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## Daniel: Sept. 11 propelled couple into winemaking

By Laurie Daniel  
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Momentous life events have a way of making people take stock and change direction. A brush with serious illness and my 40th birthday prompted me to pursue wine writing as a career. For Peter and Rebecca Work of Ampelos Cellars in Santa Barbara County, the catalyst was the events of Sept. 11.

The Works were on the corporate fast track with a human-resources outsourcing company they'd helped start. They were making regular trips to Newark, N.J., where they were negotiating a contract with Prudential Financial.

On Sept. 10, 2001, the couple took a red-eye from Los Angeles, landing in Newark the following morning. Peter had an appointment on Wall Street at 9 a.m., and he planned to take a Port Authority train to the World Trade Center station. It was a trip that would have put him under the World Trade Center at 8:45 a.m. -- just a minute before American Airlines Flight 11 tore into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

Fortunately, the Wall Street appointment was canceled as they were on the way to the airport Monday night. But as the couple tried to get home from Newark after the Federal Aviation Administration had grounded all flights, they began to wonder whether this high-powered life of travel and meetings and IPOs was what they really wanted. They got as far as Kansas City in a rented SUV before the airlines started flying again. When they finally landed in Los Angeles, Peter says, the couple knew it was time to make a change.

"9/11 made a significant impact on our life, there's no doubt about it," Peter says.

Two years earlier, the Works had bought 82 acres in the Santa Rita hills, the appellation at the cool western end of the Santa Ynez Valley. It's an area that has rocketed to prominence on the strength of its dark, concentrated pinot noirs. The Works loved wine and visiting wineries, and they thought it would be fun to plant a few grapes and make a little wine as a weekend project.

"We just fell in love with the whole ambience around the winemakers," Peter says, adding that he thought it was a "cool lifestyle."

The couple hired a vineyard consultant who persuaded them to plant 15 acres in 2001. They looked around at what grapes other people in the area were growing -- pinot specialist Sea Smoke is a neighbor; Lafond, with pinot, syrah and other grapes, is down the hill -- and decided on a mix of two-thirds pinot and one-third syrah. They planned to sell most of the grapes.

A few months later, the 9/11 attacks stunned the country, and the Works. In January 2002, they sold their house on the water in Long Beach and moved to Santa Barbara County. And they jumped into the wine business with both feet.

They bought a little wine in barrel for Peter to blend and bottle; at harvest time, they bought some grapes. Peter now makes the wines in Lompoc in a facility he shares with Ken Brown and his eponymous brand; the Works' son Don, the assistant winemaker at Sea Smoke, is Peter's consultant. The 2004 vintage marked the first harvest from the estate vineyard. The couple also planted 10 more acres -- mostly pinot and syrah, with a little grenache, pinot gris and viognier -- that year.

The Works decided to call their winery Ampelos, the Greek word for vine. The winery shares its name with a resort the couple owns with Peter's sister and brother-in-law on the Greek island of Folegandros.

I haven't tasted all the Ampelos wines, but the ones I've sampled are impressive, especially for such early efforts. The **2004 estate pinot noir (\$32)** displays bright cherry and raspberry flavors, accented by some exotic spices and a hint of mineral. It's well-structured, but the tannins are very accessible.

The **2004 estate syrah (\$34)** is dark and a little meaty, with ripe blackberry fruit and a note of violets. It's still quite young and tight and won't be released until November. Even then, it should benefit from a few more months in the

bottle.

The **2005 rosé of syrah (\$16)** is made from grapes purchased from a warm part of the Santa Ynez Valley. It's fresh, fruity and dry, with juicy raspberry flavors, bright acidity and just a bit of drying tannin on the finish. The winery also produces a little viognier and a ``syrache," a blend of syrah and grenache, both of them made from purchased fruit.

None of the wines is in huge supply: The Works made just 850 cases in 2004 and plan for production to top out at 4,200-4,500 cases. They can be ordered through the Web site, **www. ampelocellars.com**.

Since making their abrupt career change nearly five years ago, the Works haven't looked back. Peter acknowledges that owning a winery and making wine ``is more work than I had envisioned." That said, does he still think being a winemaker is a ``cool lifestyle"?

``Totally," he replies.

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