

Ampelos Cellars Takes You to Funky Town

Santa Barbara County Vintners Peter and Rebecca Work Start New Brand to Attract Millennials

By **Matt Kettmann**

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Over the past two decades, Peter and Rebecca Work clicked all the correct boxes to become successful, prominent, and influential vintners in Santa Barbara County: planting



NOT RETIRING: Rebecca and Peter Work are scaling back in production of Ampelos wines but also building a new brand called Funky Town at the same time. | Credit: Courtesy





Credit: Courtesy

“The bottom line is that Rebecca and I want to work less but have more fun,” said Peter back in February, as we sat around his kitchen table sipping on the Funky Town wines. “I want my Sundays back.”

Ampelos will remain their primary brand, though they’ve taken annual production from a peak of 6,000 cases down to about 1,500. The established lineup of pinot noir, viognier, syrah, grenache, and traditional sparkling will fall under Ampelos, but new varieties and styles will be designated as Funky Town. Explained Rebecca, “Nothing in this brand is going to have similarity with Ampelos.”

Just as
Ampelos was
a nod to their
shared love of
Greece, where
they once
owned a small
inn, Funky
Town is a





Credit: Courtesy

reference to the couple's personal histories. The labels feature skylines of both Anchorage (Rebecca's hometown) and Copenhagen (Peter's), and the bottle's back side proclaims, "These wines are for those who want to live life to its fullest, see the sunrise, and

fall asleep on new and exciting shores. Join our next adventure and take a trip with us ... from the northern lights of Alaska to the harbor shores of Denmark."

I've known the Works for more than 15 years and even made a half-dozen small batches of wine with them from 2012 through the 2018 vintage. That last project was Camp Four Vineyard carignane, a red grape originally from Spain that's most common these days in southern France. Compounded with a carignane-soaked trip to Priorat in northeastern Spain, Peter enjoyed that grape so much – he thought our 2018 haul was perhaps the best-smelling ferment of his career – that he kept at it. In 2019, he sourced carignane from the Santa Ynez Vineyard, a newer property in the far eastern edge of Happy Canyon. That's now the sole red in the Funky Town lineup, made in a snappy, fresh style.



But like other newer-wave, millennial-aimed brands, the Funky Town focus is more about white, pink, orange, and fizz than it is red wine. There's a fuschia-colored piquette, a lower-alcohol, typically sparkling style of wine made from pressed grapes that are rehydrated and refermented. Their version is from grenache and syrah grapes farmed on the Ampelos Vineyard, which was the first estate to be third-party certified as sustainable, organic, and biodynamic in the country.

"There's no 'Piquette for Dummies,'" said Peter, laughing about the experimentation that led to his version, which is deeper in fruit and earth flavors than often watery competitors. "It's just a great beer alternative."

The clairette blanche, from the organically farmed Martian Ranch near Los Alamos, is a crisp, floral, and, for lack of a better term, "normal" white wine. But the albarino, which spent 14 days on the skins, is very much an orange wine, even a bit cloudy in the glass. Also organically farmed, it's packed with dried apricot and orange peel flavors, layered in a stony, even rusty minerality, but the viscous texture is what stands out.

"The tannin balance is a really hard thing," explained Peter, clearly enthused by new challenges in the winery. "Here you have a white wine with tannin, so how much tannin?" The 2020 sold out quickly, but the 2021 is being bottled this month, so its release is imminent.

The Works see Funky Town as a means of staying relevant in a constantly changing alcohol market, where competition from hard seltzer, beer, and booze is stronger — and customers are less loyal — than ever. "We have walked the walk long before others even knew



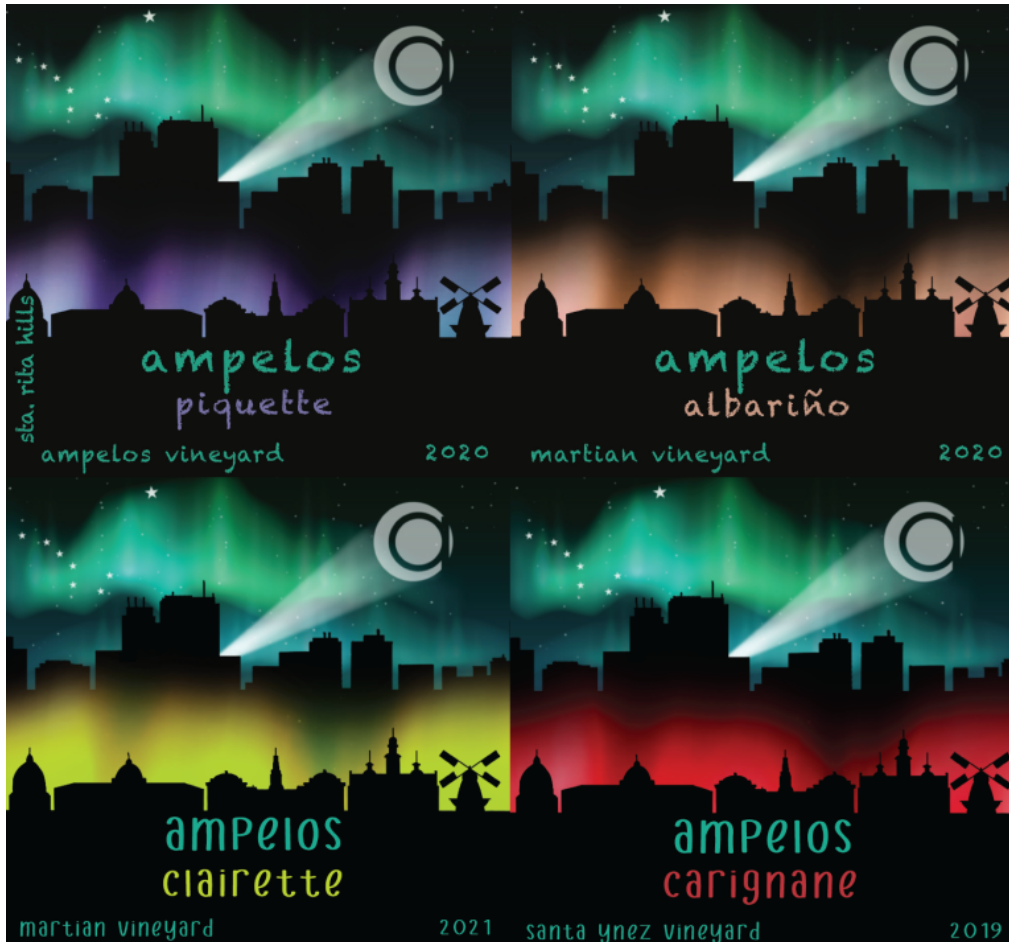
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than ever. “We have walked the walk long before others even knew about it,” said Rebecca, referring to their leadership in biodynamic farming, among other pioneering initiatives. “It’s about always continuing to raise the bar.”

It’s also about staying busy in ways that matter. “I don’t believe in retirement,” said Peter. “I don’t know anyone who’s survived it.”

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