

Beneficence of Bartholomew

It was a lovely spring day on March 12th, 2020 when I decided to visit a winery or two to start the next three paintings of 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 oaks.

My first stop was Buena Vista winery which is only a stone's throw away from Bartholomew. It wasn't until I came home after visiting both of these wineries did I realize that the two shared a very interesting history. Buena Vista did not have the mustard flowers that I was longing for, but I did find 'some' at Bartholomew. When I first arrived at the Bartholomew tasting room, I was immediately drawn to its mission style stark white building accented in a gorgeous turquoise hue, and a stunning rustic door. I knew immediately that I wanted to capture these colors regardless of my personal experience.

March 2020 was the beginning of the pandemic, right before complete lockdown. In hindsight, I'm so glad I decided to venture out on this day because otherwise I wouldn't have had an opportunity again for quite some time. There weren't any cars in the parking lot, but the door to the tasting room was open; so I reluctantly ventured in not knowing if they were open or not. There was a pleasant sommelier there to greet me. I told him I was just visiting looking for places to take family and friends wine tasting and asked if I could look around. He gave me a brief overview which emphasized the fact that this 375 acre estate was bequeathed to the public through a foundation by Frank and Antonia Bartholomew with a goal to educate the public about California's viticulture and history, and that there was a park with hiking trails included. What a fun thing to do, come to the winery for a hike and finish up with a tasting and lunch on the grounds! He also shared with me that the winery part of this estate was newly opened in 2019 in partnership with winemaker Kevin Holt. Following this short educational discussion, I began to venture around, camera in hand. I also asked if I could set the door slightly open for a photo op.

Adjacent to the tasting room is a 'dining room' gallery with plein-air paintings, basked in the rustic white mission brick walls. I wasn't sure if they host plein-air painting sessions or if they just display them, but of course this is now tugging at my creative heart! While not all paintings on the wall appear to be plein-air, it was quite beautiful to see them embrace local artists.

I left the tasting room and continued to look around taking pictures of everything. The grounds are groomed and spectacular. Across the parking lot lies a beautiful parklike setting of Oak trees, picnic tables, and pretty flowers. I thought, 'what a lovely place to have a picnic in the shade'. I continued taking pictures of the exterior of the winery and took particular notice of the majestic crest above the door. I then climbed back into my car and moved on.

Now that I'm aware of the 'park', I drove to the parking lot nearby and took a peek around. I'm perplexed by this large mansion building next door to the park. It's a museum, but closed due to the pandemic. I thought it was Bartholomew's mansion, but came to find out it was Agoston Haraszthy's (the Count from Buena Vista) mansion (or Villa) which was rebuilt by Antonia Bartholomew in 1987 as an exact replica of the original. As I ventured down the hiking trail, I was treated to beautiful gnarly Old Vines standing stately in a sea of lavender colored Sweet Peas and Mustard. The mustard was just starting to bloom, so it wasn't quite the spectacular show I was longing for, but a wonderful treat nonetheless!! I didn't do the entire hike (wasn't dressed for it), but certainly intend to come back later with my husband to hike and taste!!

Moving on...I continued to research Bartholomew at home, alongside researching Buena Vista. It wasn't until I went down this path did I realize the connection between the two. I also came to greatly appreciate the Bartholomews and their importance in resurrecting and honoring the Buena Vista winery and its past. I encourage you to read the history on their website, it's very fascinating. The history dates back to before California became a state, through the Gold Rush days, World War I and II, Prohibition, and on and on. Also fun fact, the winery building once housed 'Delinquent Women' in the 1920's! What is a Delinquent Woman? That in itself is interesting. In 1943 when Mr and Mrs Bartholomew purchased this estate and the Buena Vista winery, they didn't realize the history that came with it. Upon learning this, they began their journey into the wine business, made wonderful wines, and fully embraced it's vast history.

I visited again on May 22nd 2020, this time with my husband. The state was almost in complete lockdown due to the pandemic. The county and state parks are partially opened, but other than essential business, most everything is locked down. I have started my painting, but I am longing to revisit before I go any further. My husband and I are experiencing cabin fever like everyone else in the world, so we decided to take a drive and see if we can go on a hike at the winery. If we get there and have to turn back, oh well, at least we get out for a drive. We already know we won't be able to taste wine, since wineries are completely shut down until further notice. We arrived at the winery gate which was closed, and there wasn't anyone around. We parked the car on the outside and got out of the car to look around. A local resident lady walked out of the gate area and said we can definitely go in to hike, but need to keep parked outside.

I'm very glad this visit happened this way, because what I didn't realize on my first visit, was that to the right of the winery is a gorgeous large grassy area with a walking path. If we had not parked outside the gates, it may have gone unnoticed again! The trees are quite unique (not native to this area) and the lawn is pristine and well manicured. Along the walking path are a few nuggets of history (similar to Buena Vista). We found a sign to the walking path and used the map I had previously printed off the internet to find our way around.

As we continued along the path, I looked to my right and - what's that over there across the creek and through the brush? It's Buena Vista. This is getting more and more fun as I visualize what this would have been like way back in the 1860's when Haraszthy lived here in the villa and the winery was thriving with activity! There are two paths, we chose the longest path that loops around the backside and ends up to the left side of the winery out in the vineyards. The paths along the way climb up and down with steps made of logs. The vegetation and wildflowers were spectacular. Upon reaching the top there is a sitting bench to rest and take in the stunning views of the Sonoma Valley. Now that I've experienced this beautiful hike, I'm convinced I want to incorporate it into the painting somehow. Unfortunately, I cannot yet comment on the wine since I haven't had an opportunity to experience this part of my journey with this winery. It is 'on my to-do list'!!

My painting embraces the beautiful mission style building and turquoise color. I have emphasized the hiking path, the Old Vines, and the beautiful wildflowers. Since both visits were sparse with people, I could only imagine folks walking the path (other than my husband who I posed with a walking stick). So, I looked up people on the internet. Sidebar - as I was looking up people, I realized I was not including any people of color. It was at this point in my painting that the Black Lives Matter movement was at its height. I have never considered myself prejudice or biased, but it was at this time that I realized 'in a way', I was. So, I focused my search towards people of color and came across a loving couple about mine and my husband's age and definitely wanted to incorporate them into my painting. Of course this does not absolve me of my unintentional prejudice, but it's a start and it opened my eyes. I searched the internet to learn how to mix paint colors for different skin tones and thoroughly enjoyed this learning experience. I also included kids and a young couple.

99% of the colors in my paintings are from my own color mixing of a 6 color palette (2 blues, 2 reds, 2 yellows). However, with this particular painting, I really wanted to highlight a genuine turquoise color that stood out so brilliantly. I just happened to have a Phthalo Turquoise Blue from Rembrandt paints in my box of paints that I purchased long ago because I loved it. I also wanted to make sure my white is as bright as could be, so rather than use Titanium White, I used Zinc White.

In closing, I am anxious to revisit the winery at least one more time; to hike again, to experience the wines, have a picnic in the grounds, and visit the museum. I'm sure once I do, I will have some regrets that I didn't include certain features or symbols in my painting. Today it is May 23rd, 2021 and wine tastings are open with reservations; however, still only outside tastings are allowed and the museum is closed. Vaccines are now plentiful and California is targeting June 15th to reopen everything. I WILL return!

This painting took me a year to finish (almost to the day!). Fun fact, I actually finished this painting on the same day as my Covid vaccine, April 8th, 2021. While I was making pretty good progress during the pandemic starting in May 2020, our home was hit by the wildfires in September 2020 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 magical place, visit the pristine grounds, and enjoy their wines!

Cheers!