

HOME & AWAY

Get Your Boots Dirty

A California vineyard and olive farm tour is given from a tractor's point of view.

By Katherine Rodeghier

Mary Louise Bucher jokingly rolled her eyes when asked about her husband's collection. "Twelve tractors, I guess, five of them working the farm." She pointed, patiently, at two nonworkers, his prized Bucher and Porsche models, polished shiny red and permanently parked inside the tasting room of their Trattore Farms.

That's *trattore*, Italian for tractor.

Tim Bucher's hobby began when he brought the Bucher (no relation) from Europe years ago. It now graces the label of the farm's Trattore Estate wines. A first-generation Swiss American, Tim worked in a winery as a teen and bought his first vineyard at age 17. He met Mary Louise, a first-generation Italian American, while they studied electrical engineering in grad school at Stanford University. Their farm combines their dual heritages, his in winemaking, hers rooted in olives. And they proudly show it off on tours of their 40 acres of Dry Creek Valley near Healdsburg in northern California's Sonoma County.



Vineyards and olive orchards cover the rolling hills of Trattore Farms near Healdsburg in California's Sonoma County.

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"We want people to have a sense of place and who we are," said Mary Louise. Their Get Your Boots Dirty tour does just that. It begins at the hilltop tasting room with views of Geyser Peak and Mount St. Helens and continues with an energizing walk through vineyards and olive orchards for a tractor's-eye-view of farm operations.

Growing, Giving Back

Grapes grow in 10 blocks according to soil type, sun exposure, slope and variety of wine. At harvest time, they're micro picked. Workers taste and hand-pick them, skipping rows of vines not quite ready to turn over to the farm's veteran winemaker. Olives have grown on the land for more than a century, the oldest tree dating from the 1850s, said Mary Louise. The Buchers rejuvenated the old trees and added varieties from Spain, France and Greece, as well as Italy's Tuscany region.

On the tour, visitors see how the farm emphasizes sustainability through use of solar power, water conservation, composting of grape and olive waste, and the introduction of cover crops attracting insects and birds beneficial to vineyards and olive trees. They learn how the farm supports charities, such as Farm Aid and the Grammy Foundation, with small house concerts. John Mellencamp, The Band Perry and LeAnn Rimes have performed.

Dirty Boots tourists see the farm's new olive mill, imported piece by piece from a manufacturer who's been in business in the Perugia region of Italy since the 19th century. The mill contains two pressing techniques, granite stone and hammer, which alternate depending on the style of oil, varietal and ripeness of olives.

It takes from 50 to 70 pounds of olives to make a gallon of oil, said Mary Louise. The essential oils in citrus fruit, such as lemon and orange, add flavor. "It smells so good when we mill it. When we do jalapeno, it aerates, so we have to wear masks."



Tim Bucher's beloved Porsche tractor takes pride of place in the tasting room of Trattore Farms.
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Fruit of the Vine, Fruit From the Branch

In the tasting room, visitors decide for themselves which oils they like, sampling from some of more than a dozen the farm produces, such as blood orange, lime, the fruity, pungent Three Orchards Blend and Trattore Farms Blend, incorporating the farm's 20 varietals.

They taste wines, too. Grapes grown on steep, rocky slopes cooled by breezes from the Pacific Ocean give the farm's wines characteristics of France's Côte du Rhone.

Depending on the day, choices may include a Viognier, Zinfandel, the farm's signature Tractor Red or an award-winning Grenache aged 14 months in French oak barrels.

Wine and olive tastings are included in the 90-minute tour priced at \$50, but anyone can stop by the tasting room and choose from sampling menus priced at \$20 and \$30, waived with a purchase. Some visitors make a midday meal of it by relaxing over a charcuterie plate on the patio with a view of the valley below. On Sundays, the three Bucher children often help out at the outdoor wood-fired pizza oven.

The Buchers plan to offer a longer Farm-to-Feast Tour that also will include a walk through

the vineyards and olive orchards. Those who don't want to walk can ride—not one of Tim's beloved tractors—but the farm's mule, a five-passenger ATV.

Planning Your Trip

For more information, visit Trattore Farms at <http://trattorefarms.com>. Plan your trip with a local AAA agent or AAA.com/travel.

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