

AN INTRODUCTION TO SONOMA

of Wineries

200 wineries

of Acres

33,267 acres 1998 with another 10,000 acres non-bearing in 1998 but coming into production.

First Plantings

1812 - Russians plant vines. 1820s – Sonoma Mission planted by Spanish Missionaries. 1850s - Agoston Haraszthy purchased a vineyard and began producing vinifera wines.

Major Regions

Sonoma's 11 wine appellations demonstrate the broad range of soils, climates and topography that give Sonoma all of its diversity. From the cooler south to warmer north, Sonoma consists of Carneros-Sonoma (6,800 acres), Sonoma Valley (6,000) and the Sonoma Mountain sub-AVA (650), Sonoma Coast (11,500), Russian River (8,400), Green Valley (1,000), Chalk Hill (1,000), Knight's Valley (1,000), Dry Creek (5,500) and Alexander Valley (6,500).

Topography

Sonoma Valley's flat valley, steep hills and rapidly diminishing fog influence as you move forth make it geographically and climatically complex and a wide variety of grapes produce outstanding wines. There are more gaps in the coastal mountains and the hilltops are lower (1400-2400 feet) than the ones between Napa and Sonoma (23-2800). As a result, the coastal fog has a much easier time getting over or between the hills and influence the climate of Sonoma. As with Napa, the south end of the valley is open to San Pablo Bay and the direct influence of the fogs. Even within the AVAs, variations can be found over mere meters. Sonoma Mountain sub-AVA is great for Cabernet and Zinfandel because the mountain vineyards are just above the bulk of the fog, but low enough to take advantage of reradiated heat from the valley floor.

Climate

Alexander Valley is the largest and most fully planted valley in Sonoma with a wide diversity of grapes. Alexander Valley is a near neighbor to Napa Valley. Being at the north end of Sonoma, it has the greatest heat as it is removed from the cooling fogs coming off the San Francisco Bay area. Dry Creek also produces a wide diversity of grapes and both Dry Creek and Alexander Valley do well with Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Chardonnay. Russian River, Chalk Hill, green Mountain and Sonoma Coast are all cooler due to proximity to the ocean and the cooling fogs. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir do well in most areas of these regions.

Successes

For eight years in a row, Sonoma county wines have won more awards in major U.S. wine competitions than wines from any other U.S. wine growing region.

Major Grape Varieties

Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Cabernet, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc with Barbera, Syrah, and Viognier showing promise.