

AN INTRODUCTION TO NAPA

of Wineries

260+ wineries

of Acres

28,783 acres (12,000 ha) in 1998 with another 8,700 non-bearing in 1998 but coming into production.

First Plantings

1830s - George Yount, a trapper, plants Mission vines. 1859 - Charles Krug leaves Haraszthy's winery to start a commercial winery in Napa.

Major Regions

Most of the vineyards are on the flat, rich valley soil, but wooded knolls rising 60 - 90 meters break the flatness of the valley and help offer a diversity of mesoclimates. Sub-AVAs of Howell Mountain, Spring Mountain, Atlas Peak and Mount Veeder attest to the growing importance of mountain vineyard sites. On the valley floor, great debate ranges about the similarities and differences between Oakville, Rutherford and Stags Leap - all stellar regions lying within a few miles of one another. While the vineyards of Oakville and Rutherford lie side-by-side, the dividing lines between the two (and most other regions) are somewhat arbitrary. If you want to have fun, ask wine lovers what constitutes Rutherford Bench vineyard and what doesn't!

Topography

Napa Valley lies in the centre of California, about 1.5 hours north of San Francisco. The old Indian name for Napa was "Valley of Plenty". The valley extends north for 32 km and is 5 km wide at the south and narrows to 1 km at Mount St. Helena. At the south, the valley is open to the cool fogs off San Francisco Bay and the Carneros region crosses from Napa over to the south end of Sonoma Valley. The further north you go, the warmer the valley gets as the maritime influence of the fogs is reduced. Mountains are low, but play a significant role. Mt. St. Helena, for example, is a modest 4,344 feet but was used as a navigation aid by Russian fur traders.

Climate

The temperatures within Napa Valley itself are quite extreme, leading to more diversity than generalizations. The difference between Napa City at the south of the valley and St. Helena is greater than the difference between Bordeaux and Burgundy! Rainfall also varies, but not to the same degree; 38 inches in Calistogo, St. Helena 34 inches, Napa City 25 inches.

Major Grape Varieties

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Zinfandel.