

Memphis vs. Santa Maria



IN A MID-SUMMER BARBECUE, SANTA BARBARA WINE COUNTRY GOES WHOLE HOG

story and photos by Allison Levine



Argentine-style barbecued beef and chicken.



Host and vintner Doug Margerum with his Sybarite Sauvignon Blanc.

Over a hot August weekend, wine and barbecue lovers joined vintner Doug Margerum for three days of food and drink in Santa Barbara. Four Memphis chefs—Wally Joe of Acre Restaurant, Felicia Suzanne Willett of Suzanne's and Andrew Ticer and Michael Hudman of Andrew Michael Italian Kitchen—flew to Santa Barbara wine country to pair their delicious food with wines from Margerum Wine Company, Happy Canyon Vineyards, Cimarone and Cent' Anni.

The weekend started off with a food and wine dinner at the Wine Cask Restaurant, where the Memphis team partnered with local chefs Brandon Hughes and Rosie Gerard. The next day, guests enjoyed a polo match and Argentine-style barbecue with wines from Happy Canyon Vineyards. The weekend culminated with a barbecue cook-off pitting Memphis-style against Santa Maria-style at the brand new Margerum Winery in Buellton.

From Memphis, we were served whole roasted pig with a tangy barbecue sauce and white bread to soak up the juices of the pork. Sides included fresh watermelon, deviled eggs with salmon, a cucumber and tomato salad, kale, rice, beans and fresh pickles. From Santa Maria, guests were served up tri-tip with coleslaw, baked beans with fresh cotija cheese and grilled baguette.

With both styles of 'cue, the Margerum Wines were a perfect pairing. The equally crisp and bright 2010 Vin de Pays Rosé (made from fruit grown on the Chêne Bleu property near Gigondas, where Margerum is a consultant) and the 2010 Sybarite Sauvignon Blanc from Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara were both a refreshing start in the 100-plus-degree weather.

Both red wines—the 2007 Über Syrah, Santa Barbara County and the 2009 M5, a five-variety blend from Santa Barbara County, made in homage to Châteaufort-du-Pape—shared similar styles in that they were fruit-forward and powerful but with balanced elegance and acidity. Both wines were in harmony with the spicy flavors of the barbecue; the softer Syrah paired best with the roasted pork, while the bolder M5 stood up to the tri-tip.

The final touch was a marriage between both cities as guests enjoyed Memphis bread pudding topped with fresh Santa Barbara peaches and vanilla ice cream. A few lucky guests enjoyed a sip of the recently released and limited Margerum Amaro, a digestif made with partially fermented Sangiovese raisins, neutral grape spirit and herbs.

In the end, I still can't say which style of barbecue I liked better. I guess we'll just have to schedule a re-match. ■■