

## East Bay Wine Country

Urban wineries in Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda come into their own.

By Jody Brett Kelly

*The Huffington Post* recently declared Oakland as "wine country." Wine columnist Mary Orlin wrote: "When you think of Oakland, the other city by the San Francisco Bay, you probably don't think of it as wine country. There aren't any vineyards, bucolic settings, or palatial wine tasting rooms. Instead you find a gritty industrial vibe, one that dares to thumb its nose at traditional wine country." On her recent tour of China, Mayor Quan brought gifts of Oakland wine, referring to the article.

There are now 23 urban wineries in the East Bay. One reason for so many popping up here is the cost — winemakers don't have to buy and plant expensive vineyards. And the good news for wine lovers is their tasting rooms are easy to get to. You can walk or ride BART to many urban wineries on a weekend afternoon.

If you want to do some extensive research into local wines, the **East Bay Vintners Alliance** hosts a passport wine tasting on some Saturdays. **Rock Wall Winery** (2301 Monarch St., Alameda) also hosts some incredibly well-organized and extensive evening tastings. But for a quick and easy start, I thought I'd pop into **Wine Mine** (5427 Telegraph Ave., Ste. D1, Oakland) and try three that they had on hand.

The first two wines happened to come from Rock Wall Winery, based on the former Naval Air Station in Alameda and offering sweeping views of San Francisco's skyline and Oakland's iconic monster cranes. The stunning nighttime scene is depicted on their bottles.

The 2009 California Tannat called The Palindrome (\$15) has a soft character and rounds out nicely at the end. It's a good meaty wine but has enough depth and spice to go with chicken dishes and heavier pasta. We found it like a Zin — jammy, a bit peppery, and drinkable on its own.

The Viva la Blanc (\$11) was 60 percent sauvignon blanc and 40 percent barrel-aged chardonnay in French oak. Very lemony, it has lots of flavor but isn't so tart that you have to pair it with salads and fish dishes. While we weren't really bowled over by it, it's a decent choice for the price — though some New Zealand whites I've tasted under \$10 have been more three-dimensional.

**Eight Arms Cellars** is based in Berkeley and bottled in Suisun City. **Iain Boltin**, the winemaker behind the one-man operation, says he would love to have more arms — hence the name Octopus. "Drink the Ink" is its slogan. The Octopod Alexander Valley Syrah 2008 (\$17.50) was our favorite of the three East Bay wines we tasted. Incredibly smooth, with lots of berries and a good range from herbal to peppery that you should find in syrahs, this would go brilliantly with game meats, but also with any flavorful savory dishes.

So what East Bay wines have you tasted?