

## Revelers turn back the clock to 1875 for a birthday bash at Vintners Collective

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It's customary in many cultures to celebrate the anniversary of one's birth in some way -- most often by scheduling a birthday party with friends in which gifts are given.

Also part of the birthday tradition is for family and friends to treat someone especially well and generally accede to their wishes on their birthday.

Napa's Garret Murphy has taken this practice one step further. Murphy threw a birthday bash last weekend for a building -- a downtown Napa stone structure with a checkered past that now houses Murphy's business, a tasting room and retail outlet that's home to 17 first rate wineries.

Close to 100 wine lovers turned out for Murphy's birthday bash last weekend in the Pfeiffer building, a national landmark and, at 130 years, the oldest stone building in Napa.

Murphy and the crew at Vintners Collective put together an appropriate party designed to celebrate the heritage of the historic structure located on the northwest corner of Clinton and Main streets. He turned the clock back to 1875 and asked all attendees to show up in the dress of that era.

Knocking back some kind of enological elixir and sarsaparilla, duster-clad cowboys cooed up to scantily clad ladies of the night, ranchers chatted up well-heeled bankers and a miner or two attempted to palm off some fool's gold on unsuspecting cowpokes.

Seated around old-fashioned card ovals, party guests engaged in a card game called faro, popular in the Old West the year the first Tong Wars broke out in San Francisco. Few in the crowd probably knew the history of occupancy of the birthday building, unless they engaged Murphy in conversation.

For Murphy knows the building was constructed in 1875 by a robust Bavarian named Philip Pfeiffer for use as a brewery. He was succeeded by Gotthelp Barth who also ran a brewery operation. But when Barth left in the 1880s to launch Dry Creek Winery, Pfeiffer re-invested in the property, converting the former brewery into a saloon at street level, establishing a brothel on the second floor. When Prohibition took hold in this country, the saloon was converted into a Chinese laundry, remaining the Sam Kee Laundry until the mid-1970s. Succeeding Sam Kee Laundry was the Andrews Meat Co. and Deli, a business that prospered at the site until 1999.

Murphy settled in Napa County more than a decade ago, serving as pastry chef consultant at both Auberge du Soleil and Meadowood Resort. The son of an Irish American father and a French mother, Murphy was raised in Paris. He says both father and grandfather were "wine geeks. Wine was instilled in me as a kid. My father and grandfather used to bring barrels of wine home from Alsace and Burgundy and I used to fill the bottles for family meals. This was not the finest wines of these regions because my father really enjoyed the vins de tables (from various wine districts)." Murphy said his passion for wine led him into the business, launching one of the earliest downtown tasting rooms, Vintners Collective, in August of 2002. He enjoys chatting with others who like wine and presently represents 17 small producers at his retail outlet on Main Street. They include Ahnfeldt, Ancien, Buoncristiani, Caldwell, D-Cubed, Destino, Gregory Graham, Judd's Hill, Longfellow, Melka, Mi Sueno, Phelan, Richard Perry, Showket, Spelletich, Strata and Vinoce wine brands. "This was really our third anniversary, so we thought it would be appropriate to celebrate the history of this incredible building," Murphy said of last weekend's party. "So Doug White and I came up with this idea of asking our customers to show up in the dress of the late 1800s, when Napa was really part of what Americans call the Wild West."

Vintners Collective is open to the public Wednesday through Monday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Tuesdays by appointment only. On Saturday, all member vintners will be on hand for a special holiday tasting. And the price is right for locals -- they get a 50 percent discount on the general \$15 tasting fee. For additional information about tastings and such, call Murphy or White at 255-7150.