

West Wines winery offers royal touch



West Wine

An old blue truck belies the Swedish sophistication of West Wines, a winery in Healdsburg whose Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2005 was served at the 2010 Nobel awards banquet.

By Carey Sweet

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In Sweden, people toast each other by saying *skål* ("skoal"). In Dry Creek Valley, the Swedish American Akerlind-Bonde family invites their guests to cheer however they

like, as long as it's with one of their West brand wines.

Under the direction of Bengt Akerlind and Katarina Bonde, there's nothing Scandinavian about the West Wines tasting room design, set in a Wine Country-chic cottage flanked by vineyards flowing endlessly back to redwood-dotted mountains.

Yet Akerlind and Bonde maintain their Scandinavian connection. Their wines are offered in Michelin-star restaurants in Stockholm and Göteborg, Bonde says, and their Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2005 was served at the 2010 Nobel awards banquet for the Nobel Prize laureates in Stockholm. There it was enjoyed by the Swedish king and queen and 1,200 guests, as the first time in the Nobel Prize's 113-year history that an American wine was selected for the dinner.



For a closer taste of the European homeland, one need only visit the West Wines website, which boasts an ordering page in Swedish. "*Beställ vinet från Nobelfesten!*" it proclaims, which Bonde says translates to "Order wine from the Nobel banquet," and indeed, customers can request the 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon that was served at the official banquet.

The vibe: From the outside, the little gray-paneled building looks like an upscale gas station, complete with a roll-up garage door and concrete patio under a white metal overhang. But a "Casablanca" movie poster on the front door and chile-red patio umbrella tables set in the shade of a substantial oak add style and charm.

The experience: After greeting Winston, who is the neighboring winery's dog but likes to make his rounds, I grabbed a spot at the busy wood-trimmed bar beneath a crystal chandelier. The space is a broad rectangle, and thanks to plenty of windows and the roll-up door, feels larger than it is. My cheerful host showed me the estate vineyards

sprawling to the east, and the barrel room tucked behind glass on the opposite side of the tasting room.

The winery name, I learned, was chosen because the vineyards are on the western slope of Dry Creek Valley, in the western part of Sonoma County, "which is one of the westernmost wine-producing areas in California, and therefore among the most western vineyards in the Western Hemisphere."

The team: Akerlind and Bonde moved from Sweden to Seattle in 1992 to work in the IT industry and in 1998 bought a 60-acre vineyard in Sonoma County as a vacation property. They created their own brand in 2002. The winemaker is Phyllis Zouzounis, on board since 2008, and previously winemaker and general manager of Mazzocco Vineyards in Dry Creek.

The wines: For Dry Creek tasters, the lineup is less royal than the service with the Swedish king and queen, but all grapes do come from the Akerlind-Bonde estate, produced in a 1,500- to 2,000-case annual production. Five dollars is a good deal for four pours, including a Sauvignon Blanc 2012 (\$21) sourced from the grapes right outside the tasting room; a 2009 Viognier (\$23); the West Crest Cuvée 2008, made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc (\$35); and the signature Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2006 (\$42).



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Patio tables set in the shade of an oak tree add style and charm to what appears to be an upscale gas station.

The extras: The 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve from the Nobel awards banquet is available for purchase in magnum bottles, by special order from the West Wines website or in the tasting room.

If you go: Noon to 4 p.m. Monday, Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, and by appointment. West Wines, 1000 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg. (707) 433-2066. www.westwines.com.

Nearby: 32 Winds Wines, 1010 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg. (707) 433-1010. www.32windswine.com. Wilson Winery, 1960 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg. (707) 433-4355. www.wilsonwinery.com. Nalle Winery, 2383 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg. (707) 433-1040. www.nallewinery.com.

Rating: Rating: TWO AND A HALF STARS