

February 26, 2006

## Naked Came the Vintner

By [WARREN ST. JOHN](#)

WHEN the typical Savanna Samson fan hears her name, the first thing that comes to mind is probably not wine. In fact, wine is probably not even the fourth or fifth thing that comes to mind when fans contemplate Savanna Samson. It's even possible that no fan of Savanna Samson has ever had the thought, "Savanna Samson: wine," at any time, ever.

Savanna Samson — her real name is Natalie Oliveros — is a porn star, and a noted one at that. As a Vivid girl, one of the actors whose work is produced and marketed by the goliath Vivid Video, Savanna Samson is a porn celebrity.

She is the star of 25 sexually explicit films, a two-time winner of the Adult Video News Award for best actress, and her work with Jenna Jameson in "The New Devil in Miss Jones," a remake of a classic, won last year's award for the best all-girl sex scene.

But Ms. Oliveros is also an aspiring winemaker. Her first production, a 2004 vintage of an Italian red wine that she calls Sogno Uno (Dream One), makes its debut this week at wine stores and restaurants in Manhattan.

A porn star making wine, Ms. Oliveros readily admits, is a gimmick. But what sets her effort apart from the vanity wines of other celebrities like [Madonna](#) and the Rolling Stones is that it is good — extremely good if the wine expert Robert M. Parker is to be believed.

After tasting a young bottle of Sogno Uno at a Paris bistro last fall, Mr. Parker gave Ms. Oliveros's wine a rating of 90 to 91 or outstanding, a judgment that quickly became the talk of the wine world.

"It's a very fine wine — awfully good," Mr. Parker said by telephone. "It was really opulent and luscious and it had a personality."

Sipping a glass of Sogno Uno last week at La Masseria, an Italian restaurant in Midtown, Ms. Oliveros said she put the same passion into her wine that she puts into her sex scenes, even as she expected the wine world to turn up its nose.

"People have to be laughing when they hear about it," she said. "But I didn't want it to be a joke." As for the Parker rating, Ms. Oliveros said, "He should've given it a 93."

Peppe Luele, the owner of La Masseria, said he plans to serve Sogno Uno at his restaurant, where it will sell for \$70 to \$80 a bottle. He said he is also a fan of Ms. Oliveros's other work.

"Have you seen the movies?" he asked. He shook his head in astonishment. "Incredible."

Ms. Oliveros insists her winemaking venture is more than just a lark. As a porn star of a certain age Ms. Oliveros won't say exactly how old she is she said she knows she's running out of runway on her film career. In her relatively short time in the porn industry Ms. Oliveros shot her first movie in 2000 she said she has seen many in the industry falter when their time in front of the camera is up. She said she sees the wine business as her career parachute.

"I've seen so many fallen stars," Ms. Oliveros said. "I don't plan to be one of them."

If there is a such a thing as the "average porn star," it's a safe bet that Ms. Oliveros does not fit into that category. For one thing, she lives on the East Side, with her husband and son. She began her career in pornography when her son was 8 months old.

"I worked out all through my pregnancy," she said.

Ms. Oliveros said she happened into her pornography career. She grew up in upstate New York, one of five daughters, and came to the city at 17 to pursue a career in ballet. That didn't happen, she said, "because I wasn't good enough," so she took a job dancing at the strip club Scores "to make killer money." From there it was a short distance to making her first porn movie, which came about when she wrote a letter to Rocco Siffredi, a European porn star, asking if she could work with him.

"I figured I could go to Europe, get this fantasy out of the way, and no one would ever hear about it," she said. Instead the movie was nominated for best foreign movie at the Adult Video News film awards, and pretty soon Ms. Oliveros was invited to be a guest on "The [Howard Stern Show](#)."

"So much for that secret," she said.

News of her career didn't go over well with family and friends back home, Ms. Oliveros said.

"My parents are devastated by my career choices," she said. "What really troubles me about what I do is the pain I've caused them."

Ms. Oliveros said that her chief talent is her passion for her work. She said she genuinely enjoys having sex with strangers.

"For those few minutes that I'm working with someone, I love that person," she said. "For that reason it makes me good at what I do."

Ms. Oliveros kept dancing at Scores, where she had a strict policy of not dating customers, she said. That rule fell by the wayside when she met Daniel Oliveros, a Manhattan wine merchant who was there with his girlfriend at the time.

"I had to kick her out of the picture," Ms. Oliveros said.

On their first date Mr. Oliveros invited his future wife to a wine-soaked dinner with friends and colleagues in the wine business. That began their relationship as well as her education about wine.

"I was impressed," she said.

Ms. Oliveros said her husband is a "very strange breed" who supports her porn career. She makes six sexually explicit movies a year, and can earn anywhere from \$20,000 to upward of \$100,000 per film, depending on sales. All are shot in California, and each one takes three days to two weeks to make. She said her husband is her toughest critic.

"I know that he'll be watching, so I just put that much more into what I'm doing," she said. "If I can just spark a little jealousy out of him, then I would be so happy. But that never happens."

Mr. Oliveros said: "I was aware she had a skeleton in the closet. But as long as she looks me in the eye and says she loves me, I'm not a jealous person."

As much as she enjoyed making pornographic movies, Ms. Oliveros said there was something about them that left her unfulfilled. On a vacation in Tuscany last year, she said, she was struck by something akin to an existential crisis. "How can I leave a mark on this world?" she asked herself. "And I thought, 'Wine.' "

Ms. Oliveros has had some help with her first winemaking venture. Through her husband, she met Roberto Cipresso, a noted Italian winemaker and consultant. She asked Mr. Cipresso to experiment with blends of local grapes to achieve her ideal flavor. She tasted the blends along the way, she said, dismissing merlot and cabernet grapes as boring, and eventually falling for cesanese, an ancient and little heralded grape found mainly in the Lazio region that has a light, but spicy taste.

Ms. Oliveros said she wanted something slightly sweeter, so Mr. Cipresso added sangiovese to the mix. For backbone they added montepulciano, the aromatic grape from the Tuscan hills. Ms. Oliveros said she made her preferences known, even if the language of wine tasting eluded her.

"When they say, 'leather,' I think 'old boots,' " she said. "And when they say, 'vanilla,' I think 'ice cream.' "

Eventually they settled on a blend of 70 percent cesanese grapes, 20 percent sangiovese and 10 percent montepulciano to create a complex wine with hints of pepper, earth and cotton candy.

"This wine will make you think," Ms. Oliveros said.

Ms. Oliveros ordered 409 cases "more than I could really afford," she said and began working on a label, settling eventually on a design that plays on her notoriety as a Vivid girl. It's an image of Ms. Oliveros's naked profile beneath a sheer gown, wearing the type of heels you might expect to see on, say, a dancer at Scores. She plans to introduce the wine with a Venetian-theme mask party tomorrow night at La Masseria.

Ms. Oliveros plans to sell Sogno Uno for \$38 a bottle.

She said that the success or failure of her wine venture will be determined in the coming weeks by wine distributors and critics. She said she is optimistic, enough so that she just went to Italy to taste potential blends for a white wine, which she would call Sogno Due. She suggested that potential customers approach her wine the way she approaches some newfangled sexual position on the set of one of her movies.

"Don't knock it till you try it," she said.