It smells wonderful," said Rangel, before her first taste. "It's got one of those junior-high candy kind of things going on — definitely tasty and totally drinkable. It's enjoyable. "I always have a happy feeling when I see a pomegranate -- they're a little bit cumbersome to eat, but I always enjoy them," she continued. "As for the wine, I can stand behind that. It's good."

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