

Historical Gemstones of Buena Vista

It was a lovely spring day on March 12th, 2020 when I decided to visit a winery or two to start my next three paintings for my series. I was out on my own, so it wasn't necessarily the tasting that I was looking for, but a winery with a cascading view of mustard flowers. This time of year, Sonoma and Napa counties are treated with blankets of wildflowers across fields and rolling mountains. The grapevines are not yet sprouting, but countless vineyards are basking in seas of yellow mustard flowers, especially beautiful amongst the old vine vineyards and mighty oak trees.

I did a little internet searching and among many wineries, Buena Vista caught my eye. I remember attempting to include this in previous wine tasting, mostly because of their wine cave tours, but never was able to make it. They are located Northeast of the town of Sonoma, which is more of a trek for us, so we never made it. However, today I had time on my hands and thought this may be a place where I can experience history and beautiful wildflowers.

To set the stage, this is the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic, only days prior to complete lock down. As such, I didn't know what to expect in terms of how much they were going to be opened. The drive there was interesting in that you have to drive through residential areas to get to it. I had never been here before, or to this particular area for wine tasting, so I wasn't sure what to expect...I just had to put trust in my navigator!! I arrived at the parking lot, which was completely empty. I thought it was closed, but there weren't any signs saying as such, so I ventured to the entrance on foot. You can't see the winery from the parking lot, so it was a bit confusing. The walkway to the winery is a long dirt/gravel pathway with little tidbits of history lessons along the way. There was a tree trimming truck in the pathway, so once again I was confused where I was going. I started to turn back and then spotted someone who looked like they worked there...long story short, yes they were opened. Behind me were three young ladies who also looked perplexed and I shared with them that the winery was indeed opened.

When I got to the winery, I immediately felt disappointed and thought "well, this isn't what I was looking for, no mustard flowers!". The winery is tucked away, surrounded by lush greens on all sides. Well, better make the best of it, I thought. After changing my expectations and looking around, it didn't take long to peak my interest! History? Yes please!! This place is obviously full of history!

The buildings appear to be quite old and quite unique. I meandered around and began taking photos. There are two main buildings; one which is the tasting room and another which is the cellar and entrance to the wine cave. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, tours are closed. I peaked my head into the tasting room through the doors and the ladies were being treated to a wine tasting by a pleasingly vintage dressed sommelier. I asked if I could just come in to take a look and go upstairs to their little museum area. Typically, I could just blend in with the crowd, but now I stick out like a sore thumb since there are very few tourists! I did tell a little white lie that I was checking out wineries in the area to bring family and friends to for a wine tasting. I guess that's not much of a lie, because I certainly decided I wanted to come back!

The more I looked around, the more intrigued I became. Clearly there is more to this place than beats the eye (what does that mean?!). I took lots of pics and decided to come back another day to taste and learn more. I left to continue my quest to find a winery that has mustard flowers. I searched my navigator and a winery called Bartholomew popped up nearby. I set the navigator and off I went. Take the journey with me in my other recount of Bartholomew winery.

Days...weeks....later, I researched Buena Vista. The more I read, the more I needed to read! What an interesting history this place has!! And...come to find out, the Bartholomew winery nearby is definitely wrapped into the history. Buena Vista's history begins shortly before California became the 34th state and continues through a change of hands and hearts to this very day. Fortunately, the Boisset family took a keen interest and resurrected this great piece of history in 2011, embracing it's beauty and it's history! Prior to their purchase of the winery, Buena Vista was tossed around for several years in various corporate conglomerates as a 'line item' on their books and as such, didn't have the attention it so deserved. I also came to greatly appreciate the Bartholomews and their importance in resurrecting and honoring the Buena Vista winery and its past back in the 40's. If it weren't for these folks, this history and the winery may have been lost forever. If only the walls could talk....Gold Rush, Civil War, World War I and II, Phylloxera, Prohibition, The Cat Lady, House for Delinquent Women...so much history.

I started my painting from my thumbnail sketch, not sure where the journey would take me. I definitely wanted to reflect the history, but hadn't yet really experienced the wine. In June 2020, I made reservations for my husband and me and 'dragged' our son and daughter-in-law along (didn't take much to convince them!). Most wineries in Sonoma County do not require a reservation, but we were in the midst of a pandemic and reservations are required. Not only are you required to make reservations but it must include food, it must be outdoors, and the sommelier cannot hang out with you. Why food too??? Who knows, it certainly doesn't make any sense to me how the introduction of food could reduce the spread of a virus, but ya can't fight city hall!! I digress.....

The wines were fabulous and the tasting experience was fancy and fine! We had a wonderful time, but it definitely will not be my last! I plan to come back when we're past the pandemic and I can experience this wonderful place with all its history and glory! As I write this (May 2021), vaccines are plentiful and California plans to fully reopen June 15th.

So now I have a tasting under my belt and was able to revisit specific areas of the winery that I was interested in. However, due to the pandemic, wine cave tours and other areas of the winery were still closed down. I continued to research the history down to the final brush stroke on the painting (even buying a book on Sonoma wine history). While it was impossible to include all the historical milestones, I did include a few nuggets in the painting which I found quite interesting. From the Chinese workers who built the structures and worked the fields and processing (and then later were persecuted - not by the Count, but by others in the community), to the Count himself, and the Castle (for which the road was named and the mansion that was burned down by 'delinquent women'), to the 200+ persian cats owned by the 'Cat Lady'. I encourage you to look up the history yourself, it's fun and quite interesting.

This painting took me a year to finish (almost to the day!). While I was making pretty good progress during the pandemic starting May 2020, our home was hit by the wildfires in September which caused a 6 month delay. We were out of our home for 3 months and spent an additional 3 months recovering before I could get back to my paints. It felt so good to finally be able to pick up my paint brushes again!!

I hope you enjoy the painting and mostly I hope you have an opportunity to visit this wonderful historical place and enjoy the silky wines!

Cheers!