

New-School California

- California Background and History
- California Wine Culture, Wine Laws and Varietals
- Today's lessons in "new school":
 - Cloudy "Pet Nat" Sauvignon Blanc
 - The Non-California-Chardonnay Chardonnay
 - Unfiltered, Old-Vine Chenin Blanc
 - Trousseau, 80 Miles North of Napa
 - A Rhône Grape Made Like Beaujolais in Berkeley
 - Hands-Off Syrah from the Sierra Foothills

Background and History

- 9th century through 15th century: Vikings and Columbus arrive in America to native, wild American grapevines
- 1500s - 1800s: Colonists (attempt to) make wine with American grapes and *vitis vinifera*
- 1800s: Vines planted, wineries started in California
- 1920 - 1933: Prohibition
- 1966: Robert Mondavi creates his own brand
- 1976: Judgment of Paris
- 1980s: Rising prestige of Napa... and Robert Parker
- 1990s - today: Seeking identity, innovation and terroir

California Wine Culture and Style

- Typically considered lumped together into one (very) big state...
- But each region has its own unique features, climate, style, vintage characteristics
- Still determining what grows best where; a very young industry
- Many new collaborations in last few years, sharing vineyards, winery facilities, ideas, people
- Overall very diverse, relaxed and willing to experiment



US Quality System: American Viticultural Areas

- American Viticultural Area: an indication of geographical origin
 - 85% must be from stated AVA
 - 95% must be from stated vintage
 - 75% must be from stated varietal
 - Larger AVAs can be subdivided into smaller AVAs:
 - North Coast AVA →

Napa Valley AVA →

Rutherford AVA →

individual vineyard

- Labeled by variety and place, but no real requirements for what must be planted/produced in a specific place → ability to experiment

Salinia 25 Reasons Petillant Naturel Sauvignon Blanc NV - Mendocino, California

- Winemaker Kevin Kelley graduated from UC Davis before going to Burgundy to work with Domaine Meo-Camuzet and Domaine Henri Gouges; then worked with Wells Guthrie at Copain and made wine for Lioco before starting own label
- Works with cold climate grapes and almost no new oak; minimal intervention, no fining/filtering; experiments with skin contact, “pet-nat,” alternative containers for bottling
- “Pet-Nat” or *Pétillant Naturel* wines made by primary fermentation finishing in bottle; result is milder bubbles (pétillant), naturally (naturel)

Mendocino AVA

- Mendocino County, north of Sonoma, centered around Russian River and Navarro River
- Wide variations in temperature based on altitude, proximity to coast and fog from valleys
- Sub-AVAs of Mendocino County total 11 and includes Anderson Valley, one of California’s coldest
- Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Zinfandel plus cooler climate varieties like Riesling and Gewurztraminer; good amount of sparkling wine, too



Sandhi Chardonnay '11 – Santa Barbara, California

- Made by sommelier Rajat Parr (Michael Mina group), Charles Banks (former Screaming Eagle owner) and winemaker Sashi Moorman
- The Pursuit of Balance: inspired by Burgundy; seeking lower alcohol, more acidity, less oak influence, display of *terroir*
- Sandhi Santa Barbara Chardonnay is sourced from sites in Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Ynez and Santa Maria AVAs

Santa Barbara County

- Within “Central Coast” AVA, which runs all the way from San Francisco to Santa Barbara, covering a wide variety of climates and styles
- Santa Barbara has a maritime climate due to proximity of Pacific, and the longest growing season in CA
- AVAs of Santa Barbara County: Santa Maria Valley, Santa Ynez Valley, Sta. Rita Hills, Happy Canyon
- Pinot Noir and Chardonnay = top two varieties

Field Recordings Jurassic Park Vineyard Chenin Blanc '11 - Santa Ynez Valley, California

- Field Recordings’ owner/winemaker is Andrew Jones, whose day job is helping plan new vineyard sites by observing unplanted land
- Field Recordings wines are made with experimental plots whose winemakers let Andrew have the grapes
- Jurassic Park vineyard is so-named because it’s dotted with oil rigs, giving it a pre-historic look; its 30-year-old Chenin Blanc vines turn out just 40 cases

Santa Ynez Valley AVA

- Within Santa Barbara County, a valley between the Santa Ynez Mountains to the south and San Rafael Mountains to north
- Cool temperatures funnel into the valley from the Pacific
- Closest major AVA to Los Angeles (two hours away) and home to “wine towns” Los Olivos, Solvang, Lompoc and Buellton
- Sta. Rita Hills and Happy Canyon AVAs within Santa Ynez Valley



Arnot-Roberts Luchsinger Vineyard Trousseau '11 - Clear Lake, California

- Childhood friends Nathan Roberts and Duncan Arnot Meyers grew up in the wine industry in Napa Valley and worked with many “big” wineries but sought to make a different style of wine focusing on cool climate vineyards and wines with restraint
- Nathan is a cooper and personally builds all of their barrels, though only the Cabernet Sauvignon sees any “new” oak
- Trousseau is sourced from a vineyard 80 miles north of Napa in the Clear Lake district; it was originally planted to grow grapes for Port-style wines

Clear Lake AVA

- Within Lake County, north of Napa and Sonoma; east of Mendocino
- Surrounds Clear Lake, California’s largest natural lake
- Far inland, though climate is moderated by the lake and higher altitude (1300-2000 feet)
- Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc dominate

Broc Cellars Carbonic Carignan '11 - Alexander Valley, California

- Winemaker Chris Brockway studied philosophy then dabbled in winemaking courses before getting interested in more “natural, intuitive” winemaking (less “technical”) and started his own label of small batches
- Sources fruit from cooler vineyards around northern California and vinifies in Berkeley, experimenting with things like pet-nat, carbonic maceration, low or no-sulfur wines
- This is Carignan from 120-year-old vines in northeastern Sonoma’s Alexander Valley AVA; carbonic maceration leaves grape clusters whole so that fermentation takes place in the grape

Alexander Valley AVA

- Northernmost AVA in Sonoma
- Vineyards vary based on elevation (valley floor or slopes to east and west); mostly alluvial soils
- Warmer region, though Russian River flows through Alexander Valley creating foggy mornings
- Mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Zinfandel



La Clarine Farm "Sumu Kaw" Syrah '11 - Sierra Foothills, California

- Owner/winemaker Hank Beckmeyer more interested in “interesting” wines rather than “sound” winemaking
- Extremely minimal intervention, just letting the wines do their own thing, letting “problems” resolve themselves in time
- Vines grow at 2,600 feet, situated among wild herbs, flowers and... goats!
- Sumu Kaw vineyard within El Dorado sub-AVA, worked by David and Sheila Bush

Sierra Foothills AVA

- East of Sacramento in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains (Gold Rush country)
- Altitude is essential to provide cool temperatures; these are among the highest in CA
 - El Dorado vineyards are around 2,400 feet
- Five sub-AVAs of Sierra Foothills, including El Dorado
- Very old vines: some Zinfandel dates to before Prohibition

Tradition vs. Innovation: Back to “New School” Themes

- Honing in on vineyard specificity
- Experimenting with varietal selection
- Balancing the role of technology
- Sharing ideas and resources
- Desire to drink more, especially with food
- Focusing on sustainability
- Examining longevity

