


Enotech Eclectica

Picayune Cellars
& Mercantile

BY TANYA HENRY



A top-down photograph of a glass of red wine and several antique skeleton keys arranged on a rustic wooden surface. The glass is partially filled with a dark red liquid. The keys vary in size and design, with some having heart-shaped or circular heads and others having more traditional notched heads. The wood grain is prominent and runs horizontally across the frame.

KEY Most of Picayune's labels include an image of an antique skeleton key, which is a nod to the negociant-style of Picayune winery.

Downtown Calistoga's Picayune Cellars is a perfect example of how the wine tasting model that previously included packing in as many tastings in one day as possible has changed. A hat bar where visitors can design their own chapeau, a retail store chock-full of the founders' "favorite things" and of course wines are all on the menu at this expanded tasting room experience. »»

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PICAYUNE CELLARS



CHEERS Claire Ducrocq Weinkauf's initial foray into winemaking began with a purchase of what she had expected to be a barrel, but instead she received a tank.

« The handsome two-story white building with dark trim is the newest location for Picayune Cellars, which was previously located behind the Depot Train Station in Calistoga. Part of the town's permitting process required occupants of the prime Lincoln Avenue location to offer a retail component—and boy did owner Claire Ducrocq Weinkauf comply! In February 2023, Picayune Cellars & Mercantile opened their doors to reveal an inviting tasting room with several seating options, along with a vast array of jewelry, handbags, Native American blankets, hand-picked artworks and much more.

Weinkauf's initial foray into winemaking began with a purchase of what she had expected to be a barrel, but instead she received a tank. Thus began her winemaking journey. She aptly named the winery Picayune (very loosely translated to a little) and released her first wines in 2011. While Weinkauf cites her interest is first and foremost as a wine drinker, the French native was no stranger to the business before she started her own label.

She founded Claire de Lune, a wine marketing consulting firm in 2010 and before that gained invaluable experience working for Paul Hobbs Wines. While

she worked on the business side, she also learned a great deal about the winemaking process during time spent in Argentina. It was there that she saw firsthand that winemaking in South America and the U.S. was less bound by century's old traditions as it is in France. This appealed to Weinkauf's more accessible attitude toward winemaking, and she vowed to bring that spirit to her own wines.

"I am a wine drinker before a winemaker," explains Weinkauf, who noticed the lack of good quality and affordable wine options by the glass in many restaurants. She wanted to »

I am a wine drinker before a winemaker...
I started Picayune out of my desire
to drink wines that I stylistically loved
and that I could afford on a daily basis.

— CLAIRE DUCROCQ WEINKAUF

« change that. “I started Picayune out of my desire to drink wines that I stylistically loved and that I could afford on a daily basis,” she said.

In 2011, she released her first sauvignon blanc with her good friend and then partner, Jennifer Roberts. Today Picayune produces over 10 different wines, including a rose made with 100% syrah grapes to a coveted Blanc de Noir Champagne (thanks to a partnership with a French family).

Most of Picayune’s labels include an image of an antique skeleton key (there is also a large replica of a key that adorns the exterior of the building). Tasting room manager Carly Silva explains that the key is a nod to the negotiant-style of Picayune winery. This means the winemaker doesn’t own vineyards or a winery but instead dedicates herself solely to the making of the wines, or as Silva puts it, “All of the efforts go into the bottle and not all the fluff around it.”

As there is typically a fair amount of secrecy surrounding this type of winemaking, a key suggests the contents are under lock and key. In fact, one of the wines (a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and other Bordeaux varietals) is titled Padlock.

The wines at Picayune are indeed bright and accessible. Their sauvignon blanc is eminently drinkable, with a mix of citrus and mineral notes. While the winery is best known for their sauvignon blanc, pinot noir and cabernet sauvignon (grapes are sourced from all over), there are also some unexpected offerings, »



SPACE The eclectic space may soon host live music.



BOTTLE As tasting room manager Carly Silva explains, 'All of the efforts go into the bottle and not all the fluff around it.'

« including an albarino, a grenache and syrah blend, and of course the Champagne Blanc de Noir Grand Cru. The wines aren't confined by limited varietals, but rather by what the founder likes to drink.

Just as the wines very much reflect the taste of the founder, so too do the mercantile offerings. And much like the wines that eventually became "a little bit" of everything (as their name suggests), the retail inventory also boasts an eclectic mix of wares. Weinkauff's initial buying started with her own personal collections.

Hand crafted knives from artisans in the region of France where Weinkauff grew up are on the shelves. Locally made silk scarves, along with plenty of Native American artwork and blankets, are also on display. Lest it feel too designer-y, a large selection of whimsical socks are also available, along with attractive wine-country friendly housewares. Silva stresses the buying process is focused

on supporting artists and people, not corporations.

While the merchandise has been carefully curated, there is also a hat bar, where visitors can purchase a basic style and with Silva's assistance can personalize and brand their selections with initials or insignias, and adorn them with feathers, ribbons and bows if they desire. It's safe to say that designing and building a one-of-a-kind hat whilst enjoying a flight of wines decidedly raises the bar on tasting room experiences.

Picayune's inviting interior is open and cheery, with plenty of air wafting through the large space from the front doors to the back of the store, which opens onto a newly completed back patio. A grand opening recently celebrated the completed space. Plans for live music are also in the works. Even the tasting experience will get a boost with the addition of a Chef's Bites menu option,

including a whipped goat cheese crostini and wild mushroom arancini.

For visitors who can't get enough of all things Claire Ducrocq Weinkauff, the Calistoga resident even takes 10-20 of Picayune wine club members on a journey to France every summer. She rents a barge with a crew; and travelers join her in visiting villages, historic sites, and of course, discovering plenty of food and wine along the way.

A visit to Picayune Cellars & Mercantile clearly includes much more than simply sampling locally made wines. This eclectic tasting room offers up things one didn't even know they wanted, all under one white stucco roof in the heart of downtown Calistoga.

Picayune Cellars & Mercantile

Website: picayunecellars.com

Phone: 707-341-3410

Address: 1440 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga

Hours: Sunday-Thursday: 11am-6pm;

Friday: 11am-8pm; Saturday: 10am-7pm