

SONOMA WINE COUNTRY

SONOMA COUNTY—WHAT WINE COUNTRY SHOULD BE

Sonoma County is truly one of the world's premier spots for growing and making great wines of all types, thanks to its ideal climate and varied terroirs. But it's the environment that surrounds those growing conditions that also sets Sonoma County apart — the natural beauty, ranging from coast to redwoods to mountains; the history and heritage; the agricultural diversity leading to a bounty of locally grown foods. Most of all, it's the people — a true community of growers, winemakers, and friends whose artisan passion makes Sonoma a place like no other.

TERROIRS OF SONOMA COUNTY

Sonoma County covers slightly over 1,000,000 acres, with 60,000 of those planted with wine grapes in the 13 wine regions. The County offers an almost unlimited range of microclimates and growing conditions within its AVAs, unparalleled among the world's premium winegrowing regions. The major influences to create these terroirs are:

Climate & Temperature: Sonoma County is blessed with an ideal long growing season, with sunny days and almost no rain from May through September. Summer average high temperatures range from the 70s to the low 90s — ideal for ripening grapes — but even in the warmer inland regions of Alexander Valley and Knights Valley, cool evening temperatures in the 40s and low 50s preserve the wines' acidity and balance.

Soil: It has been said that Sonoma County has more soil variation than in all of France, with 11 major formation types, 31 different soil series within those types, and innumerable permutations within each series.



Photograph by Olaf Beckman/Sonoma Cutter Vineyards

Fog/marine influence: The Pacific Ocean provides a cooling maritime influence, bringing cool air through the Petaluma Gap that cools the western part of the County and creates morning fog to prevent grapes from ripening too quickly. On the southern inland end of the County, the San Pablo Bay's influence generates afternoon fog to achieve the same effect in Carneros.



Photograph by Don Wallace

Elevation: Sonoma County's vineyards range from sea level to 2,600 feet above sea level. The array of valley, benchland, and mountain elevations and slopes heavily influences soil fertility and grape ripening times, adding yet another variable for grapegrowers as they match the right varietal and rootstock to each vineyard block's unique growing conditions.

SONOMA COUNTY WINE REGIONS

Sonoma County is home to an unmatched collection of distinct, and distinctive, wine growing regions, or AVAs (American Viticultural Areas), each with its own unique soils and climates that allow the variety of wine grapes to grow — and thrive — in this land.

BY THE NUMBERS

Size of county:

1,050,000 acres

Vineyard acres (2007):

60,302

Wineries: 350 wineries

(250 open to the public)

Grape Growers:

1,800

Tons harvested (2007):

198,533

VARIETAL DIVERSITY

Most top winegrowing regions are known for growing just one or two varietals well, but Sonoma County's vast diversity of *terroirs* enables wineries to produce a wide variety of classic wines. Altogether, more than 60 varietals are grown in Sonoma County. The leaders by acreage are:

Chardonnay:

15,768

Cabernet Sauvignon:

12,075

Pinot Noir:

11,031

Merlot:

6,895

Zinfandel:

5,669

Sauvignon Blanc:

2,546



SONOMA COUNTY WINE HISTORY

With almost two hundred years of growing grapes, Sonoma County has an unrivaled history as California's first premium wine region.

- 1817** Russian Colonists planted grapes at Fort Ross (Sonoma Coast).
- 1823** Spanish Franciscans planted several thousand vines at the Sonoma Mission.
- 1834** Mexican government begins secularizing the missions, and wine begins to move from the altar to the dinner table.
- 1845** Bear Flag Revolt in Sonoma; California becomes independent.
- 1856** Cyrus Alexander plants grapes in northern Sonoma County.
- 1857** The Hungarian Count Agoston Haraszthy, "The Father of California Wine Industry," founded Buena Vista winery in Sonoma Valley. Now known as Buena Vista Carneros, it is California's oldest premium winery.
- 1858** Gundlach Bundschu Winery founded. It is now California's oldest family-owned winery.
- 1873** Worldwide outbreak of phylloxera.
- 1920** 256 wineries in operation, with more than 22,000 vineyard acres.
- 1920** 18th Amendment launches Prohibition. Vineyards survive by selling grapes for home winemaking.
- 1933** Repeal of Prohibition. Less than 50 wineries in Sonoma County survive.
- 1960s** With acreage down to 12,000 acres, a new generation of wineries begins following a nationwide wine boom. Consumption grows at a 40% rate.
- 1975** Planted acreage grows back to 24,000 acres.
- 1976** The now-famous "Judgment of Paris" tasting in which California wines trumped their French counterparts in a blind tasting, bringing worldwide credibility and renown for the state's wines. The winning white wine, a 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay, was made primarily from grapes grown in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley.
- 1982** Sonoma Valley AVA designated, the first in Sonoma County.
- 1999** Over 49,000 acres of vineyards owned by more than 750 growers and 180 bonded wineries.
- 2008** Sonoma County is now home to 13 AVAs, more than 350 wineries, 60,000 vineyard acres, and 1,800 growers.



Photograph by George Rose

LEADERS IN SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING

Even before sustainability was a buzzword, Sonoma County's grapegrowers have been naturally farming the land with respect for generations. More than 30% of the County's vineyard acres are enrolled in the Code of Sustainable Winegrowing Programs. Additionally, many Sonoma County wineries utilize some or all of the following practices to preserve the land for the generations to come.



Photograph courtesy of Quincea Vineyards & Winery

- Solar power to reduce energy use. Sonoma County features two of the wine industry's largest solar arrays.
- Biodynamic and organic farming, and integrated pest management practices to reduce the use of chemicals.
- Wastewater recycling and reuse to preserve this natural resource.
- Preservation of natural forests, streams, and other agriculture, ensuring a diverse and healthy natural ecosystem.
- Biodiesel fuel for tractors.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ♦ www.sonomawine.com to learn more about the wines and wineries of Sonoma County
- ♦ www.sonomawinegrape.org for information about Sonoma County's grapegrowers
- ♦ www.sonomacounty.com to plan your trip to Sonoma County



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