

# WINE OVERVIEW



## CALIFORNIA

Content contributed by Larry Cekola and Chad Goodwill, both of Imperial Beverage



Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

As you study wine, you will find the California wine story only represents a few sentences in the book of the history of wine. Remember, wine has been a part of history since 6000 B.C., and in some cultures, has been a staple ever since. Although you are going to spend a lot of your time with California wines, it is only because we live in the United States and are taking it from the US consumer's perspective (61% of all wine consumed in the US is produced in California).

**“ 543,000 acres of grape vines, 4,600 growers, 19.9 billion in retail value, 212 million cases. Ninety percent of all wine production in the United States takes place in California. As a state, is the 4th largest wine producing area in the world behind only France, Italy & Spain. ”**

Wine has been produced in California, the United States “Wine Country”, only since the late 1700’s when Spanish missionaries first planted grapes there. Junipero Serra, a Franciscan missionary, has been credited with establishing the first winery in California near San Diageo in 1769. Just after the turn of the century, missionaries that were traveling north planted vineyards in Sonoma and Napa. The first oldest wineries from Napa and the Gold Rush include Charles Krug, Inglenook and Schramsberg. The first commercial winery didn’t open until 1859, shortly after the 1849 Gold Rush in Napa Valley. Slowly becoming the melting pot of the wine industry, California has representatives from almost every wine growing region in the world; all have tried their hand in the California wine growing region and have returned their own influences on the world of wine. California wine was not recognized internationally until 1976 when at the Judgment of Paris wine competition, where international & French judges chose California wines over French wines in both the red and wine categories. From this point forward, California wine has been continually more accepted around the globe as quality wine.

Part of California’s success in the world of wine comes from a university. Research conducted at the University of California, Davis has been taking the lead on documenting the data and best techniques of producing wine on the West coast and all over the US. Those intending on a career in winemaking look to UC Davis as the Mecca of US wine education.

Current highlights for California from the Wine Institute in 2011 include: 543,000 acres of grape vines, 4,600 growers, 19.9 billion in retail value, 212 million cases. Ninety percent of all wine production in the United States takes place in California. As a state, is the 4th largest wine producing area in the world behind only France, Italy and Spain. Other notable states include Washington with near 4%, New York at 3% and Michigan only produces .17% of the total wine produced in the US.

The largest producers of wine in California are:

- E & J Gallo - Producing more than 25% of all wine produced in the US
- Constellation - Largest brands are Columbia Winery & Robert Mondavi
- The Wine Group – Franzia box wine & Concannon
- Bronco Wine Group – Economy brands like Crane Lake, Charles Shaw
- Diageo – Beaulieu, Chalone and Sterling vineyards

## CLIMATE: WARM DAYS, COOL NIGHTS

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Stretching all the way from the Mexican border to the Oregon border, California's wine country has many different wine growing climates. Driven by the climate of the Pacific Ocean, most of California has the vine loving climate of hot days and cool nights driven home with lots of sunshine. Soil types range from clay, granite, gravel, and sand to volcanic ash, each delivering its own minerality and style. So depending on both the latitude and soil type, many different styles of wine live on the Golden coast.

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## CALIFORNIA'S 5 MAJOR REGIONS

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### NORTH COAST

The coolest of the climates in California, it stretches north from the Golden Gate bridge and includes the most wineries and most prestige in California. Napa & Sonoma are the primary regions. Other notable regions are: Alexander Valley, Diamond Mountain District, Dry Creek Valley, Lake County, Los Carneros, Mendocino, Oakville, Russian River & Yountville.

### CENTRAL COAST

From the bridge south down to Santa Barbara, it stretches the coast down Highway 101. From North to South, the climate changes greatly due to temperature and oceanic influences, which allow winemakers to produce a large variety of styles from this region. The primary regions are: Arroyo, Livermore Valley, Monterey, Paso Robles, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz Mountains & Santa Ynez Valley.

### CENTRAL VALLEY & SIERRA FOOTHILLS

In the center of California, this area is far from the coast and influences of the Pacific and runs along the East side and parallel to both the North and Central coasts. Most notable are the Central Valley El Dorado, Sierra Foothills & Lodi.

### SOUTHERN COAST

Most famous for its cities of Los Angeles, San Diego and Malibu, this growing region has the perfect blue skies with high elevation to offset the heat of the south. Primary regions include Temecula Valley, San Pasqual & Romona Valley.

### THE NORTH

There is not much going on in the North yet, but the growth continues to develop into new AVAs, Trinity County being the largest. Watch for more to come out of this region.

### NAPA VALLEY

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Geography / Terroir:

Napa Valley is an AVA located in Napa County, California. The valley is surrounded by the Mayacamas and Vaca mountain ranges. It slopes up from south to north going from sea level at the Southern end to 362 feet above sea level at the Northern end. The soil ranges from simple sedimentary deposits to volcanic lava and ash. The climate ranges from the cooler Southern end to being much warmer in the North. The



Napa Valley



San Francisco

★ **61% of all wine consumed in the US is produced in California**

## (NAPA VALLEY CONT.)

Western mountain ranges also tend to absorb the winter storms creating a more arid environment in the Eastern valley.

### History:

The region has been producing wines since the 1800s, but has only grown in prominence since 1960. George Yount planted the first vineyard here in 1938. By the end of the century, there were over 140 wineries. The region benefitted from a growing reputation of producing quality wine. Then the outbreak of phylloxera and the subsequent prohibition took its toll on the wine industry here. In 1944, the industry in this region had to start again. Today, there are more than 400 wineries here and 95% of them are family-owned. It was actually a Napa wine that won at the Judgement of Paris in 1976, placing Napa Valley squarely in the seat of honor for California wines.

### Wine:

Most people are very familiar with the Napa region. Interestingly, it only accounts for five percent of total vineyard acreage in the US and four percent of California's total wine production. There are approximately 45,000 acres of vineyards in Napa Valley. Cabernet Sauvignon is planted in about 18,000 of these acres and Chardonnay in about 7,000 acres.

### Sub-regions include:

Los Carneros, Howell Mountain, Wild Horse Valley, Stags Leap District, Mt. Veeder, Atlas Peak, Spring Mountain District, Oakville, Rutherford, St. Helena, Shiles Valley, Yountville, Diamond Mountain District, Coombsville, Oak Knoll District and Calistoga.

(Sources include Napa Valley Vintners and Wikipedia.)

## CARNEROS

### Geography / Terroir:

Carneros is an AVA located in Northern California, which is located in both Sonoma and Napa counties. While it is an independent AVA, individual wineries are also entitled to use the Napa and Sonoma AVAs depending on their location. It was the first wine region not to be defined by political boundaries, but by climate. It was recognized as an AVA in 1983. Carneros means "rams" in Spanish. It got its name from the fact that the area used to be inhabited by rams and sheep herds.

The air off of the Pacific Ocean as well as persistent fog combine to make Carneros a cool climate appellation. Geographic features such as the Coast Mountain Ranges, the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay influence the grapes. The soil is thin and heavy with clay. Elevation ranges from near sea level to 400 feet. It is also one of the windiest AVAs in the country, which can keep crop yields small and delay grapes from ripening. But a long growing season can produce intense and vivid flavors.

### History:

Grapes played a prominent role in the history of Carneros agriculture. Wine historian William Heintz of Sonoma contends that Carneros may in fact be the second oldest vineyard area in northern California. But it was not until the 1970s when the wine industry took off in earnest. By the 1970s, the Carneros region had more than 1,300 acres of vineyards. By this time the Carneros region was starting to develop a reputation for the quality of the Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs that came from this cool-climate region. This reputation caught the eyes of sparkling wine producers from Champagne and elsewhere. The 1980s saw a wave of investment and development in Los Carneros by producers that made Carneros one of the centers of California sparkling wine production. Today, there are over 8,000 vineyard acres and 22 wineries in the area.

### Wine:

Carneros is primarily associated with the cool-climate wines such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, as well as the sparkling wines made from those grapes. Many wineries in Napa & Sonoma use Carneros grapes as a cool-climate blending component.

Carneros Chardonnay is marked by its high acidity that can bring balance to the fatter, rounder Chardonnays produced in the warmer climate areas of Sonoma and Napa. It is usually put through malolactic fermentation and giving significant oak treatment to soften some of the acidity. Pinot Noir from

## (CARNEROS CONT.)

the Carneros is known for its crisp acidity and tight structure and frequently exhibits spicy berry fruit. In recent years, Carneros has been recognized for the quality of its Syrah, its Merlot and new varietals now emerging throughout the appellation.

(Sources include the Carneros Wine Alliance and Wikipedia.)

## SONOMA

Sonoma itself is not an AVA but a county in Northern California. There are actually 13 different AVAs in the Sonoma area. They are as follows:

### Alexander Valley

15,000 vineyard acres / 42 wineries / Earned AVA status in 1984

Almost as warm as Knights Valley, the valley floor of Alexander Valley has gravelly soil that produces some of the county's richest Cabernet Sauvignon, along with flavorful, ripe Chardonnay. The Valley's hillsides produce complex and concentrated Zinfandel, Merlot, and Cabernet Sauvignon. ([www.alexandervalley.org](http://www.alexandervalley.org))

### Bennett Valley

650 vineyard acres / 4 wineries / Earned AVA status in 2003

Merlot shines in Bennett Valley like nowhere else, with volcanic-laced, clay soils and a moderately cool climate that results in extended hang time ideal for the varietal. The long growing season helps maximize flavors and increase concentration, while the cooler temperatures preserve the grape's natural acidity. ([www.bvvg.org](http://www.bvvg.org))

Carneros (Previously discussed.)

### Chalk Hill

1,400 vineyard acres / 5 wineries / Earned AVA status in 1983 w/revision in 1988

Soil, climate and elevation all separate Chalk Hill from other parts of Sonoma's Russian River Valley. Occupying the Northeast corner of the larger Russian River AVA, Chalk Hill is named for its unique, volcanically-derived, chalky white ash soils. These mildly fertile soils lend themselves to the production of excellent whites, particularly Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. Chalk Hill's five wineries sit above the rest of the valley, on the western benchland slopes of the Mayacamas Mountains, separating Sonoma from Napa. The appellation enjoys a warmer climate relative to the rest of the Russian River Valley. Due to the higher elevation of this viticultural area, vineyards escape much of the cooling fog that regularly shrouds the lower-lying growing areas near the river.

### Dry Creek Valley

10,000 vineyard acres / 50 wineries / Earned AVA status in 1983

Approximately 16 miles long and 2 miles wide, Dry Creek Valley is one of the smallest enclosed American Viticultural Areas. Roughly 9,300 acres of vineyards extend along the valley floor, the surrounding benchlands and hillsides, and 58 wineries produce a diverse selection of wines ranging from the renowned Zinfandels to Bordeaux and Mediterranean varietals. The history of grape growing and winemaking in Dry Creek Valley is among the longest in California, with its roots beginning more than 130 years ago.

Morning fog from the Pacific Ocean tempers warm days – good balance of maritime and inland climates. The stone-strewn soils are ideal for concentrating fruit and flavor character of Zinfandel, the hallmark of Dry Creek Valley, along with Cabernet Sauvignon, and the resulting wines are rock solid examples of their types. ([www.wdcv.com](http://www.wdcv.com))

### Green Valley

3,600 vineyard acres / 10 wineries / Earned AVA status in 1983

Green Valley is one of the smallest appellations in Sonoma County. It lies in the Southwestern part of the Russian River Valley, bounded by the towns of Sebastopol, Forestville and Occidental. It is very tightly delineated, both geographically and climatically, and is the most consistent of any North Coast appellation in terms of soil, climate and flavor. The fog is Green Valley's trademark. The predominant soil type (60%) of this American Viticultural Area (AVA) is Goldridge soil, the most sought-after type in Sonoma County—especially for Pinot Noir. ([www.greenvalley-russianriver.com](http://www.greenvalley-russianriver.com))

## (SONOMA CONT.)

### Knights Valley

2,000 vineyard acres / 2 wineries / AVA status in 1983

Knights Valley, the most remote of Sonoma County's appellations, snuggles up against Mt. St. Helena, the area's most influential feature. The unique character of this appellation can be discovered in its mountain vineyards, where ideal growing conditions have resulted in cabernet sauvignon of regal quality.

### Northern Sonoma

AVA status in 1990

There are more than 100 wineries, at least 150 soil types, hundreds of vineyards, and tremendous variations in climate. It is a geographic area covering most of Sonoma county and holds six of these AVAs within its borders. Gallo of Sonoma was the primary force behind its formation and is the sole winery using Northern Sonoma as a label designation. It is reserved for Gallo of Sonoma's estate program, which features two wines, chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon. In order to use the term "estate", both a winery and a vineyard must be within the same AVA; the winery must also own or control the vineyard. Gallo of Sonoma's winery is in Dry Creek; its 3000 acres of vineyards are located in several viticulture areas. Without an umbrella designation such as Northern Sonoma, these ultra-premium wines could not be labelled as "estate". ([www.sonomauncorked.com](http://www.sonomauncorked.com))

### Rockpile

150 vineyard acres / Became an AVA in 2002

Spreading west of Lake Sonoma to the Mendocino County border, Rockpile is known for intensely-flavored red grape varieties with great concentration and balance. At elevations up to 1,900 feet, Rockpile is too far upland for the penetrating fogs that influence other Sonoma appellations. This exposes grapes to more California warmth and sunshine, boosting their ripeness and richness. The appellation is designated by altitude and geography.

### Russian River Valley

15,000 vineyard acres / 70 wineries / Earned AVA status in 1983

The Russian River Valley climate is sculpted by the regular intrusion of cooling fog from the Pacific Ocean a few miles to the west. Much like the tide, it ebbs and flows through the Petaluma Wind Gap and the channel cut by the Russian River through the coastal hills. The fog usually arrives in the evening, often dropping the temperature 35 to 40 degrees from its daytime high, and retreats to the ocean the following morning. This natural air-conditioning allows the grapes to develop full flavor maturity over an extended growing season - often 15 to 20 percent longer than neighboring areas, while retaining their all-important natural acidity. ([www.rrvw.org](http://www.rrvw.org))

### Sonoma Coast

2,000 vineyard acres / 7 wineries (Excluding wineries in Russian River, Green Valley, Carneros, and Chalk Hill) / Earned AVA status in 1987

The Sonoma Coast AVA extends from San Pablo Bay to the border with Mendocino County. The appellation is known for its cool climate and high rainfall relative to other parts of Sonoma County. Close to the Pacific, with more than twice the annual rainfall of its inland neighbors, it can still be warm enough to ripen wine grapes because most vineyards are above the fog line. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay shine, along with cool-climate Syrah.

### Sonoma Mountain

800 vineyard acres / 3 wineries / Obtained AVA status in 1985

The 2,400-foot Sonoma Mountain range begins to rise above the town of Glen Ellen at the Western edge of the Valley of the Moon. Found here are high-altitude, steep-sloped vineyards, with Eastern exposures to catch the fog-free morning sun. These vineyards fall within the larger Sonoma Valley AVA. However, due to the unique hillside terroir, they are entitled to use the more specific designation of the Sonoma Mountain AVA. Powerful, yet elegant Cabernet Sauvignons – the appellation's specialty – grow here on well-drained soils. The irregular folds and crevices of the mountain slopes also create microclimates suitable for limited production of a diverse range of other varieties, including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, as well as Pinot Noir and Zinfandel.

## **(SONOMA CONT.)**

### Sonoma Valley

14,000 vineyard acres / 55 wineries / Earned AVA status in 1981 (amended in '85 & '87)

The Sonoma Valley AVA centers on the Sonoma Valley (also known as The Valley of the Moon) in the Southern portion of the county. The appellation is bordered by two mountain ranges: the Mayacamas Mountains to the east and the Sonoma Mountains to the west.

Along with being the area where so much of Sonoma County's winemaking history took place, the area is known for its unique terroir, with Sonoma Mountain protecting the area from the wet and cool influence of the nearby Pacific Ocean. The Sonoma Mountains to the west help protect the valley from excessive rainfall. The cool air that does affect the region comes northward from the Los Carneros region and southward from the Santa Rosa Plain.

Because the valley is cooled from the north and south, it is different from other California north-south-oriented grape growing valleys in the interior. In addition, the daily wind that makes its way into the northern and southern sections of the valley slows ripening, which prolongs hang time and promotes natural balance in the wines. In the appellations of the North Coast, the wind is unique to Sonoma Valley and Carneros.

The soils of the Sonoma Valley, like the rest of the county are varied. One finds a wide disparity between valley floor and mountain soils; those found in flatter, valley areas tend to be quite fertile, loamy and have better water-retention while the soils at higher elevations are meager, rocky and well-drained. In general, the structure, rather than the composition of the soil, is the deciding factor where grape plantings are concerned. ([www.sonomavalleywine.com](http://www.sonomavalleywine.com))

## **PASO ROBLES**

### Geography / Terroir:

Halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Paso Robles is located in San Luis Obispo County, California. With a long growing season of warm days and cool nights, the grapes from this region produce flavorful wine with dynamic personalities.

### History:

Missionaries planted grapes in Paso Robles as early as 1797. However, the wine industry did not begin in earnest until the 1880s with Ascension Winery (today known as York Mountain Winery, the longest continuously operating winery in the U.S.). The wine industry in this AVA has grown steadily since 1990 going from 20 to more than 200 wineries.

### Wine:

There are approximately 26,000 vineyard acres in Paso Roble. More than 40 wine grape varieties are produced, but they are known primarily for Zinfandel. There has been a trend since the 1950s to introduce French grapes in the area such as Bordeaux and Rhone varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Voignier and Roussanne.

They are also gaining notoriety for more wild blends. These are wines that are unique to the area with combinations of grapes and winemaking styles that are not in the traditional vein.

(Sources include [www.pasowine.com](http://www.pasowine.com) and Wikipedia)

## **VARIETALS**

California has its own new world style of wines. Although a few have reverted to the old world wine style, most predominate wineries here are producing fruit-forward styles over those of the old-world flavors of the earth. By utilizing the very ripe fruit of the California climate, many have found their niche to this style of big fruit and flavorful wine. In the beginning, California wine was primarily mass-produced, jug-packaged wine. All of the connotations of thrift and poor quality rang true at the time. Over time, quality improved, and California started to produce varietally specific wine. The first California winery to produce such a wine was Wente Vineyards. Wente is still the oldest continuously family-owned winery in California having bottled and labeled a Sauvignon Blanc in 1935. Slowly, other producers started down that same path. It was not until the 1970's that producers of non-varietal California jug wine started producing varietally specific wines for the mass market.

In the early years of the US, many native species of grapes (*Vitis Labrusca*, *Vitis Riparia*, *Vitis Rotundifolia*, *Vitis Vulpina* and *Vitis Amurensis*) covered the landscape; none of which make particularly great wine. It was not until the Europeans brought over *Vitis Vinifera* that the US wine industry started to grow. Winemakers pulled up the indigenous juicy vines and started planting imported varieties. Previously predominated by French and Italian varieties, California is now home to hundreds of varieties. The primary grapes grown in California listed by order of popularity are: Reds - Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Grenache, Malbec, Mourvedre, Petit Verdot and Sangiovese; White: Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Grigio, Riesling, Viognier. Sparkling or California Champagne is also a popular style.



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### US WINE REGULATIONS

American Viticulture Area (AVA) is a recognized wine growing region designated by the US government. The Alcohol & Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau regulates the industry and must approve the area upon petition from the winery. In 2010, there were 198 AVAs in the US. In order for a winery to place an AVA on their label, a minimum of 85% of the grapes used to produce the wine must be grown in that AVA. With county-specific designated AVAs, the law allows for the use of a minimum of 75%. Most states in the US only require 75% of the grapes to be grown in that state to allow for the state's appellation. California however requires 100% of the grapes to be grown there in order to use it as an appellation designation.

The TTB regulations of the wine industry are minimal, unlike the harsh old-world regulations based on region, variety, elevation and limited irrigation. The TTB has for the most part left the doors open for wineries to produce what they want and where they want it, limiting it only with AVA designations.

The TTB allows for the use of, as they put it, “semi-generic” wine terms on the label. The words Burgundy, Chianti or Champagne may appear on the label of a California wine, when they obviously were not grown in those famous regions of the world. The European wine industry has been lobbying through the World Trade Organization to eliminate the use of these terms, to no avail.

Other than the AVA designations, the TTB has only set forth a few limitations on US wine producers. Ninety five percent of the wine must be grown in a particular year in order to use a vintage specification. On varietal designation, 75% of the wine must be from that grape in order to use the specific varietal on the label. TTB law also requires the Surgeon General's warning on alcohol consumption and the disclosure that it contains sulfites, if applicable.

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