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## Idle Hour uses hands-on approach to winemaking

By Nathan Denny GAZETTE CORRESPONDENT



**Idle Hour Winery operators Anna Marie dos Remedios and Deb Payne are pictured with their awardwinning vintages.**

Oakhurst's first and, so far, only winery, Idle Hour, prides itself on its traditional, hands-on approach. But despite its modest size, the two-person operation has quickly found itself in league with the best of California's winemakers — no small feat here in the heart of America's wine country.

In January's prestigious San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, where Idle Hour wines competed against thousands of others from across the U.S., the Viognier ("a crisp bouquet with hints of pears, pineapple and honey"), Cabernet Franc ("lush raspberry and anise flavors and peppery

finish"), and Tempranillo ("floral aromas and lush black cherries with nicely integrated French oak flavors") all took home medals.

Anna Marie dos Remedios and Deb Payne manage the Idle Hour winery within the larger business of the Queen's Inn by the River, a modest eight-room inn located on a peaceful patch of the Fresno River on Oakhurst's northern fringes. The inn has been in Payne's family since the 1960s; the two have spent the last several years remodeling and reopening the inn — and adding a winery.

And that winery seems to be getting all the attention. During a recent wine release party on Jan. 22, some 400 people crammed into Idle Hour's modestly sized facilities to enjoy new wines, great food, and local art and music.

That level of community support is to be expected, given how active Dos Remedios and Payne are in the local area and Madera County in general.

Dos Remedios is the current president of the Madera Vintners Association, and has just returned from representing Oakhurst in Sacramento's Unified Wine & Grape Symposium, an informational conference for grape and wine industry professionals that bills itself as "the largest event of its kind in the western hemisphere."

Dos Remedios recently talked to the **GAZETTE** about her special winemaking process and why she's excited about the future of Idle Hour winery in Oakhurst and Madera County.

"It's only been a short few years here for the winery,"

Anna said, "and I have to say I'm enjoying making the varieties that we're making here. The weather is similar to the Rhone valley in France. And the grapes we're getting here, the quality is really nice.

"We use very traditional methods in the processing of our grapes," she explained. "We use gravity flow, which means not filtering the wines. We use native yeast, which means we don't add a lot during the fermentation process. It's a low manipulation method of winemaking.

"Our wines are single vineyard, not blends — although I did do a white blend and a red blend this year."

Dos Remedios gets most of the grapes from this area, as well. "Two of 'em in Madera, and one of 'em is in Fresno county," she said. "We also have a vineyard in Mariposa County that we sometimes use (Sturm Gardner), and we use three vineyards from outside of the area."

"We've grown in size as far as our case production over the last few years since we moved to Oakhurst," she continued.

"They've all been very supportive," dos Remedios said about businesses in Oakhurst, Mariposa, and Madera County. "I know there are a lot of wineries in California but wineries in particular are pretty supportive of each other, so this is a great networking place."

Still, Dos Remedios wants to keep the Idle Hour's production modest. Currently, she and Payne produce about 1,800 cases a year — that's about 150 to 200 cases each of about 12 or 13 different lots of wine.

"For me, 6, 8, 10 barrels of one wine, is enough. It feels more personal, I guess. I'm doing it because I love doing it."

The winemakers head to San Francisco for the 2011 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition Tasting, on Feb. 19. "It's an honor to be able to pour next to hundreds of other wineries that have won awards," Dos Remedios said. Information on the event is available at [WineJudging.com](http://WineJudging.com).

Idle Hour wines are available at all Oakhurst area restaurants (and soon at Von's, as well). They're also offered in some Mariposa restaurants like the River Rock Inn and Café, Savoury's Restaurant, and the Charles Street Dinner House.

The Idle Hour winery is part of the Queen's Inn by the River, located at 41139 Highway 41. Standard opening hours for the wine bar are 4 to 10 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday. Contact them directly at (559) 683-4354 or [IdleHourWinery.com](http://IdleHourWinery.com).