

Raising Atōst

A budding aperitif brand whose roots run deep into the Southern California soil.

By Hannah Drake Litman



Cindy Pressman explores a Ventura County fruit farm with her grandmother, Maria Mendoza. (Photo provided by atōst)

In a small industrial warehouse in Moorpark, California, Cindy Pressman expertly navigates a row of towering stainless-steel tanks, describing their functions as they gleam under harsh fluorescent lights. “We add in the fruit and all of our ingredients, and two to four weeks later, we’re ready to start bottling.” The space is utilitarian and her straight-forward explanation makes the process sound simple and methodical, as if the tanks merely contain liquid rather than the fruits of Cindy’s labor—a tribute to her family’s story. Then Pressman, dressed head-to-toe in denim, flashes a small smile from beneath her wide-brimmed hat. “It’s like magic.”

Reluctant to take the credit from her beloved steel tanks, Cindy Pressman is the alchemist transforming a passion for local produce and a deep respect for her family legacy into a product that, with each sip, transports consumers to the California coast. The juicy essence of

ripe strawberries, the tannic bitterness of orange zest, and the floral finish of blooming roses—it's all captured in atōst aperitif.



Cindy Pressman in the atōst bottling room.

Approximately 20 miles away, in the Citrus Capital of the World, atōst's seeds were planted in the 1970s when Maria Mendoza immigrated to Santa Paula, California from Jalisco, Mexico. In search of more opportunities and a better life, Mendoza found work on citrus farms. Long days of picking, sorting, and packing fruit were exhausting, but the work was honest and the satisfaction at the end of the day was worth it. "No puedes evitar respetar la tierra," she said. You can't help but respect the land.

Mendoza passed down her work ethic and appreciation for farming to her eight children and 22 grandchildren. In 2020, while living in Colorado, Cindy Pressman felt called to honor her grandmother's legacy and create a product that celebrated both her heritage and the abundant produce of Ventura County. After leaning on a friend who owned a brewery for guidance, it was time to source ingredients. So, Cindy returned to the origin of her inspiration. "I tried to build relationships with the farms in areas around where my grandparents had already worked," said Pressman. Hundreds of pounds of fruit, countless batches, and a lot of trial and error finally culminated into something that Cindy wanted to sip every single day. And since the quality of the final product was just as important to Pressman as the tradition it represented, she insisted that all of the fruit that she sourced be organic.



The California Spritz is the brand's signature cocktail made with atōst and sparkling rosé, garnished with an orange wedge.
(Photo provided by atōst)

The fruits, herbs, and botanicals used in atōst's recipe are then carefully zested, chopped, and blended by hand with the same care and dedication that Cindy's grandmother, Maria brought to the California soil decades ago. The ingredients are then combined with grape-based grappa—rather than the neutral grain spirit used in most aperitifs—and placed in stainless-steel tanks to rest for two to four weeks. According to the company's website, after resting, a “kiss of organic sugar” is added to balance the flavors. It's a meticulous, labor-intensive process, and Cindy believes it's this attention to detail that sets atōst apart from other aperitifs. As consumption of low-ABV cocktails and mocktails continues to rise, Pressman feels confident that her aperitif fits perfectly within the movement. “We do have a little bit higher ABV than wine, but less than a traditional spirit,” she said. “What's great about the product and it being all-natural is that you feel a lot better the next morning after you've been drinking it.” Pressman also wants the brand to represent life's celebratory occasions, big or small. “It's more about the memories and the gathering than the liquid itself.”

Bar consultant and self-described “bartender's bartender” Ryan Flannery has worked in the food and beverage industry for 10 years, honing his expertise in mixing, tasting, and creating beverage programs. He thinks that while atōst is a product in a league of its own, Cindy's character is the driving force behind the brand's growth and success. “She is not going to say 90% is good enough,” said Flannery. “She's very honest and she'll tell you if something is off.” Flannery met Cindy and her husband, Kyle, when they hosted a tasting event at a bar where he was working. They immediately hit it off, and he soon began experimenting with atōst. “I was really impressed with its versatility and its playfulness in a cocktail,” he said. “It became a

cheat code in how I built cocktails.” Flannery was so enamored by the product that he started introducing it to other beverage professionals. “Bartenders get giddy over it,” he said. “It’s exciting because it’s familiar, but it’s done in the best form that they’ve ever had.” He has since helped get atōst stocked behind the bar at eight restaurants, stretching from Ventura to Los Angeles.



Cindy Pressman explores a Ventura County fruit farm with her grandmother, Maria Mendoza. (Photo provided by atōst)

The fields in Ventura County are often freckled with pops of color from ripening produce, all grown in the same rich, fertile soil that Maria Mendoza spent years tending. Recently, she visited a fruit farm with her granddaughter, Cindy, and described the experience as “Un momento de círculo completo.” A full circle moment.

“I wanted to create something that spoke to my heritage,” said Cindy. “I wanted to celebrate the fruit and agriculture of Southern California.” Standing in front of the tanks, full of the elixir that embodies her family’s past, present, and future, she looks at me and shrugs. “And the best way to celebrate is with atōst.”