

May 2006

Patterson's **BEVERAGE** Journal

Palette for the Palate

Ann Rea Interprets a Sense of Place on Canvas



California winemakers are discovering that, in addition to wine, their vineyards contain another asset that can be marketed to wine lovers; the beauty of the setting itself. Vintners are being helped along the marketing path by San Francisco artist, Ann Rea, who has molded her art around the Wine Country's majestic scenery.

Rea, a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art, is a "plein-air" painter who spends her time with her canvases and easel in the vineyards. She has created what she calls "the perfect pairing" by working with wineries such as R.H. Phillips, Gloria Ferrer, Went, Louis M. Martini, and Markham Vineyards. The winemakers take Rea on a tour of their vineyards, explaining their particular "terroir." Rea sets up her easel among the grapes and puts her oils to work.

Following in the tradition of the French Impressionist, Rea captures the rapidly changing light and surrounds on her canvas, with each painting depicting a recognizable area of the vineyard at a unique time.

She produces vineyard mementos including original paintings, signed prints, gift cards and postcards at the affiliated vineyards. Additionally, Rea offers 42 Giclee prints of her Carneros, Dunnigan Hills, Livermore, Napa, and Sonoma wine region paintings at her Web site www.annrea.com.

"My assumption was that the wine lover is a collecting personality, and likes to collect art," Rea said. "After an afternoon comparing Pinot and Merlot, wine enthusiasts can take a little of the magic home," Rea said.

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Iain Douglas, vice president of marketing for Gallo, noted in a San Francisco Chronicle business feature that Rea is a unique combination of artist and businessperson.

“Wine is a live product, and her style of plein-air paintings capture it live,” said Douglas. “her business approach was the best I’ve seen from the art world. Her flexibility in offering her paintings in so many different forms allows us to share it with our customers in many different ways, from than-yous for key customers to postcards in our tasting room.” Rea is currently negotiating the publication of a book featuring her collection of vineyard paintings and winemakers’ notes about the terroir.