

OUR STORY

SAM & SHAWNDA MARMORSTEIN, OWNERS & FOUNDERS OF BERNAT VINEYARDS & WINERY AND LOS OLIVOS WINE MERCHANT & CAFÉ

At the award-winning Los Olivos Wine Merchant & Café, you really do “Taste the Central Coast.” The Café makes it a priority to choose locally grown, organic ingredients. The Wine Merchant offers the best from the many terroirs of the captivating California Central Coast in its collection of 500 wines; and is the exclusive retailer of Bernat wines, from an organically certified (CCOF) vineyard in Los Olivos.

The story of this family-owned and operated Café, Wine Merchant and Winery began in early 1995, when Sam Marmorstein, a former stock broker and entrepreneur, decided to leave Los Angeles and follow his dreams. Having made wine as a hobby with friends in L.A. for a number of years, Sam had romanticized about owning his own winery and vineyard. In 1995, Sam made the move to the Santa Barbara wine country, purchased 10 prime acres of home/ranchland in Los Olivos and began planting Chardonnay and Syrah grapes. Bernat Vineyards and Winery was born (and named after his father). The owl on the label’s logo honors the feathered friends that protect and watch over the vineyard. So while Sam’s four-acre vineyard was growing, he followed his other passion . . . food.

Sam had envisioned a restaurant that would offer good wine with good food, in an approachable and welcoming atmosphere. The Café has been successful since its crowded opening day December 30, 1995. Serving lunch and dinner daily, the Café’s warm, inviting ambiance, friendly service and excellent cuisine offers locally sourced ingredients, some of which come from Sam’s own ranch, and continues to win rave reviews from *Sunset*, *Westways*, *Gourmet*, *Los Angeles Times* as well as being the proud recipient of the *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence along with many other accolades.

In 1999, Bernat Winery, one of the smallest licensed producers in the Santa Ynez Valley, debuted its first estate grown Chardonnay—24 cases. Sold out within two months, Sam continues to use “old-world” methods of hand pruning, hand harvesting, and minimal processing in the certified organic (CCOF) vineyard. Currently, the four acres are planted with Syrah, Nebbiolo, and Sangiovese.

In a perfect blend of food, wine and dreams, Sam met Shawnda (at the Café of course). A former real estate agent, Shawnda had dreamed of owning her own restaurant and is now an integral part of all the family businesses. They have been blessed with three children who love to run through their vineyard, pick grapes at harvest and eat pizza from their restaurant.

In 2001, when the retail space adjoining the Café became available, Sam and Shawnda expanded their successful restaurant by opening the Wine Merchant—featuring over 500 local and international vintages and exclusive distributor of Bernat Wines. In Fall 2003, a movie producer spotted The Wine Merchant’s now famous wall of wine, and decided it would be the perfect backdrop for some pivotal scenes in his film—*Sideways*—eventual winner of an Oscar and two Golden Globes in 2005. Filmed entirely on location in the Santa Ynez Valley, this cinematic tale of two middle-aged men and the women they meet on a weeklong wine tasting adventure continues to bring worldwide recognition to the Café and the incredible wines of the region.

Sam’s decision to leave L.A. to pursue his dream of having his own vineyard and making his own wine has opened more opportunities than he ever could have imagined. Going to work every day, whether it is in the Café, Wine Merchant, Winery, or pulling weeds in his Vineyard, is something he enjoys waking up to do. Sam’s life is very full, filled with love, family, good food and good wine!

Cheers!