
PEREGRINATIONS



ART IN A BOTTLE

Oenophiles are always looking for new ways to describe wine — its provenance, its nose, its mouth-feel, even its temperament. If Sondra Barrett has anything to say about it, they could one day be comparing notes on its crystalline structure, or, as she likes to call it, its inner life.

With a doctorate in biochemistry, Barrett worked in medical research but soon recognized her Olympus interference microscope as a medium for transforming science into fine art. She started photographing wine and became fascinated by the stunning crystals and forms that she observed. She discerned patterns that she believes correlate not only to the type and quality of the wine, but also to the terrain where the grapes are grown and to the aging process.

Barrett found that, as wines develop, their crystals change from small geometric shapes to beautifully complex ones that deteriorate after the wine reaches its peak, and she noted particular forms in well-preserved vintages that she believes could indicate longevity.

She has — among other pursuits — a wine photography business and a gallery of prints (at www.mysticmolecules.com), but she would like to find partners with whom to pursue a systematic study of these microscopic forms in wine so as to corroborate her observations on aging and other factors. She believes that this could be valuable to vintners and wine collectors alike. Here's to her success! □

Crystals from a 1-year-old sauvignon blanc (top) and a 5-year-old merlot (bottom) take distinctive shapes that a California scientist-cum-artist believes could provide important clues to a vintage's complexity and aging potential. Courtesy of Sondra Barrett.