

CENTRAL COAST

IN RARE FORM

**MONTEREY COUNTY'S SCHEID FAMILY
WINES SHOWS ITS EXPERIMENTAL
SIDE IN PRODUCING VARIETIES
UNCOMMON IN CALIFORNIA**



Pictured from left to right in Scheid Family Wines' 335-acre Riverview Vineyard in Monterey County are Vice President of Winemaking Dave Nagengast, Winemaker Marta Kraftzcek, Executive Vice President Heidi Scheid, COO Kurt Gollnick, and Director of Vineyard Operations Greg Gonzalez.

BY KATE NEWTON
PHOTOS BY JOHN CURLEY



Nestled inside Scheid Family Wines' 335-acre Riverview property outside Soledad, California, is a "vineyard within a vineyard" paying homage to Marta Kraftzeck, a Monterey County native and the region's first female winemaker.

Aptly named—you guessed it—Marta's Vineyard, the 6-acre plot is encompassed by the family-owned company's northernmost estate vineyard. It also serves as somewhat of a microcosm of Scheid Family Wines' overarching approach to winemaking: Planted largely to grape varieties seldom grown in California, Marta's serves as a breeding ground for experimentation rarely executed by a commercial winery of Scheid's size.

While this year marks Kraftzeck's tenth harvest at Scheid, it's her 35th year making wine in Monterey. On a warm morning in early October, Kraftzeck strolled the vineyard rows of Fiano, Grüner Veltliner, Petit Manseng, Pinot Meunier, and Dolcetto grapes, admiring the thickness of the latter variety's hefty clusters. "If you look at the top ten varieties in the world, they used to be a much smaller percentage of the amount produced than they are now, and a lot of those interesting varieties are fading by the wayside," Kraftzeck explained. "I think it's up to growers like Scheid to embrace a bit of diversity."

Of the 23 "unusual" varieties Scheid has planted on its Riverview, Mesa del Rio, San Lucas, and Hames Valley properties—the winery's 11 estate vineyards comprise roughly 4,000 acres within a 70-mile span—it's currently bottling ten as single-varietal wines primarily shared with its 2,500-member wine club. The others are typically incorporated into blends like the Scheid Vineyards Odd Lot Red. "Sometimes we'll plant just a half-acre of something and it does so beautifully that we see that there's actually potential to expand production and go beyond our wine club to do something primarily for on-premise," says Executive Vice President (and founder Al Scheid's daughter) Heidi Scheid.

Among the most successful of the standalone releases are the Grenache Blanc and the Grüner, as well as the Tannat, the Portuguese variety Touriga Nacional, and the Petit Manseng, which Vice President of Winemaking Dave Nagengast says makes for a "great dessert wine" and "conversation piece."

Considering Scheid usually produces a maximum of just 250 cases of each variety at a time, Heidi said "it's pretty easy to sell through it." "A lot of people come to the tasting room specifically because they've heard we have unusual varieties," she adds. "You come to Monterey and you taste a lot of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay—which is great, because who doesn't love a beautiful Monterey Pinot or Chardonnay—but sometimes when you have a couple-day trip, you want to taste something different. We're one of the few growers that's gone out on that ledge."



In the top image, hefty clusters of Dolcetto, a Piedmontese grape, grow in Marta's Vineyard inside Scheid Family Wines' Riverview property. Below, Scheid Family Wines Winemaker Marta Kraftzeck walks the rows of her eponymous 6-acre "vineyard within a vineyard."

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Scott and Heidi Scheid, the children of Scheid Family Wines founder Al Scheid, now serve as President/CEO and Executive Vice President, respectively.

The majority of the red wines processed in Scheid Family Wines' reserve winery go through a 2-ton basket press, which is gentler on the grapes.

Bottling the Best of Monterey

Describing Scheid's foray into esoteric grapes as "a technological playground," Nagengast works closely with Director of Vineyard Operations Greg Gonzalez and the rest of the vineyard team to give each variety the meticulous care and consideration they require to thrive in their various microclimates.

In addition to having their own separate block valves for irrigation, each block in Marta's Vineyard is also hooked up to a system that monitors environmental elements like soil moisture. "When we find the sweet spot, we can nail it," Gonzalez says of tailoring these variables to each grape.

To highlight the terroir of Riverview, with its well-drained, decomposed-granite soils and bench location overlooking the Salinas River, Nagengast and crew will set aside some lots to press and barrel on-site so that the only yeasts present are those native to the vineyard. "Even the yeast is part of terroir, and that's sometimes overlooked. We're trying to exploit that here," COO Kurt Gollnick says. "Everything that's happening in one location is its own expression that you could never duplicate anywhere else in the world. I love the whole idea of pulling the very best out of this location from all angles."

Because the small lots of these varieties would, in Kraftzcek's words, "get lost" in the company's massive main facility, they're instead processed in Scheid's reserve winery. Completed in 2006, the facility will double in size



after an addition is completed in time for next year's harvest, providing some much-needed space for barrel storage. In accordance with the winery's gentle approach to winemaking, which Kraftzeck describes as "minimal-intervention," a 2-ton basket press is utilized for most reds, while white grapes go through a bladder press. New fermenters equipped with hydraulic-assisted punch-down devices



A native of Monterey County, Marta Kraftzeck was the region's first female winemaker and has worked with Scheid Family Wines for ten harvests.

were also recently installed, though Kraftzeck anticipates the winery will continue to use plastic fermentation bins for smaller quantities.

While grooming each variety in Monterey's diverse microclimate zones yields new learning experiences at all levels of the winemaking process, Heidi says they'll skip certain vintages with some of the varieties "if [they] feel like it moved backward in quality instead of forward," adding that this approach harkens back to Scheid's core value of continuous improvement. But just because a particular grape doesn't perform well in a certain spot doesn't mean there isn't a place for it somewhere else in the valley: "This is the type of business where you need to be in it for the long haul," Heidi adds.

Above all, the prevailing goal of this experimental project is to channel the distinctive character of Monterey County into the wines, not to simply mimic the winemaking style of the varieties' native regions. "When we're making a Grüner Veltliner, we're not trying to make a Grüner that tastes like it's from Austria," Heidi explains. "It might, but that's not our goal to force it into a certain taste profile. We're really trying to produce the best wine we can from the grapes our vineyards give us." ■■



A TASTE OF SCHEID'S ESOTERIC VARIETIES

REVIEWED BY MERIDITH MAY

Scheid Vineyards 2016 Petit Manseng (\$24) This variety is regarded as one of the most notable white grapes grown in southwest France, and in Monterey County it produces an ideal late-harvest wine fermented in stainless steel. With only a half-acre devoted to this special grape, the resulting liquid is honeyed gold with floral tones accented by lemon verbena and dried apricot. The acidity cuts through the sweetness with grace. **91**

Scheid Vineyards 2017 Grenache Blanc, San Lucas Vineyard (\$24) This is one of the southern Rhône varieties that can be the most glorious due to its pretty nature, precise acidity, and edgy point of view. Warm days ripened the fruit showcased here, and the aromas are bejeweled with lime and minerality. Slate and lemon wedge enhance the palate as white flowers lay a delicate groundwork. Tart green apple and Valencia orange ride in on the vivacious acidity. **93**



Scheid Vineyards 2016 Touriga Nacional, Hames Valley Vineyard (\$34) Portugal's indigenous grape performs well here: White pepper charms plums and blackberries on the nose, while dark chocolate lushly coats blackberry on the palate. Notes of earthy tomato leaf and heather accent the dark fruit as well. It's aged 20 months in Hungarian oak for a tame, spicy, and exuberant mouthfeel. **93**

Scheid Vineyards 2016 Dolcetto, Riverview Vineyard (\$34) This Piedmontese variety shows its bone-dry, tannic nature in the California sunshine. On the heels of a blueberry-vanilla nose, the palate offers a concentrated expression of blackberry, espresso, and spiced tobacco. Aged ten months in 100% French oak and coming in at 14.5% ABV, this is a structured wine with a lean body. **92**

Scheid Vineyards 2016 Tempranillo, San Lucas Vineyard (\$30) Spain's native red is an early ripener and succeeds at finding balance in this cool, maritime site. Rich, round, chalky tannins are accentuated by ripe notes of plum and blackberry in the sturdy mouthfeel. The oak is well-integrated. **92**