

# Old-School California

- California Background and History
- California Wine Culture, Wine Laws and Varietals
- Today's lessons in "old school":
  - Champagne-Style Sparkler from Sonoma
  - Chardonnay Channeling Burgundy
  - Semillon Released When It's Ready
  - Santa Barbara's Pinot Noir Precursor to *Sideways*
  - Mini-Production Mountain Merlot
  - Cool-Climate Cabernet Sauvignon

## Background and History

- 9<sup>th</sup> century through 15<sup>th</sup> 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
- An experimental approach that started in the 1960s and 70s
- Looked to Europe for inspiration and advice
- Still determining what grows best where; a very young industry



## 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

### *Iron Horse Vineyards Wedding Cuvée '07 – Green Valley, California*

- Audrey and Barry Sterling started Iron Horse in the cool, foggy, wild Western reaches of Sonoma in 1976
- Focus is on traditional method sparkling wines with long lees aging, made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir
- Farmed with precision viticulture: strict focus on each small plot's root stock, clonal selection, exposure, trellising
- Wines made by winemaker David Munksgard in what they like to call a “glide your socks off” – not “knock your socks off” style

### Green Valley AVA

- Small AVA within the Russian River Valley, which is within Sonoma AVA
- 13 miles from the Pacific coast
- Cool climate; known for being very foggy
- Goldridge soil: a sandy clay-loam with good drainage



### *Hanzell Chardonnay '11 – Sonoma Valley, California*

- Hanzell was founded by James D. Zellerbach, who planted some of the first vines in the Mayacamas Mountains in 1953, with a goal of making wines “equal to the best in the world”—which he felt were from Burgundy
- Hanzell was the first winery in the world to ferment their wines in stainless steel tanks rather than oak barrels
- Eschews a strict dogma for organic or biodynamic winemaking; instead, vineyard manager José Ramos Esquivel focuses on practicing “mindfulness”

### **Sonoma Valley AVA**

- Sonoma Valley is at the southeastern end of Sonoma County, close to the town of Sonoma
- Separated from Napa Valley by the Mayacamas
- Carneros runs through it and into Napa
- Very rocky soil

### *Kalin Cellars Semillon '99 – Livermore Valley, California*

- Kalin owned by Terrance and Frances Leighton with a winemaking style emphasizing aging: They release when they feel the wines are ready (usually 5-10 years after vintage), not in order by vintage on a set schedule
- Kalin’s Semillon vines in the Livermore Valley (50 miles inland from San Francisco) were planted in 1880s from cuttings from Château d’Yquem in Sauternes
- Semillon is one of the grapes of white Bordeaux (both dry and sweet styles); also popular in Australia, though relatively rare in California; noteworthy for its high acidity and ability to age

### **Livermore Valley AVA**

- 35 miles east of San Francisco
- Dry, warm and windy; gravelly soil
- One of California’s oldest wine regions with many very old vines: Sauvignon Blanc first planted in 1869 with cuttings from Château d’Yquem
- Home to Wente, one of the country’s oldest continuously operated wineries and origin of California’s most common Chardonnay clone



### *Au Bon Climat Pinot Noir '10 – Santa Barbara, California*

- Jim Clendenen began making wine in 1978; started Au Bon Climat in 1982 and today is one of THE formative Central Coast winemakers
- Au Bon Climat is (and has always been) a benchmark for a balanced, “classic,” Burgundian style of California Pinot Noir
- Based on the famous Bien Nacido Vineyard at northern end of Santa Barbara County... heartland of the *Sideways* hit

### 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

### *Mayacamas Merlot '07 – Mt. Veeder, California*

- Winery first built in 1889 by a pickle merchant who also planted vineyards and started making his own wine
- An earthquake and series of new owners ensued; re-christened as Mayacamas in 1941; bought by current owners (Travers family) in 1968
- Bob Travers has been winemaker since the purchase in 1968; today makes the wine with his son, Chris
- 1971 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon was in the original Judgment of Paris and two subsequent “replays”
- Very small production of Merlot: only a few hundred cases per year

### Mt. Veeder AVA

- A sub-appellation of the Napa Valley, on the western side
- In Mayacamas Mountains, which separate Sonoma from Napa, at ~2,000 feet
- Steep, rocky slopes of volcanic soils: ash, tufa, sedimentary, lava
- Double the rainfall of the valley floor; allows for dry-farming



## *Domaine Eden Cabernet Sauvignon '10 – Santa Cruz Mountains, California*

- Part of Mount Eden Vineyards, based in the Santa Cruz Mountains, a cool climate AVA at altitude and home to the famous Monte Bello vineyard (Ridge's Cabernet from here was in Judgment of Paris)
- Long history of focus on single-varietal wines from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon
- Winemaker Jeffrey Patterson began his career at Mount Eden in 1981 and became head winemaker in 1983; he works with a “wine is made in the vineyards” approach, emphasizing great viticulture before vinification

## Santa Cruz Mountains AVA

- Just 80 miles south of San Francisco
- Remote vineyards high in Santa Cruz mountains, up to 2,600 feet elevation
- Pacific Ocean to the west, San Francisco Bay to the north and east
- Cool climate due to proximity to coast, fog and elevation
- Locally identified sub-regions, but only one official sub-AVA: Ben Lomond Mountain

## Tradition in California Winemaking: “Old School” Themes

- Belief that California can rival the greatest in the world
- Gathering inspiration from the “Old World”
- Mimicking traditional winemaking techniques
- Continuously seeking appropriate vineyards and varieties
- Examining longevity

