

with the family exerting great labor to make olive oil good enough to win a blind taste test against a dozen of the finest offerings made throughout the world.

Making premium grade olive oil starts with using the best fruit one can find. The Barianis grow two varieties—Mission brought over from Spain by missionaries and Manzanilla first planted by farmers during the infancy of the California olive industry a century ago.

Olives are picked by hand or raked from trees, careful to avoid bruising. The bounty is quickly washed and leaves are removed before the olives are run through a mammoth granite crusher imported from Italy. The paste is mixed and spread onto mats, which are then squeezed in a hydraulic press. After sediment is removed from the oil, it is placed in tanks to decant before bottling.

The Bariani property was home to an olive orchard 60 years before they arrived. After starting their business, the old orchard was pruned and revived and 2,000 new trees planted.

Bariani olive oil is made through painstaking labor and exacting standards. Family members oversee or perform all of the labor involved in producing oil, from growing and harvesting fruit to bottling and sales.

The oil is extra-virgin, unfiltered and not heated, preserving taste, shelf life and vital nutrients.

A growing, appreciative customer base keeps the family going through laborious 16-hour workdays.

"It's very rewarding," said Emanuele Bariani, who handles sales.

"The greatest satisfaction is to have responses by e-mail, mail and phone calls from customers that purchased maybe one bottle and are coming back because they need more for their friends. They write us cards for Christmas and Thanksgiving, thanking us for the oil." One hundred e-mails a day are a common occurrence.



Photos/Jim Morris

*Despite a busy work schedule, the Barianis find time for an Old World lunch, complete with generous servings of their olive oil. (Below) Angelo talks with Enrico about the finer points of olive processing.*

Emanuele said demand for their oil is growing so fast, it's a challenge to make enough product to keep orders filled. Interest extends beyond the United States—Germany and Japan have become valued customers. Fine restaurants and hotels in Japan including the Ritz Carlton use the Bariani oil. Consumers in the Asian nation pay upwards of \$100 for a half-liter bottle of the oil.

The family spends nothing on advertising, though plentiful media accounts, including interest by entertaining guru Martha Stewart and the *San Francisco Examiner*, further awaken the public to the product.

The simple black and white label exemplifies the confidence and pride the family has with the oil. "We guarantee the quality by putting our name on the bottle," said Emanuele. "When people know the oil, then they know us as a family."

Olive oil is best enjoyed fresh, when its fragrance and nutrition are at a zenith. Bariani oil has harvest and bottling dates on every bottle. Olive oil is highly sought after for its exquisite taste and excellent nutrition. Researchers say the oil contains numerous beneficial nutrients and may help fight off hypertension and several types of cancer.

A centerpiece of a Mediterranean-style diet, olive oil popularity in America is on the rise. Despite an overall decline in demand for all cooking oils, olive oil volume increased by 10 per-

cent and value by 5 percent during a one-year period ending in July. Olive oil is used in nearly 30 percent of American households, double the figure of a decade earlier.

Americans have a lot of catching up to do with Europeans in consuming the oil. While U.S. consumers use less than one cup of olive oil per year, consumption in Greece, Spain, Italy and many other European countries is about 40 cups annually. Ninety-nine percent of the U.S. olive oil market is foreign-produced oil. Consumption figures are tracked by the A.C. Nielsen organization, at the request of the New Jersey-based North American Olive Oil Association.

California olive oil production was about 250,000 gallons last year—off considerably from the 1999 output. The decline in production is due to the alternate bearing characteristics of olive trees, which generally follow a heavy production year with a much lighter fruit set.

The Bariani family enjoys their oil every chance they get. "It is essential to have olive oil on the table," said Enrico. "Even before my Mom has finished cooking our lunch or dinner, we start dipping bread into the olive oil."

Future sales gains of Bariani and all quality California olive oils look boundless. While the family product appears poised for greater sales, their roots will remain firmly planted in the rich northern California soil.

"For sure we will stay in California," Enrico said. "This is a perfect place to live."

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