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## Uncovering the History of the Canyon Country Store

Posted by Adam C. Vignola on Oct 15, 2004, 13:00

### Canyon Vines By Adam Vignola

Originally built in the early 1900s, the

**Canyon Country Store** (CCS) has quite a rich and diverse history. On a crisp fall evening that only the Canyon could provide, Tommy Bina told me a little history of **Laurel Canyon** and his love of wine.

Tommy is the current owner of this historic country store. "I came from **Tehran** in 1976 to study at American universities. I was a student in Alabama and Louisiana. The revolution in Iran in 1979 really changed things."

By 1982 Tommy had moved to Los Angeles and bought a slice of L.A. history. "Really the road follows a river that used to come down the side of this canyon. In 1908 they put the river underground with cylinders and the road above it."

I had been drawn to an unexpectedly large fine wine section on a previous visit, so naturally I asked, "So, who's the wine lover?"

"The **French embassy** gave me a license to drink," smiled Tommy. "I took an international wine test at the French embassy and that's how I first learned about wine. Later on I visited **Napa** and grew to love California wine."

The CCS has a wide variety of global wines from **Chile, Argentina and Australia** for its customers and even a local one from Laurel

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Canyon. "A guy makes wine from grapes grown in the canyon," Tommy told me.

"So how's the **St Claude Cotes du Rhone 2001?**" I ask. "Really good," Tommy declares. "Big and juicy like a Chauteneuf-du-Pape, only without the sticker shock. \$14.99." **CCS** carries high-end liquors in Porfidio Plata tequila and Oban Single Malt Scotch whiskey 14 years, as well as their own brand of Canyon Country Store vodka and tequila shipped directly from the distillery in Puerto Vallarta.

We headed down a set of stairs into the cool underbelly of the Canyon Country Store. Behind a locked door in a rustic brick and mortar room I see he has a terrific vintage of the flagship red from Chateau St. Jean, their Cabernet Sauvignon Cinq Cépages, 1997. He also has an outstanding red Bordeaux from 2000, the **Chateau Graves du Bert, Saint-Emilion**.

Gazing over to the brick walls, Tommy reveals a little more history. "This was the site of the famous Bungalow Inn lodge. People would go hunting in the canyon, and then they'd come here to picnic. It burned down in 1929 and was rebuilt with bricks. Eventually, a kitchen was built down here, and it started selling food to the hunters. Later on, they added groceries and made it into a market."

As we head back upstairs, Tommy tells me that, "In early days of Hollywood this building was turned into a developing lab for the studios." Films that have shot in his store include John Carpenter's "**The Fog**" in 1980, "**Rainbow Drive**," "**Sunset Boulevard**" and most recently "**Laurel Canyon**."

At one point, the café was kind of a café and art gallery. You could come for lunch, look at the paintings on the wall and buy them. In the '60s, a community of rock and roll musicians lived here in the hills and would come down at night to the café and do solo sets for the regulars. Musicians who performed at the CCS include **Joni Mitchell**, **Three-Dog Night**, **Zappa and The Mothers of Invention**, and of course, **Jim Morrison**. Jim would later sing about the CCS, "I see you live on Love Street. There's this store where the creatures meet."

The **CCS** is so close to everything, yet it still possesses for me the remote and secluded quality from its heyday. Now it has become something else, a fine wine store for all of us to enjoy.

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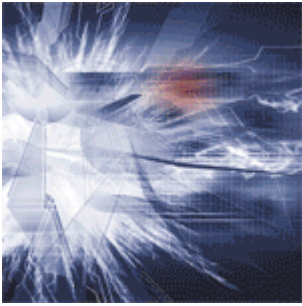
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