

montecito JOURNAL

winter | spring • 2015/16



MONTECITO TO MANHATTAN

ART+WINE

BY KIA MCINERNY

PHOTOS BY BOB DICKEY

FRED BRANDER

There's nothing pretentious about Bordeaux-variety producer Fred Brander. For our meeting at his favorite Montecito coffee spot, he arrives in a well-used white truck with an antique Spanish desk lashed to its flat-bed.

Wine aficionados know Brander from his prestigious vineyards and winery in Los Olivos, which he and his father planted in 1975. Four decades later, the label is celebrated for its Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. And, while continuing to innovate in wine-making, he has recently become equally impassioned about art.

INTRODUCTION TO MEXICAN CERAMICS

Opening this summer is a private museum Brander designed for his collection of museum-quality Mexican folk art. "I started collecting 20th-century masters in Mexican painting," he explains. Then, while on a Santa Barbara Museum tour of Mexican villages with an informed guide, Brander was introduced to the country's high-quality ceramics. He instantly recognized a parallel between regional folk art and wine.





AN ART-WINE PARALLEL

“Both evoke a strong sense of place,” he notes. “Like wine, ceramics derive from the soil. Although crafted individually, the art conforms to a genre and style particular to the community.” This is also true of wine. Sauvignon Blanc – whether from New Zealand, the Sancerre, or Los Olivos – offers a profile unique to its region.

“In particular with Mexican ceramics, as with wine, not only can the provenance of a piece be determined (in terms of locale or community) but, at the highest expression of quality, the individual artisan or winemaker shows through.”

There is even a strong government scheme in place to ensure geographical authenticity of Mexican folk art – similar to the strict regional controls for wine districts and appellations in the U.S., France, and Italy.

Having lived in Argentina until he was 12, Brander has a strong affinity for both Hispanic and European cultures. In his analysis, the relationship between wine and art can best be demonstrated by comparing Mexico with a European model.

“In countries with strong wine cultures like France, Spain, or Italy, wine is individually made but follows a collective process involving traditional techniques, and grape varieties best matched to the region.” Similarly, folk art is crafted by the individual, using materials, motifs, and style from past and present culture. And, while it may range in quality – “both wine and art will preserve their sense of provenance.”

SELF-TAUGHT ARTISANS

The collector has tapped into an exuberant spirit of creativity among Mexican artisans. A life-size carousel horse in cast bronze is ridden by fantastic figures with animal faces and six-fingered hands. There is a beautiful Oaxacan vase of swimming-fish design blackened from kiln-smoke, then partially burnished with pieces of pyrite to create mirrored shapes.

A commissioned piece is a brightly festooned cart pulled by oxen. Its honored passenger? The current pope, a fellow Argentine.

Demonstrating Brander's view that folk art, like wine, is tied to

An existing 1940s barn with original corrugated roof forms the rear of the courtyard. The new hacienda structure has thick exterior walls and 12-foot ceilings, for an environment that is passively heated and cooled. Painted ceilings of forest green and cerulean blue evoke the colors of Yucatan buildings, and floors are of Saltillo and Tecate tiles.

The galleries will be open by appointment and for special events. From Brander's collection of approximately 300 works, up to 100 at a time will be on view, with changing installations.

The collector travels to Mexico four times a year. A favorite museum is Mexico City's Museo de Arte Popular (MAP). "I have always been drawn to Mexico for its proximity and my interest in the culture. In



its culture, many of the artisans Brander visits are modest people with kilns in their backyards. "The whole family is working on the art in this tradition. Generations upon generations, relying entirely on their art for their livelihood."

HACIENDA STYLE

The museum is modeled after a true hacienda style, with three sides around an open courtyard. From the entrance is a captivating view of vineyards below. A peacock door pull and mural of whimsical figures are from Tlaquepaque.

some ways, MAP is an inspiration for my museum."

He plans to bring artists from Mexico to show their work and demonstrate how it is made.

"There has been an evolution of thought about Mexico," Brander observes. "In the 1940s and 1950s, Mexico City was seen by many as having the sophistication of New York or Buenos Aires." In later decades, "Mexico was considered second-rate in terms of cuisine, quality beverages, or lifestyle. By opening this museum, I hope to encourage knowledge of quality Mexican art in the community. I feel there's a need for a museum of this kind."

Gracias, Señor Brander!

